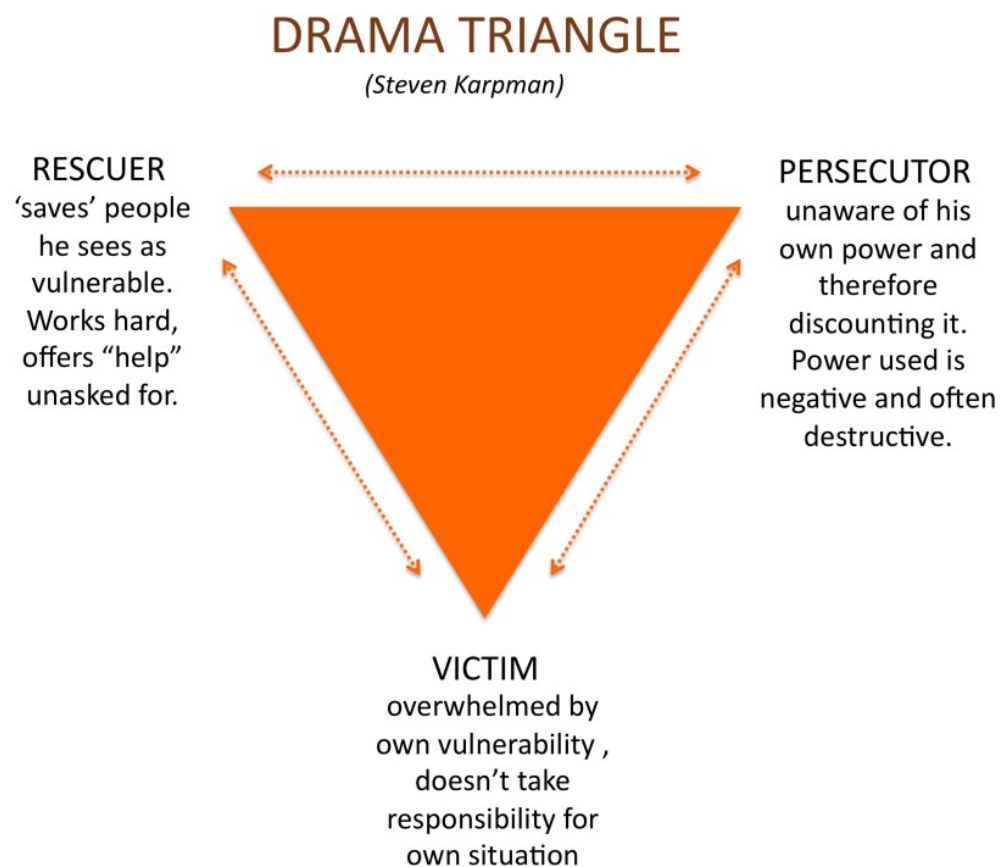


Getting out of your Drama Triangle

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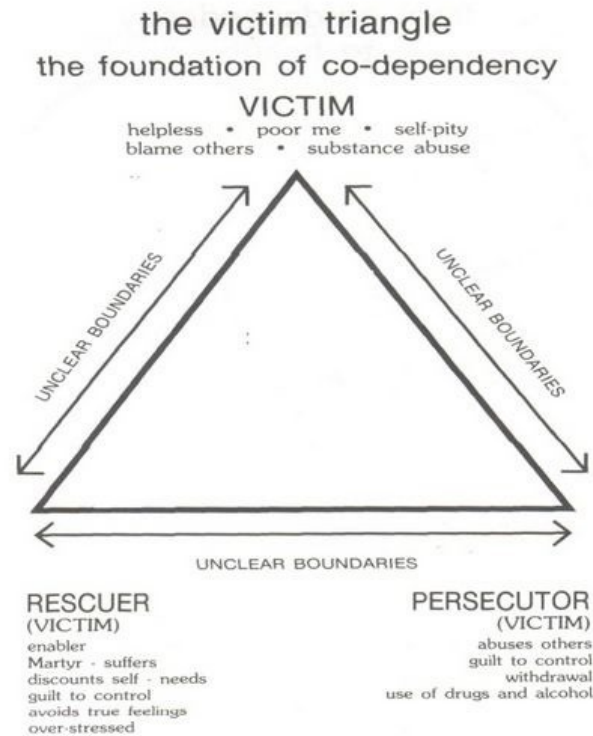
THE DRAMA TRIANGLE OR TOXIC SOCIAL TRIANGLE



Getting out of your Drama Triangle starts with knowing you're in one. Drama is something we and other people use to distract us from the reality of how we feel. One minute, you're nice and helping people in a giving, kind, and loving way, and the next, you're wanting to beat up someone who cut you off in traffic. We persecute, then rescue, and then feel like victims. This drama unfolds even more interestingly in your family and marital relationships. Getting out of your Drama Triangle is not always as easy as you imagine. We need drama; we are used to gossiping, moaning, and complaining. We love to blame. That is, until we weigh the cost of living a life like that.

