

The Drama Triangle and Automatic Patterns



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Topics for Today

1. Automatic Actions/Patterns
2. The Problem: Dreaded Drama Triangle
3. The Solution: The Empowerment Dynamic



“Training and then Retraining our Brain”

Automatic “Well Learned” Actions *that we just take for granted*

- Walking
- Using a fork
- Reading
- Cutting with scissors
- Tying shoes
- Riding a bike
- Driving a car
- Typing / Texting

It's just like riding a bike...



What did you observe?

Automatic behaviors?


Learning new behaviors?

Returning to old behaviors?



What would it be like if starting right now, you had to use your opposite hand for the rest of your life to:

eat, write, cut, throw, open doors, brush your teeth, button buttons, wipe your hiney, and use a mouse?

- What if your life depended on it?
 - Can you learn to do it?
 - Can you do it consistently & perfectly right from the start?
 - What does it take to create a new pattern/behavior?
- 

Automatic “Well Learned” Actions

Riding a Bike

Coping Mechanisms

- Drinking / Using
- Eating, Shopping
- Over Working
- Over Accomplishing
- Controlling

Interaction Patterns

- How are you?
I am well.
- Someone sticks out their hand
we stick out our hand to shake.
- Smile at someone
they smile back
- Verbal attack
attack or back down

Family Dynamics are...

- *Automatic, unconscious* patterns of relating
- Somewhat unique to each family system.
- Somewhat common with predictable patterns.
- Sometimes helpful, sometimes unhelpful.

Influence of Family Dynamics

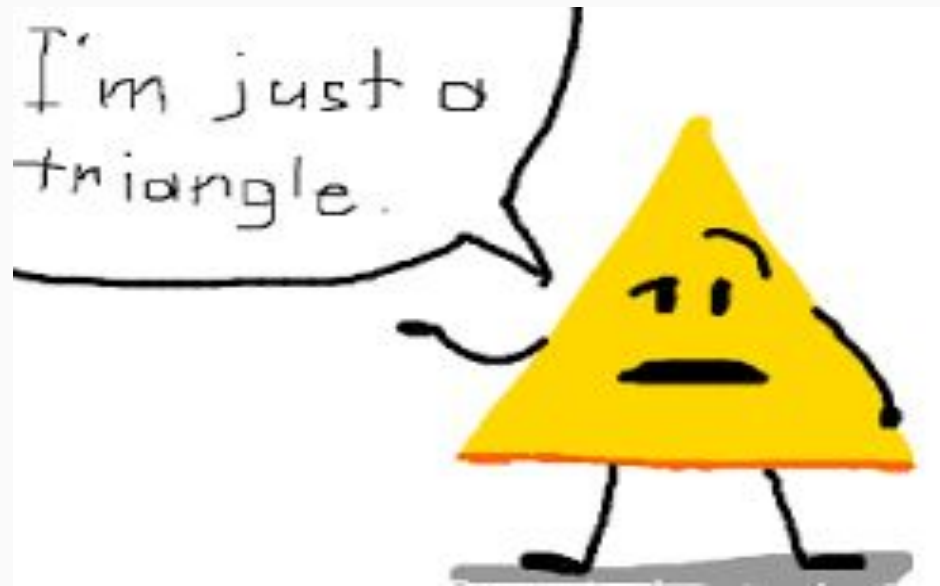
- Strongly influence the way people see: themselves, others and the world.
- Strongly influence: relationships, behaviors and wellbeing.
- We are Influenced by family dynamics from earlier years/generations.
(even when there is little or no present contact with those family members)

Automatic Actions and Patterns in...



Family Drama and Communication

THE DREADED DRAMA TRIANGLE



Drama Triangle

- Steven Karpman - 1968
- Explains how dramatic and intense conflicts arise in relationships
- Emotionally and physically draining
- 1st - Understand roles
- 2nd - Identify alternative behaviors
- 3rd - Practice using alternative behaviors
- Goal - Decreasing destructive patterns

Three Roles

Rescuer

Persecutor

Victim

*We have a primary role
but cycle through all
three roles*

THOUGHTS

- “I’m OK, but you’re not, so I’ll fix you”
- “You need my help”
- “I must fix it now”
- “If I do good, I will be worthy”
- “I am a good person so I’m going to save that person”



FEELINGS / EMOTIONS

- Fears not being needed
- Superior to the “Victim”
- Guilty and anxious if doesn’t rescue
- Connected and capable when “Victim” is dependent
- Persecuted, unappreciated, and resentful when the “Victim” doesn’t accept their help
- Resentful when becoming worn out from helping too much



