



Relationships *The Adlerian Team*

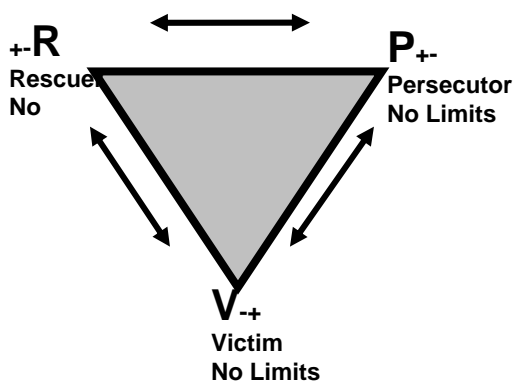
The Drama of Conflict in Families

By Cathy Lumsden

During our lives we are constantly in relationships with our partners, children, friends and families. How successful we are in these relationships depends on our ability to know and understand ourselves. Each and every one of us have core beliefs we developed as children. Some of these beliefs are positive and some are self-limiting. Often it is our self-limiting beliefs that create problems and conflict in our relationships. Steve Karpman provides a roadmap to identify when we are acting out of our negative belief systems. He calls it the Drama Triangle. This triangle can provide insights into developing healthy relationships within our families.

occurs is they choose people who feel incapable of handling life and sometimes can't even take care of themselves. Consequently, their need to be taken care of does not get met. Then the rescuer becomes disappointed, feels used, may feel like a martyr, (after all I've done for you attitude) and jumps to the Persecutor role of punishing their victim. This is how we dance around the drama triangle without even knowing it.

The Karpman Drama Triangle



A true helper acts without any expectations of receiving. They encourage self-responsibility and have faith in their children and partners. They empower rather than promote dependency. Finally, they also understand that others can learn from mistakes just like they do.

A Rescuer can choose to get off the drama triangle by taking responsibility for their needs and recognizing when their limiting belief is being activated. Notice your behavior of focusing on other people and shift your energies to yourself. Take the risk of expressing your feelings and needs.

A **Victim's** self-limiting belief consists of the theme that they can't make it on their own, that they are incapable and powerless. Because these limiting beliefs are unconscious, the person in the Victim role looks for someone to "save" them. When they find their saviour they have temporary relief and then may start resenting the Rescuer's attitude of 'I know better'. They too jump into the Persecutor role blaming their Rescuer for making them feel less than. As well, behavior such as manipulation and control may occur when they are on the drama triangle.

The Drama Triangle

Karpman has identified three basic roles on the drama triangle: Rescuer, Victim and Persecutor. We all play these roles with others and even with ourselves. Karpman states that no matter where we start on the triangle we always end up in the victim role. Thus all three roles are forms of victimhood.

The Victim can get off the drama triangle by learning how to empower and take care of themselves. They too need to take full responsibility for their needs and feelings. Notice when you are expecting someone else to rescue you and choose to rescue yourself. Learn to be authentic with others, stating your feelings and your needs.

Rescuer – Victim – Persecutor

A **Rescuer's** self-limiting belief is that their needs are not important or relevant. Consequently, they unconsciously decide to take care of others in order to feel important. They're hope is that they will get appreciation and love back from whom they caretake. Rescuers tend to be over-protective, want to "fix", and believe they know better. One cannot be in the rescuer role without a victim. Inevitably what

A **Persecutor's** self-limiting belief consists of "I am worthless". Their greatest fear is powerlessness. To compensate for these unconscious fears, persecutors protect themselves by becoming authoritarian, controlling and aloof. Because they dislike feeling worthless they project their feelings onto others. They too need a victim.

Persecutors see the world as dangerous and are always in the defense mode to protect themselves. They often feel like they are the innocent bystanders – "others are to blame, I

was just protecting myself". This way they can justify their attacking behavior.

The Persecutor can choose to stay off the drama triangle by being accountable and responsible for their behaviors and feelings, which allows them to stop blaming others. Own the effects of your anger and dominance over others and apologize. Notice when you are feeling superior or inferior and refocus on your true talents and strengths.

Self Accountability as a Healthy Approach to Relationships

Self-accountability is the only way off the drama triangle. Not taking responsibility for ourselves is an important clue in recognizing when we are on the triangle. When we are not taking personal responsibility we are often avoiding pain and we jump on the triangle, blaming, rescuing and feeling like victims. Living on the drama triangle only creates pain and suffering, ironically creating the behaviors we are trying to avoid.

Personal responsibility also involves becoming aware of our unhealthy beliefs we learned about ourselves as small children. We all have them. Giving up the victim mentality that others cause our feelings is the first step in growing. In reality our feelings are created by what we tell ourselves, the stories we create. This paradigm shift enables us to take full responsibility for our thoughts, which gives us the power to change these harmful storylines. When we are aware of these self-limiting beliefs we can choose healthier alternatives and create the life we truly want.

Being aware of the roles on the drama triangle and noticing what role you are playing when in conflict, will assist you in developing healthy relationships. Always remember, the greatest gift we can give ourselves and others is to manage our relationships with self awareness, mutual respect and healthy communication.

References: Lynne Forrest, The Three Faces of Victim, www.lynneforrest.com

Stephen Karpman, The Drama Triangle, www.karpmamdramatriangle.com

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