

# STEPPING OUT OF CHAOS

*Recovery for Incest Survivors, