



# Crossroads Counseling of Chicago

Personal Leadership Development &  
Partner Abuse Intervention

---

## The Drama Triangle and Equality Triangles

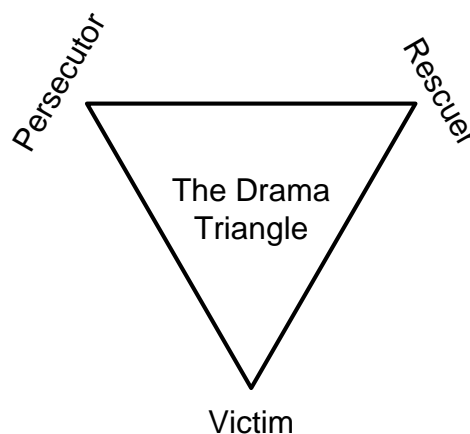
---

[The Drama Triangle](#) was originally developed in 1968 by Stephen Karpman, a [Transactional Analysis](#) trainer, as a way of describing the dance that occurs whenever we make someone else responsible for how we feel. According to Karpman, any time we don't take responsibility for our feelings, we are acting in a part of the Drama Triangle. The Drama Triangle is a simple yet powerful mechanism for understanding dynamics in a relationship.

**The Drama Triangle** is based on unequal relationships. The roles are akin to those in a parent/child relationship where the parent “knows best” and enforces compliance on the child. The roles of the drama triangle are: **Victim**, **Persecutor** and **Rescuer**. Karpman shows the relationship among these three roles by putting them on an upside down triangle. This shows the **Persecutor** and **Rescuer** in the one-up (parent) position that they take to the **Victim**. The Victim considers himself to be powerless while seeing the others as powerful, a child-like view.

- A **Persecutor** is someone who puts other people down and therefore goes one-up. The Persecutor often defends himself by claiming good intention, thereby seeing himself as the Rescuer.
- A **Rescuer** also goes one-up. They do more than their share and they do things they don't really want to do. They often profess to know how you should live your life better than you do. In this sense, a Rescuer is a Persecutor in sheep's clothing. The victim will often see the Rescuer as the Persecutor.
- A **Victim** doesn't take responsibility for himself. They will often feel overwhelmed with their feelings or even numb to them. The Victim takes the viewpoint that the solution to his problem is 1) for others to change or 2) for someone else to fix it for him. Hopelessness, helplessness and inevitability are the hallmarks of the Victim.

It is important to distinguish between taking the life-view that “I am a victim” versus “I have been victimized”. People are sometimes truly victimized by such forces as crime, abuse, war, societal prejudices, or religious or political persecution. Seeing life as “I am a victim” (helpless, whiney, [depressed](#), hopeless, cynical, complaining) is independent of being victimized. This latter state of mind is the subject of this paper.





# Crossroads Counseling of Chicago

## Personal Leadership Development & Partner Abuse Intervention

The role names are part of our everyday language. The drama in the Triangle comes from the switching of roles. As the drama triangle is played out, people change roles or tactics. Others in the triangle will then switch to match this. Sooner or later the **Victim**, sick of the one-down position, turns on the **Rescuer**. Or the **Rescuer** becomes fed up with a lack response or any appreciation of their efforts, becomes persecuting. The Drama Triangle has been around long enough for there to be many derivatives and modifications.

<b>The Drama Triangle Roles and Interactions</b>			
<b>Interaction</b>	<b>Victim</b>	<b>Rescuer</b>	<b>Persecutor</b>
<b>Reality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suffering or potentially suffering</li> <li>• I love my suffering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concern for victim</li> <li>• I know what is best for you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invested in satisfying own needs</li> <li>• I have the right to punish you</li> </ul>
<b>Characteristics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acts as if he does not have the resources to solve his problem</li> <li>• Acts as if his neediness is so acute it prevents him from solving problems</li> <li>• Does not use Adult Ego State for thinking and problem solving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Takes over</li> <li>• Does the thinking and problem solving</li> <li>• Does more than his share</li> <li>• Does things he does not want to do</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Others suffer on account of his behavior</li> <li>• Part of his goal is to punish</li> </ul>
<b>Discount</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The situation is hopeless. It can never be solved</li> <li>• I love my victimhood</li> <li>• Only you have the solution to my problems and any solutions you have can't possibly work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The victim cannot solve his problem</li> <li>• I love telling others what to do</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The victim doesn't matter</li> <li>• I can't be OK unless you get your come-uppance</li> <li>• I can't let you get away with this</li> </ul>

While the Drama Triangle illustrates the conflictual pattern quite clearly, it's not always that easy to see a way out when you are in the middle of the drama. [The way out](#) is through the Persecutor corner. You have to become willing to allow the other players to see you as the Persecutor in order to stop playing this game.