ACTIONS / BEHAVIORS

- Focuses on helping the “Victim”
- Seeks connection through helping
- Gives “fish” rather than teaching to “fish”
- Jumps in to save the day
- Fosters dependency & being indispensable
- May sacrifice the truth to protect others
- Seeks approval through helping others
- Fails to confront or set boundaries
- SUPER parent/partner/coworker
- Takes on the responsibility for another person’s problems
- Avoids looking at their own life which may be a mess



**Donate a kidney and
you're a
"Hero"**

Donate six
and you're
"Under Arrest"

**Where
do most
Heroes live?**

Capetown

THOUGHTS

- "I'm OK, but you're not, so you need to do what I tell you to do"
- "They're wrong and I'm right"
- "I know how to fix your problem"
- "I must win"
- "This is your fault"
- "I know best"
- "Dominating others will get me ahead"
- "They will get what's coming to them if they don't listen to me"



FEELINGS / EMOTIONS

- Frustrated
- Self-righteous and entitled
- Defensive, protective and on guard
- Angry, resentful, and revengeful
- Fears being out of control
- Sense of worth/power through offending
- Sense of pseudo power and self-esteem by scaring Victim
- Lacks respect from others and for self
- Lonely, shameful



ACTIONS / BEHAVIORS

- Critical, blames and finger points
- Rigid in thinking
- Critical, domineering, and bossy
- Passive aggressive behaviors
- Criticizes, teases, shames, patronizes
- Talks down to others and about others
- Dominates, manipulates and controls
- Bullying to try to fix someone's problem
- Exerts covert or overt power over others
- Abusive emotionally, mentally, physically, and/or sexually



Can you relate?

- My spouse yelled from upstairs and asked, “Do you ever get a shooting pain across your body, like someone’s got a voodoo doll of you and they’re stabbing it?”
- Sounding concerned, I replied, “No...”
- My spouse responded, “How about now?”

THOUGHTS

- "I'm not OK, but you are, so fix me"
- "I never get a break"
- "It's not my fault"
- "My dream isn't possible"
- "Poor me"
- "Yeah but.."
- "Why does this always happen to me?"
- "No-one else understands what this is like"



FEELINGS / EMOTIONS

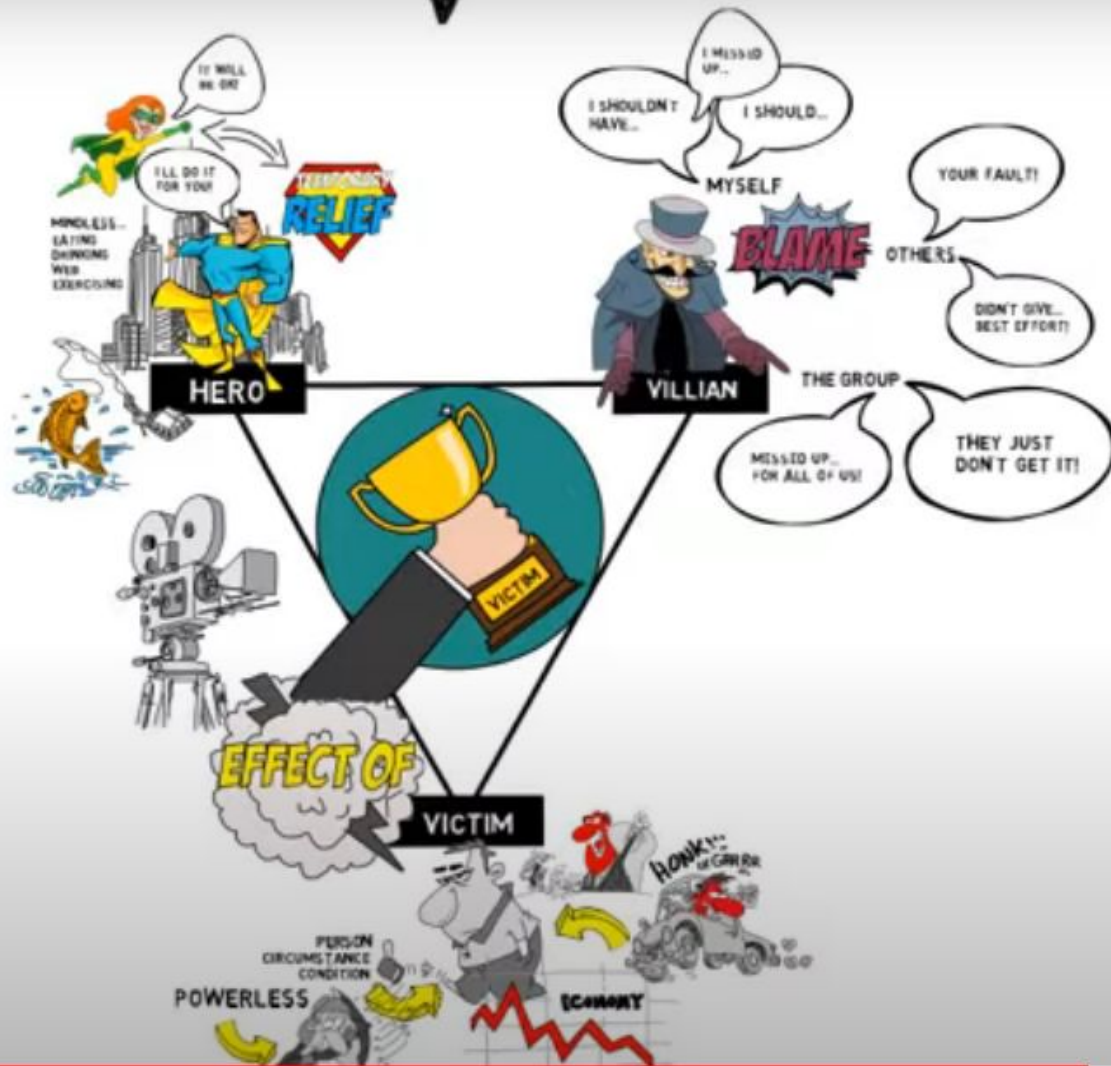
- Helpless
- Hopeless
- Powerless
- Victimized
- Discounted
- Sensitive
- Oppressed
- Incapable
- Misunderstood
- Trapped
- Cared about
- Loved