The Karpman Drama Triangle was originally conceived by Steven Karpman in 1968 and was used to plot the interplay and behavioral "moves" between two or more people. Karpman's original premise was based on the Transactional Analysis (TA)

model as proposed by Eric Berne in the 50's. He hypothesizes that people form a "Script," which is essentially an individual's concept or belief about who they are, what the World is like, how they relate to the World, how the World relates to them, and how others treat them. Psychologists theorize that an individual forms their Script by the time they are four or five. A Script is based on what an individual is told, what they experience, and how they interpret these external stimuli from their own internal frame of reference.



Rescuer—“I Get to Feel Safe by Enabling Others-needly people”

A “Rescuer” is someone who often does not own their own vulnerability and seeks instead to “rescue” those whom they see as vulnerable. The traits of a Rescuer is that they often do more than 50% of the work, they may offer “help” unasked rather than find out if and how the other person wants to be supported, and what the Rescuer agrees to do may in actual fact not be what they really want to do. This means that the Rescuer may then often end up feeling “hard done by” or resentful, used or unappreciated in some way. The Rescuer does not take responsibility for themselves, but rather takes responsibility for the perceived Victim whom they rescue. Getting out of your Drama Triangle will mean letting this side of your persona go. The Rescuer will always end up feeling the Victim but sometimes may be perceived by others who are on the outside looking in as being the Persecutor.

Victim—“I Get to Feel Safe by being Submissive”

A “Victim” is someone who usually feels overwhelmed by their own sense of vulnerability, inadequacy or powerlessness, and does not take responsibility for themselves or their own power, and therefore looks for a Rescuer to take care of them. Getting out of your Drama Triangle means at some point the Victim may feel let down by their Rescuer, or perhaps overwhelmed or even persecuted by them. At this stage the Victim will move to the Persecutor position, and persecute their erstwhile Rescuer. They may even enlist another Rescuer to persecute the previous Rescuer. However, the Victim will still experience themselves internally as being the Victim.

Persecutor—“I Get To Feel Safe by Hurting others and Putting them Down”

The position of “Persecutor” is synonymous with being unaware of one’s own power and therefore discounting it. Either way the power used is negative and often destructive. Any player in the “game” may at any time be experienced as the Persecutor by the other player/players. However their own internal perception may be that they are being persecuted, and that they are the Victim. There of course are instances in which the Persecutor is knowingly and maliciously persecuting the other person. If this is the case, then strictly speaking the Persecutor is no longer playing a “Game “ in the TA sense of the word, as the Persecutor is operating from a place of conscious awareness; it could then be argued that they are in fact employing a strategy.

Getting out of your Drama Triangle

Whilst it was originally devised as a therapeutic tool, it is also a communications device and plots the moves of a series of transactions between people. It is in this context that we use it in coaching, although its use will give us insights into our client’s belief system and behavior.

Essentially Karpman devised a simple formula which plots the moves of a “Game”.

Some one – usually the Victim – presents a con – “Can you help me?”

The particular con matches the specific hook of the person to whom it is directed, who will usually be a Rescuer, however some Victims play to and “hook” a Persecutor.

The other party – (let’s imagine it is a Rescuer) responds by saying “Yes of course I can help you!”

Getting out of your Drama Triangle – Note. If the con does not match, the perspective Rescuer/Persecutor usually will not be “pulled in” or “hooked”, and the Victim will wander off to find someone else to play the game. Alternately the Victim may try to initiate another Game this time from the position of being a Persecutor, e.g. “You’re a lousy coach” or perhaps “Are you accredited” or even “Do you belong to a professional organisation?”

Once the Game begins a series of ‘complementary transactions’ will continue as long as it suits both parties. In some instances this series of complementary transactions can go on indefinitely and may take the form of a life long friendship or marriage (alcoholic and codependent) as both parties are content to stay in the Game without going for the pay off.