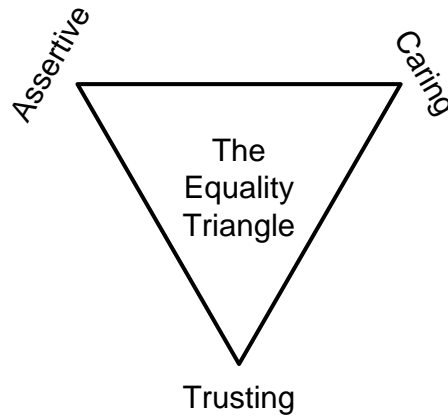
I have included a more detailed example of each of these three roles following the next section.

**The Equality Triangle** uses the same structure as the Drama Triangle but uses adult roles to replace the parent/child roles of the Drama Triangle. Each player views the others as equal and treats them with respect. Note, one player can be in the Equality Triangle while others remain in the Drama Triangle. The players still in the Drama Triangle will tend to view the player in the Equality Triangle as the Persecutor. The player in the Equality Triangle must work hard not to slip back into the Drama Triangle as a result of this "invitation" to rejoin the others.



# Crossroads Counseling of Chicago

## Personal Leadership Development & Partner Abuse Intervention



The roles of the Drama Triangle each have their equivalent role in the Equality Triangle. Each of the three roles in the Equality Triangle requires the development of a different set of skills (see table below).

Drama Triangle Role	Equality Triangle Role	Skill to be Developed	Costs
Victim	Trusting	Problem solving	Take self-responsibility
Rescuer	Caring	Listening	Give up “fixing”/”hero”
Persecutor	Assertive	Assertiveness	Change myself, not you.

Any technique that the **Trusting** person can use to start thinking about options and consequences is valuable. In the **Caring** role the development of listening skills that involve empathizing with the Trusting person is required. Listening is frequently the only Caring response needed. **Assertiveness** is about getting your needs met without punishing. The Assertive person holds boundaries by accepting the costs of self-change rather than to attempt to impose change on others. Self-awareness is essential in all three roles.

The Equality Triangle Roles and Interactions			
Interactions	Trusting	Caring	Assertive
<b>Reality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suffering or potentially suffering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concern for the vulnerable person</li> <li>You know what is best for you</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invested in satisfying own needs</li> <li>I have no right to punish you</li> </ul>
<b>Characteristics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses Adult Ego State for thinking and problem solving</li> <li>Awareness – uses his feelings as data for problem solving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does not take over unless asked and agrees</li> <li>Does not do the thinking</li> <li>Does not do more than his share</li> <li>Awareness – does not do things he does not want to do</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asks for what he wants</li> <li>Says no to what he doesn't want</li> <li>Makes changes in order to get his needs met</li> </ul>
<b>Skill</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Problem solving</li> <li>Responds to betrayal by becoming assertive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Active listening</li> <li>Cares, but does not move to “fix”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assertiveness</li> <li>Holds boundaries by self-change</li> </ul>



# Crossroads Counseling of Chicago

## Personal Leadership Development & Partner Abuse Intervention

### Discussion of the roles of Victim, Persecutor, and Rescuer

The following are more detailed examples of the characteristics of the Victim, Persecutor and Rescuer. I had originally found these on the web site of [Gregory J. Boyce](#), however the article is no longer available. Mr. Boyce has now written a book on the subject that likely contains this and more material. His book is called [No More Drama](#). Here are Mr. Boyce's descriptions:

#### **Victim: Poor Me**

The Victim will ignore, discount, or minimize himself. He considers himself to be powerless in the relationship or situation and actually lies to himself about his ability to effect change. The Victim feels oppressed, helpless, hopeless and often ashamed of that 'fact'. The Victim will use a variety of communication styles to express his victimization: whiney, pouty, complaining, sullen, pessimism, doom and gloom, woe is me, cynical. The outstanding trait is a position of "I can do nothing about this."

The Victim will attempt to convince you that they had 0% responsibility in the matter of their victim hood. It was out of their control. It just happened. Similarly, for a current situation they will push to convince you that they have no influence; but you do!

The position of Victim is one of 'no think'.

To move off this position yourself, begin problem solving. (Hint: if you are in the Victim position and reading this, go right now to a desk with pen and paper. Go. Sit. At the top of a blank page write - The Problem Is. Underline it. Now imagine you have an advisory group of 500 experts and your job is to simply record their brain storming ideas on where to start tackling the problem. In point form, jot down any and all ideas that come to you. Don't stop until you have at least 10.)

To encourage another person to move off the position and into problem solving, all you can do is affirm to them that you have faith in their ability to solve this problem they have, and if they need something from you, you will listen to and consider any requests they might have. It is imperative that you not attempt to solve their problem nor give advice!!!! You can empathize with them i.e. Yes I hear you are (feeling).

Discernment: When people first hear about the Victim position, one tendency is to lump everyone who discusses a problem into the Victim group. The key is to listen for POOR HELPLESS ME messages. If you hear them, don't buy in or you'll be supporting and discounting a Victim.

If you do join in and play to the victim's position, be ready for him to switch to Persecutor and attack you.