ACTIONS / BEHAVIORS

- Reacts to problems and drama
- May distance themselves
- Little energy for forward action
- Seeks a Rescuer to validate their feelings
- Does not stand up to Persecutor
- Refuses to make decisions, solve problems, gives up
- Refuses to get help, do self care, or change behavior
- Avoids responsibility by blaming and making excuses
- Uses guilt, seeks sympathy to get needs met
- Acts out of a sense of powerlessness

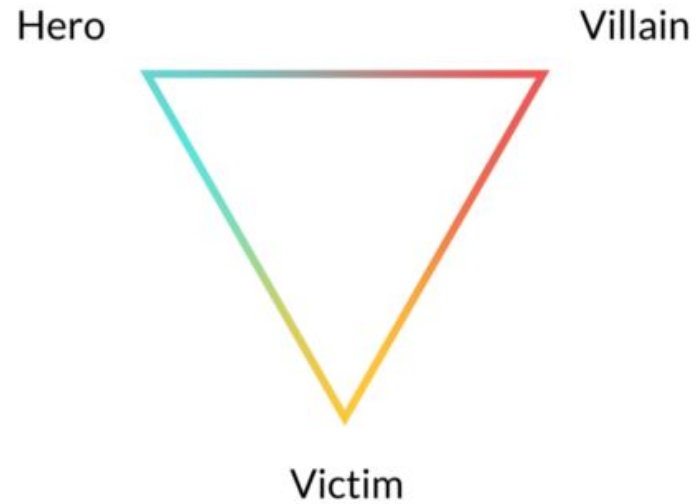




We may cycle through all three roles (hero, villain, victim) in an attempt to gain control of ourselves or other people.

But... they all lead back to feeling like the victim.

- This cycle can be an OBSESSIVE and FEAR BASED method to feel IN CONTROL or CARED FOR by others
- It is a disease of perception
- The smallest thing is enough to set off the drama pattern
- I can know this cycle isn't helpful but still choose to step into the drama
- We want the other person to change first, then we will think about changing
- And so we continue the cycle...



A still from a movie showing Tom Cruise and a woman in a dark, industrial setting. They both have serious, concerned expressions. The woman is on the left, looking towards Tom Cruise on the right.