However more often than not, one party becomes discontented or unhappy, for whatever reason, and pulls the SwitchOh dear. Things then usually fall apart pretty quickly, and the players whiz round the Triangle like players on a snakes and ladders board!

The Rescuer usually at this point becomes the Victim, and the Victim often becomes the Persecutor, The Game is over and both retire with that ‘uncomfortably comfortably familiar feeling’ and nurse their wounds. Game Set and Script!

The Purpose of the Victim, Rescuer, Persecutor Game in Getting out of your Drama Triangle:

1. Keeps responsibility out there.
2. There is a lack of internal conflict within the individual. It’s all created in others.
3. Players lack empathy, and are very self-absorbed in their own role of the moment.
4. Patterns of the game prevent problem solving — the drama rules.
5. Maintains bad boundaries.
6. The game provides identity and fills emptiness, because two people can jump around in all three roles to fuel the drama.

Playing the Roles always Create Lose—Lose—Lose. No One Wins in the Drama Triangle.

1. Cause pain.
2. Come from denied pain.
3. Perpetuate lies and unhealthy secrets.

4. Come from a sense of shame and cause shame.
5. Come from feelings of unworthiness.
6. Are about a loss of personal power.
7. Perpetuate guilt and a “sick sense of love.”
8. Keep people caught in dysfunctional behavior.
9. Are passed down to the next generation of children.

Severe personality issues and defenses always cause major destructive role-playing. One form of the Perpetrator is the “nice guy” who turns mean while drinking. Another form is the angry person who rages when using drugs or alcohol. The alcoholic who withdraws regularly into stupor is a form of neglect. OCD traits in some family members correspondingly bring up rescuing and victimhood in others big time. The deeper that one or more family members move into destructive habits, the bigger the family drama will become. An article from Al Anon illustrates how family members can shift Drama Triangle positions in their despair and frustration. “It is appalling how well the alcoholic controls the family, especially the wife, husband or mother. The alcoholic drinks again and again. The family screams, cries, yells, begs, pleads, prays, threatens or practices the silent treatment. It also covers up, protects and shields the alcoholic from the consequences of drinking. If the alcoholic continues to act like a little god, it is because the family is inadequate in opposing this attitude and abets the preservation of the illusion of omnipotence.”

Rescuing and enabling interrupt the natural aversive consequences of the roles. Sometimes people need to experience the painful consequences of their choices. Sometimes they need to suffer and hit bottom before they understand that they need to change. For example, a restraining order and being court ordered to anger management classes after domestic violence gives the shake up and reality check that the perpetrator needs. He needs to suffer the pain of aversive consequences rather than have the family members continue to suffer his destructive behavior.

Another dynamic not described by Karpman is the child in the family who is often wiser than the parents who knows from an early age that things are not right in the family. This child understands that there must be a better way to live than to keep wounding each other with offensive behavior. He or she starts to look outside the home for positive role models—a teacher, neighbor, healthy relative, friend’s parent or coach. If the child has talent, he/she is reinforced with attention and encouragement for his hard work. He/she becomes resilient in dealing with the dysfunction of the family and seeks healthier people to hang out with. He/she works hard and his/her identity becomes associated with hard work and talent. High achievement becomes the new defense to bolster up self esteem, but it makes the person one sided. Achievement becomes the self esteem rather than balancing all the skills necessary to form connection and create a happy family life.

The resilient child becomes successful in life due his/her incorporation of positive work skills. Working hard and even workaholicism becomes a defense strategy to feel good and getting the praise that comes with being seen as an excellent worker. All may go well for many years until working hard to keep self esteem high is not enough. The person starts to feel empty and have the sense that something is missing in their life as he/she has literally withdrawn from contact in the family he has created. He/she starts to feel the imbalance that spending long hours on the job or on hobbies has created. Having only limited defenses—working hard and perhaps drinking or drugging, the person turns more to what has worked in the past—working harder. But achievement no longer is enough to fill the void inside. Getting out of your Drama Triangle is a life quest most of us don’t know we are even on.

At this time, there may be a crisis—perhaps a mid life crisis. The defense of achievement does not work any more. At this juncture in life, there is a choice. The resilient child grown up can either crash into depression or acting out in chaos OR start to examine the early pain of being brought up in a Drama Triangle family where unhealthy behaviors were the daily norm. This can be a shake up time where the person decides to go into recovery and address the pain of the past. It may take the form of searching for a spiritual identity and true meaning in life. Some people believe this shake-up time is the Soul’s calling.