#### **Persecutor: It's All Your Fault**

The Persecutor will ignore, discount, or minimize another person, or himself. He will state directly or indirectly (imply) that the other person is inadequate, stupid, helpless, hopeless, worthless, useless, pond scum or worse. The Persecutor will use a variety of styles to convey the message: blaming, criticism, accusations, sarcasm, gossip, seduction, conning and trickery, cruel or practical jokes (hey can't you take a little joke?), temper tantrum, violence, threats, trapping and cornering. The Persecutor believes the Victim's problems are most likely because of a personality/character/mental/emotional/genetic/spiritual flaw.

The Persecutors often 'think' that nothing would happen if it weren't for them. They are responsible for anything 'good' that happens. They are 100% responsible. In fact they have to



# Crossroads Counseling of Chicago

## Personal Leadership Development & Partner Abuse Intervention

be because the Victim(s) are too useless to contribute anything. People who don't delegate or who have control issues should examine themselves as highly probable career Persecutors.

To move off the position yourself, focus on answering these two questions: What is it that I really want for myself? How can I get, or who can I ask for, what I really want in a clear honest manner?

If you are interacting with a Persecutor, inform them that you are not going to listen to them until they change their behavior so it doesn't include the discounting or blaming or whatever it is they are doing. Then terminate the interaction!!! Remember that you are a powerhouse of possibilities and options for any situation - this person is not Big Daddy who has your life in his grip. In fact this person has a severe stroke deficit and simply needs you to pay attention. You declare the terms on which that exchange will take place. Of course if your stroke economy is in a deficit then you'll be tempted to engage and play the game.

For milder forms of persecution, stop the Persecutor with this question: What is it you really want from me? Then wait for and insist on the answer. Once you have that answer, move to problem solving.

Advice givers are often subtle discounters or attempting to get a stroke indirectly from you for their 'good ideas'. But often you initiated the response by taking a Victim stance. Watch how you initiate discussions of your challenges because that's where the invitation is made. "Oh brother I got this problem with my ..." is very different from "I don't want advice. Will you just listen for a minute while I describe a problem I have with my ..."

A persecutor cannot force you to play Victim. It's a choice. Likewise a Victim cannot force you to play Persecutor. It's a choice. Either way, if you choose to play, be ready for the switch when the players suddenly take up new positions, everyone says "Huh? What just happened?"

### **Rescuer: Ah Poor Thing, Let Me Help You**

A Rescuer will ignore, discount, minimize another person by taking the position that the person is hopeless, helpless, unable to solve the problem, and generally assumed to be flawed in some way. Because there are real victims in the world who need real rescuers, this position on the drama triangle tends to be more subtle and covert. And indeed, a psychological Victim may actually get them into a real victim situation. That's what we call 3rd degree, playing for keeps.

A Rescuer also believes the Persecutor is flawed in some way thereby discounting the Persecutor and his ability to solve whatever it is that requires him to be a Persecutor. So the Rescuer is discounting both Victim and Persecutor. This explains why Rescuers often get beaten up by both players and told to keep out of it. Or in a 3rd degree game, the Rescuer tries to break up a fight and ends up attacked and hospitalized by the combatants.

A Rescuer often at a deeper level doesn't want to rescue; but does so out of guilt. Like who else will take care of this Victim. Can't let the Victim suffer, don't you know! And usually the Rescuer doesn't expect the rescue to succeed. Like, with such a Victim a rescue is next to impossible. "You just can't help that kind of person." Plus on the Victim side, he doesn't want to be rescued cause that would end the exchange of strokes.

There are many styles of rescuer from Mr. Nice Guy to Ms. Helpful; from Mr. Community to Ms. Volunteer; from Mr. Martyr to Ms. Everyone's Best Friend. In every style the common theme is the Rescuer will attempt to solve the Victim's problems when in fact the Victim could solve their own problems. Yes the solving may be difficult; but whose problem is it? A gifted Victim will attempt to convince you that his problems are yours and you are therefore solving your own problems by solving his. A master Victim will engineer his problems to become your problems.



# Crossroads Counseling of Chicago

## Personal Leadership Development & Partner Abuse Intervention

To get yourself off the Rescuer position, move to clear nurturing by taking no action until specifically requested in a clear direct manner. In response to the emotional moaning and groaning, ask if the person needs anything from you. Listen for a request. Often the Victim will phrase the request in a hazy, unclear way, hoping again that you'll do the work and figure it out. Don't do it. The baby chick needs to peck its own way out of the shell or it will die! Here are some other phrases to use with a Victim that will help you stay off the Rescuer position. "I'm sure you can figure this out. I'll look forward to hearing about your success." "Are you asking me for something?" "Will you think about what it is you want?" "Will you be specific?" "I'm not a mind reader, tell me exactly what you want from me and I'll consider it."

The other aspect about taking up a Rescuer position is to examine what it is that you are not asking for. "What needs of my own am I indirectly attempting to fill by doing this rescue thing?"

If a Rescuer invites you to play Victim (you'll feel discounted) and you don't want to, move to clear structure. This will involve interrupting the Rescuer with "I'm confident I'll figure that out, what I would like to discuss is ..." or "I'm not interested in talking about that. Instead let's discuss ..."