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

**I DON'T KNOW, WE'VE NEVER MADE IT
THIS FAR BEFORE**

pikabu.ru



**...NOW WHAT
DO WE DO?**

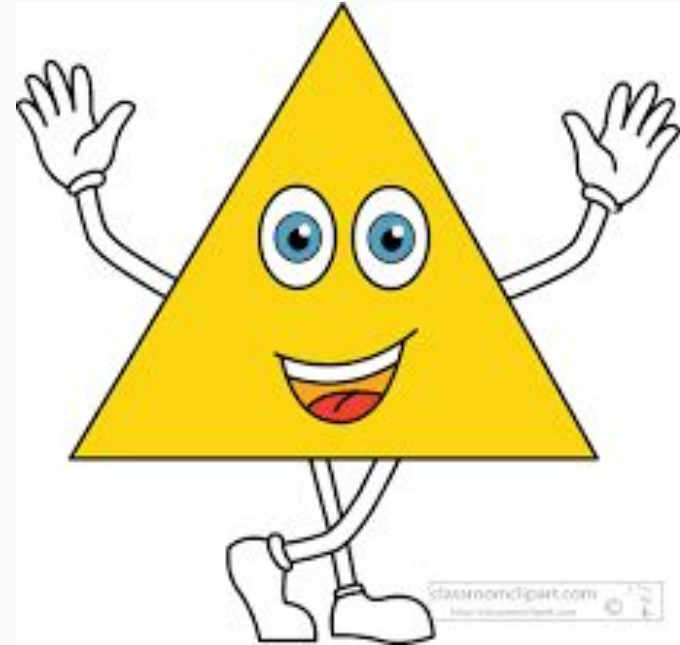
**Coffee
is the most
silent victim ever.**

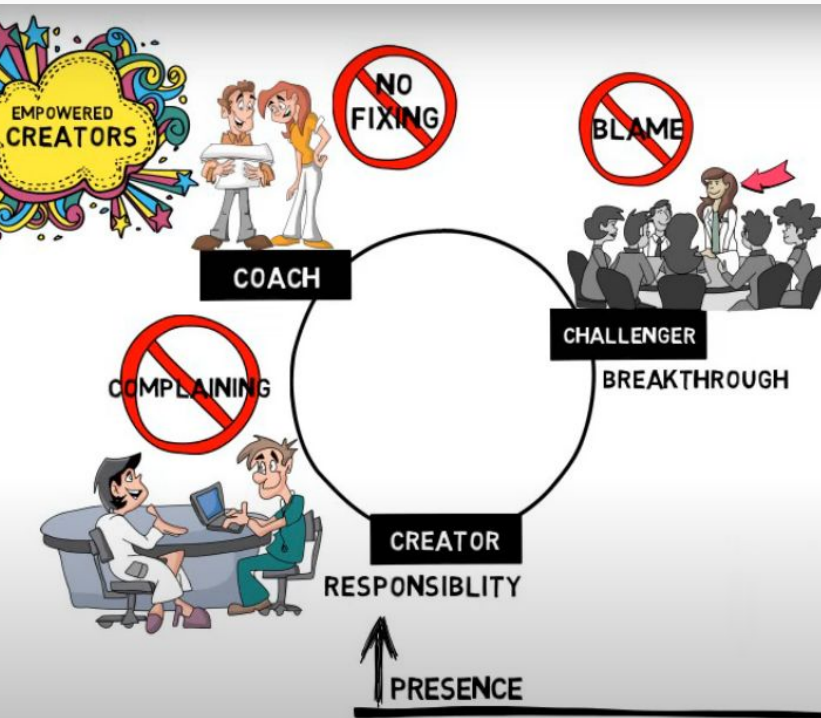
It gets mugged every
day.

**My friend David was
just
the victim of
ID theft.**

Now we just
call him Dav.

The Empowerment Dynamic





- PAUSE - BREATHE - *box breathing*
- Check your motives
- It doesn't matter how many times you replay the old cycle, long term... it doesn't fix things and it doesn't help you feel better!
- Decide to get off the crazy train!
- **Victim changes to Creator**
- **Rescuer changes to Coach**
- **Persecutor changes to Challenger**
- Reframe Thoughts
- Reframe Actions
- Emotions are last to change

THOUGHTS

- “I have a choice despite my circumstances”
- “I am dedicated to continuing my growth”
- “I am focused on what I want to create”
- “What am I grateful for today?”
- “What do I want for myself?”
- “What steps do I need to take?”
- “I will ask for what I need”



FEELINGS / EMOTIONS

- Hopeful
- Energized
- Inspired
- Resilient



ACTIONS / BEHAVIORS

- Actions oriented toward desired outcomes
- Takes responsibility to make choices
- Uses baby steps to learn and grow
- Follows through on their part.
- Stops complaining about what is happening to them
- Acknowledges strengths, what they have, and what is going well
- Asks for what they need: “I need more time before making a decision”
- Asks for what they need: “I am feeling a little overwhelmed and need to take a break. Can we talk again in an hour?”