Healthy Skills for each Role Player to Leave the Drama Triangle

Perpetrator Role

- Stop denying that you reject, punish, or persecute others.
- Face the horrific reality that you have damaged others by your unrealistic expectations and anger.
- Give up the need to be right and feel self righteous and superior to others.
- Stop rationalizing and justifying domineering beliefs and behaviors.
- Get honest with yourself—tell yourself the truth! Own the effects of your loud voice, angry stare and cold shoulder on others. Catch and interrupt yourself when you increase the volume and force to get your way.
- When others disagree with you, ask yourself, “Am I really being threatened or is it just a difference of opinion?”
- Learn how your use of force makes you feel powerful and find healthy ways to feel good about yourself.
- Own how you are energized by getting angry. Identify the adrenalin rush that anger gives you.
- Find new, healthy highs and energizing experiences to replace the adrenalin high of anger.
- Attend anger management classes to learn anger containment and anger release techniques.
- Attend parenting classes to learn about children’s age appropriate behavior and learn appropriate discipline techniques.
- Monitor anger and take a time-out by walking away before you become verbally or physically abusive.
- Learn to feel vulnerable with uncomfortable feelings instead of exploding out in anger when stressed or threatened.
- Learn and use the Intentional Dialogue Technique (Harville Hendrix’s Imago Therapy) to feel empathy and compassion for others.
- Apologize to those you have harmed and begin the repair work to set the family on a healthy course.
- Get a life where you can live in peace, without anger!

Rescuer Role

- Catch yourself in the act of feeling good because you helped someone. Stop basing your self-esteem on helping others.
- Give up the need to feel superior because you are the good guy who always helps others.
- Address your self esteem needs to control others and know what is best for them.
- Address your own problems, shortcomings and negative emotions instead of focusing on other people.
- Set limits about solving other people’s problems and put ALL of your energy in to solving your own.
- Learn the “hooks”—how others use guilt and manipulation to pull you into the Drama Triangle.
- Stop rationalizing and justifying your caretaking and enabling behavior.
- Stop feeling sorry for other people and giving them advice, money or support.
- When others overwhelm you with their problems, tell them you are not qualified to deal with such deep issues and suggest they get professional help.
- Get clean and sober with your codependency. Read at least five books on codependency and do the mind-opening exercises.
- Attend Adult Children of Alcoholics and AlAnon, get a sponsor and work the steps.
- Deal with your anger of being the good little girl or boy and the parentified child who did not get to have a childhood.
- Read five books on the heavy emotion of shame. Do the exercises in the books to help release shame.
- Interrupt guilty feelings when you refrain from unnecessary giving by reminding yourself that your old family programming is coming up.
- Define your new self esteem as a person who takes care of your own feelings, thoughts, actions and problems.
- Bow out of the drama and encourage the Victim to stand up to the Perpetrator whenever possible.
- Take an assertiveness course.
- Get a life where you are responsible only for yourself!

Victim Role

- Stop expecting someone else to rescue you. Think and problem solve for yourself. Act boldly.
- Take responsibility for your feelings, thoughts and actions that contribute to your Victim role.
- Be authentic with others and learn to state your feelings and your needs firmly.

- Learn the body sensations and reactions that signal you are about to collapse into helplessness.
- Listen to your constant Victim statements and break into them.
- Address the terror and release traumatic memories of being abused by the Perpetrator.
- Learn to handle confrontation and deal with other people's anger.
- Study Learned Helplessness and Learned Optimism (Martin Seligman) and apply the ideas from his research to your life.
- Challenge any belief or thoughts that say you are unworthy and can't take care of yourself.
- Decide what you expect and state your minimum standard of behavior that you consider to be decent treatment from others.
- Set limits with Perpetrators and rescuers and walk away if they don't respect your boundaries.
- Stop blaming the Perpetrator and rescuer and focus on getting out from under their influence.
- Deal with your anger at being scapegoated and punished by others and your taking on the victim role.
- Start a self-nurturing, self care program to bolster your ability to take care of your own needs.
- Take an assertiveness training course. Read five books on assertiveness. Take the course again.
- Surround yourself with new, positive friends and define yourself as an independent person who can handle life's problems.
- Get a life where you are responsible for yourself!