Good and Bad Communication Practices¹

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

There are four hostile forms of communication that put couples at high risk for divorce when these patterns take up permanent residence in the relationship.

- 1. **Criticism**: Blaming; attacking partner's personality or character (e.g., saying, "How can you be so selfish!").
- 2. **Contempt**: Showing disrespect, disgust or hostility (e.g., mocking, making sarcastic remarks, or rolling the eyes).
- 3. **Defensiveness**: Denying personal responsibility (e.g., denying having made an offensive statement or deflecting the partner's complaint).
- 4. **Stonewalling**: Refusing to reply or listen; withdrawing from interaction (e.g., leaving the room).

The Four Good Communication Skills

- 1. **Calming down**: Waiting until emotion has calmed down before discussing difficult issues.
- 2. **Complaining**: Expressing one's unhappiness about certain situation or behaviour without blaming the partner.
- 3. **Speaking non-defensively**: Using "I" or "we" statements; speaking honestly and rationally.
- 4. **Validating**: Validating or appreciating partner and partner's behaviour.

Implementing Eight Communication Skills: Tracking Sheet (Gottman, 1994)

Target Behaviour	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Total
1. Criticism								
2. Contempt								
3. Defensiveness								
4. Stonewalling								
5. Calming down								
6. Complaining								
7. Speaking non-defensively								
8. Validating								

¹ Gottman, J. M. (1994). Why marriages succeed or fail. New York, NY: Fireside.

Paul Wong's Guide to Marital Communication

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Five Toxins

- 1. **Nagging**: Harassing, with frequent complaints and demands.
- 2. **Projecting**: Projecting one's own emotions (e.g., saying, "You're angry with me again!")
- 3. **Distorting**: Twisting statements by the partner to make them sound worse.
- 4. **Controlling**: Manipulating or lecturing to impose one's own wish on the partner.
- 5. **Focusing on the negative**: Fault finding or looking for something to complain about.

Five Nutrients

- 1. **Communicating clearly**: Saying what one means and asking for clarification.
- 2. **Sharing deeply**: Sharing feelings, ideals, or future plans.
- 3. **Focusing on the positive**: Keeping the conversation positive.
- 4. **Being playful**: Talking silly just to have some fun.
- 5. **Showing appreciation**: Giving compliments, validating, expressing affection or gratitude.

Implementing Ten Communication Skills: Tracking Sheet (Wong, 2017)

Target Behaviour	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Total
1. Nagging								
2. Projecting								
3. Distorting								
4. Controlling								
5. Focusing on the negative								
6. Communicating clearly								
7. Sharing deeply								
8. Focusing on the positive								
9. Being playful								
10. Showing appreciation								