THOUGHTS

- “People are resourceful and creative”
- “I trust others and their abilities”
- “I have seen them succeed”
- “If I want them to be able to *walk* one day, I have to stop *carrying them*”
- “If they are upset about my choice to stop *carrying them*, it doesn’t mean I made a poor decision



FEELINGS / EMOTIONS

- Compassionate
- Engaged
- Fulfilled
- Reflective
- Supportive
- “Non-attached”



ACTIONS / BEHAVIORS

- Asks permission before providing feedback and suggestions
- Asks questions to help others and self develop their OWN clarity and vision
- Encourages and provides positive reinforcement (only if it is helpful to the other person)
- Encourages person to find their own solution, take responsibility for themselves, and solve it for themselves
- Listen within boundaries: “I have 20 minutes to talk and listen”



THOUGHTS

- “Things unfold at their own pace”
- “You can do it”
- “Trust the process”
- “You may be right”
- “I don’t have to convince them that I am right”
- “I don’t have to convince them to like my boundary or my decision”



FEELINGS / EMOTIONS

- Self awareness
- Empowered through living their values
- Confident, direct, and clear
- Calm
- Accepting that others may have a different opinion

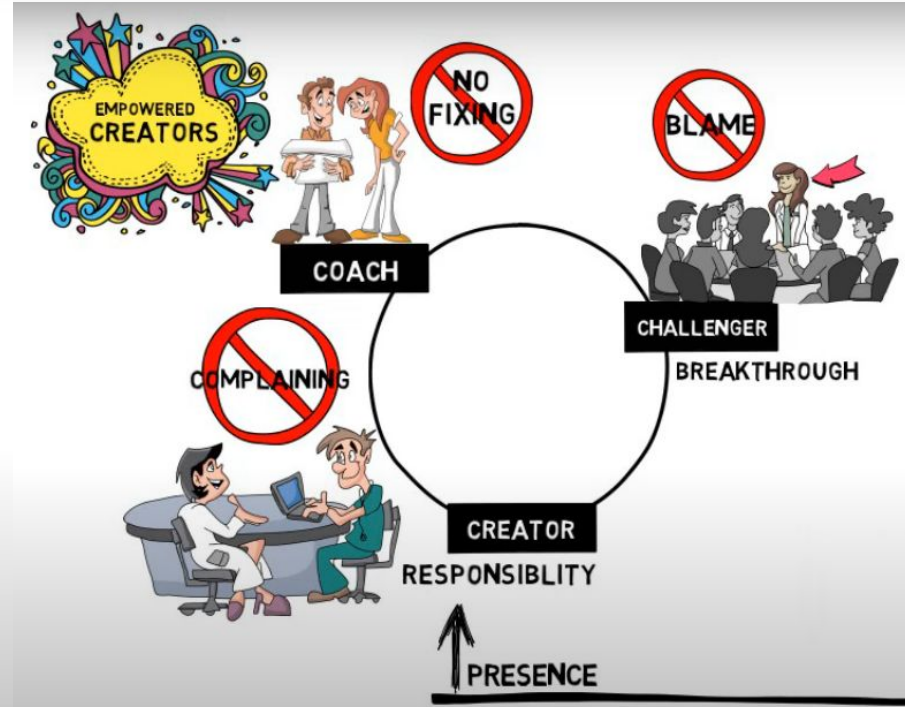
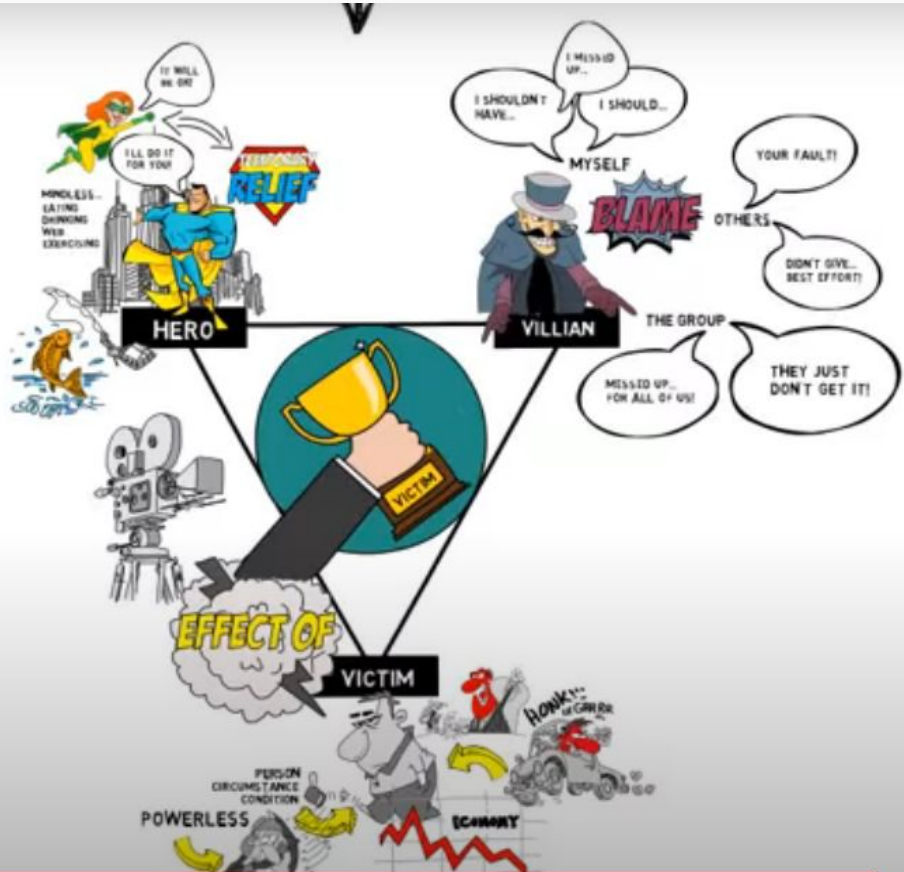


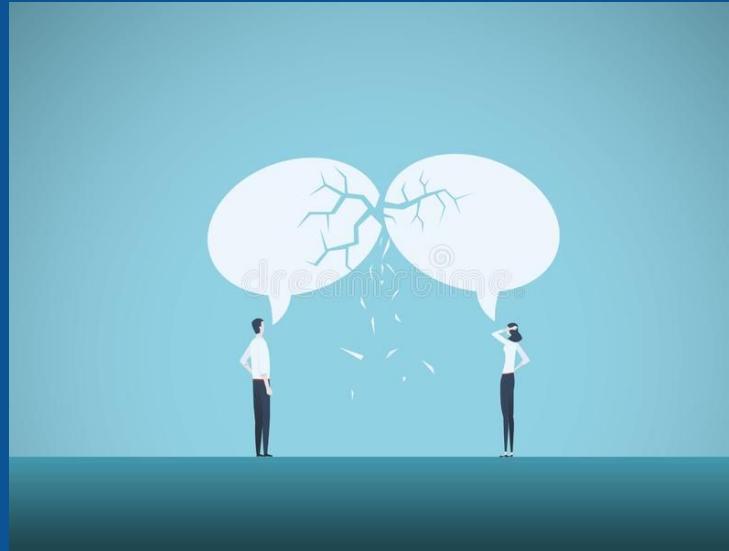
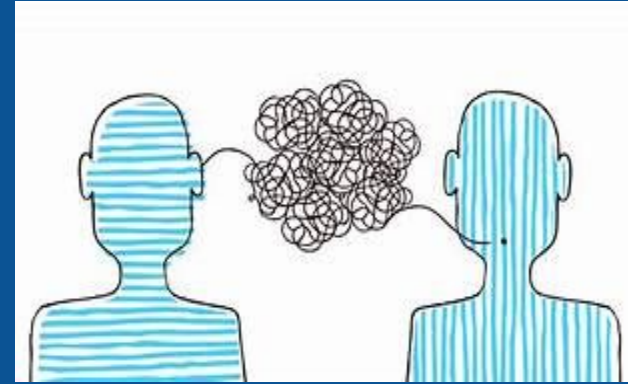
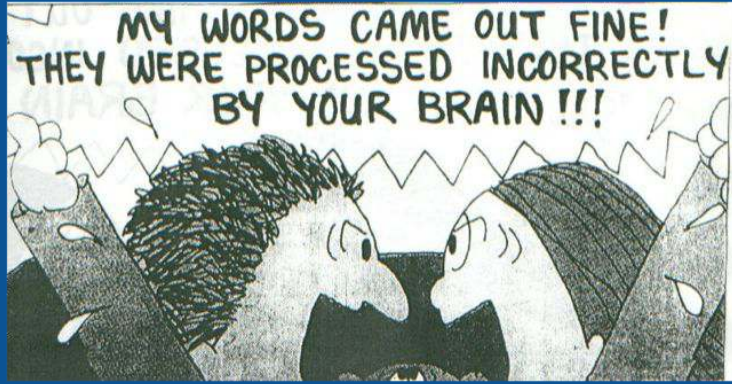
ACTIONS / BEHAVIORS

- Evokes themselves and others to action (through healthy boundaries)
- Holds self and others accountable for taking action (through healthy boundaries)
- Focuses on self improvement and growth
- Sparks learning by challenging assumptions and the status quo.
- Assertive, not aggressive
- Confident and direct
- State your boundaries: “I have 20 minutes to talk and listen”



Let's Summarize and Review...





It's not about the nail...



Getting hooked into the Drama Game...

SCENE: Tom, who often comes home late, has just arrived in his bedroom. It is 11:30 pm & his wife, begins.

1) **Mary** (*tearfully* - Victim)

Where were you? I've been worried & couldn't sleep, I was afraid there'd been an accident. You know how I worry. How could you not at least call to let me know you were still alive?



3) **Mary** (*getting angry* - Persecutor)

Don't touch me! Last time this happened you said you'd call and did you? No! You don't care if I lie here thinking you're on the road dead. You *never* think of anybody else, so you don't know how it feels to worry about somebody you love.



2) **Tom** (*placating* - Rescuer)

Oh, honey, I'm sorry. I thought you'd be asleep and I didn't want to wake you up by calling. Don't be upset. I'm home now and I'll call next time, I promise. I can give you a back rub and you'll feel better.



4) **Tom** (*helplessly* - Victim)

Honey, that's not true. I was thinking of you and didn't want to wake you. I didn't know you'd be so upset. I was just trying to be thoughtful. Seems like no matter what I try, I'm wrong. If I'd called and woken you up, then I'd be a jerk. I can't win.



5) Mary (*relenting* - Rescuer)

That's not true. It's just that you're so important to me; I want to know that you're all right. I'm not trying to make you feel bad; I just want you to understand that I worry about you because I love you so much. I'm sorry I got mad.



7) Mary (*voice rising* - Persecutor) Glad to see you! After lying here for two hours worried? You *never* do anything to build that trust. You don't call, you blame me for being upset, and then accuse me of not being nice to you when you finally drag in the door! Just turn around go back to wherever you've been all evening.



9) Mary (*crying* - Victim)

You just don't understand how it feels to be waiting, knowing that you *could* call but don't, because I'm not important to you...



6) Tom (*sensing an edge* - Persecutor)

Well, if you worry so much, why aren't you glad to see me when I get home? How come you hit me with all this whining about where I was? Don't you trust me? I'm getting tired of having to explain everything to you all the time. If you trusted me you'd go to sleep, and when I got home you'd be glad to see me instead of jumping all over me! Sometimes I think you just like to fight.



8) Tom (*soothing* - Rescuer)

Look, I know you're upset, and I've got a big day tomorrow. How about if I make you a cup of tea? That's what you need. Then I'll take a shower and come to bed. Okay?



So what's the answer?

- Mary and Tom keep working in the Dreaded Drama Triangle...
Persecutor - Victim - Rescuer - Persecutor - Victim - Rescuer
- It is a no-win cycle of accusation, rebuttal, blame, and counter blame
- It is pointless, futile, and degrading - Stop
- Let go of trying to make it turn out the way you want it to be by being nice, being angry, or being helpless.
- Change what you can, which means change yourself!
- Stop needing to win
- Stop needing to fight
- Stop needing the other person to give you a good reason or excuse for their behavior or neglect
- Stop needing them to be sufficiently sorry

Replay the scene...

- Even though Mary is tempted to respond in one of the drama ways, she doesn't
- Mary responds in a way that will end the game
- Like riding a bike, it is tricky at first and takes practice
- Mary is realizing that she has no business trying to manage and control Tom
- Mary worked on taking care of herself earlier in the evening and instead of allowing herself to get nervous and worked up about Tom being late, she called a friend in her support group
- They talked about her mounting fear, which helped to calm her
- Mary needed someone to hear how she felt, and her friend listened with understanding but without giving advice
- After she hung up, she practiced one of her favorite affirmations, "My life is divinely guided, and I grown in peace, security, and serenity every day, every hour.
- Mary found that as she gave her thoughts over to the soothing words of affirmation, she became calm, and relaxed

Replay the scene...

- By the time Tom got home at 11:30 pm, she was asleep
- He woke her when he came into the room and she immediately felt the annoyance and anger returning, so she repeated her affirmation to herself a couple of times and said, “Hi Tom. I’m glad you’re home.”
- Now Tom has always been used to a battle under these circumstances, and was a little surprised at her casual greeting
- “I was going to call you, but...” he begins his excuse defensively
- Mary waits till he is finished and says, “We can talk about it in the morning if you like. I’m too sleepy now. Good night.”
- If Tom was feeling guilty about the lateness of the hour, a fight with Mary would actually have eased his guilt
- He could then tell himself that she was a nagging and criticizing woman with a problem rather than the problem being his for being late
- As it is, he’s left with his guilt, and she’s not suffering because of his actions.
- That’s the way it should be

Family Interactions in Early Recovery - *Dilworth Recommendations*

1. Especially in the early weeks of the treatment process, it helps for Family Members and Patients to keep interactions to a minimum and “go to their separate corners”.
2. Even though chaos is unproductive, chaos can feel normal and is a known pattern of interaction.
3. Patients, Parents, and Partners may unconsciously try to engage and manipulate in order to feed the chaos upon which they are accustomed.
4. Trying to **reason** with someone or trying to **convince someone using logic** are unproductive uses of your time especially in early recovery.
5. “Going to separate corners” gives the chaos, anxiety, anger, and manipulation a chance to diminish.

Family Interactions in Early Recovery - *Dilworth Recommendations*

6. This lack of interaction may be a welcomed relief for some and feel very uncomfortable and anxiety evoking for others.
7. Keep escalation and manipulation to a minimum by turning yourself and your loved one towards the solutions needed to maintain physical and emotional sobriety.
8. This will be their: group, Dilworth counselor, sober network, recovery meetings, sponsor, outside counselor (*notice that you are not listed here!!*)
9. NOTE: When we stop the Dreaded Drama Triangle Cycle, others may become angry with us because we are disrupting homeostasis/balance and they do not know how to respond to our new role. They will try to “bait and hook” you back into your old ways of being. Sometimes things get worse before they get better.
10. Pause - Breathe - Acknowledge the Feelings - Think - and only then Respond /Act

Words of Detachment - to keep unhealthy interactions to a minimum

- YES / NO / WOW / REALLY
- INTERESTING
- YOU MAY BE RIGHT
- I AM SO GLAD YOU CAN TALK TO YOUR GROUP ABOUT THAT
- I WILL TALK TO MY GROUP ABOUT THAT
- I DON'T KNOW, ASK YOUR GROUP, SPONSOR, ETC..
- I DON'T KNOW, LET ME THINK ABOUT IT
- I HAVE NOTHING ELSE TO ADD
- I AM CONFIDENT YOU CAN FIGURE THIS OUT
- I TRUST THE PROCESS THAT DILWORTH RECOMMENDS
- ONE DAY AT A TIME
- *It is okay for you to leave the room, drive in a separate car, etc...*

Review

1. Automatic Actions/Patterns
2. The Problem: Dreaded Drama Triangle
3. The Solution: The Empowerment Dynamic



“Retraining the brain takes intentional practice”

Resources

- The Backwards Brain Bicycle - SmarterEveryDay - Smarter Every Day 133 - <https://youtu.be/MFzDaBzBIL0>
- Understanding the Drama Triangle vs. Presence - The Conscious Leadership Group - https://youtu.be/ovrVv_RICMw
- The Drama Triangle - Lauren Kress - https://youtu.be/E_XSeUYa0-8
- It's Not About The Nail - Jason Headley - <https://youtu.be/-4EDhdAHrOg>
- The Empowerment Dynamic - powerofted.com
- Stop the Drama - solutionsforresilience.com
- Karpman Triangle Overview - sonialevine.com
- Women Who Love Too Much - Robin Norwood - ISBN 978-1-4165-5021-1

Backwards Brain Bicycle - notes

- My thinking was in a rut
- I KNOW how to ride a bike - but I don't have an UNDERSTANDING
- Changed way handlebars work - now work in opposite direction
- Once you have a rigid way of thinking in our head, you can't change it, even if you want to.
- But you can retrain your brain.
- It took Destin 8 months (5 min per day) to learn new way to ride bike
- Son has been riding bike for 3 years. It took him 2 weeks to learn new way to ride bike
- A pathway in his brain is unlocked
- It's like a trail in my brain but if I wasn't paying attention my brain would easily lose that new neural pathway and jump back on the old road it was more familiar with.
- Any small distraction would throw my brain back to the old control algorithm and I would wreck
- Can he ride a normal bike? Can he return to the old way?
- It took about 20 minutes for his brain to click back into the old way of riding.
- Knowledge does not equal understanding
- Truth is truth, no matter what you think about it.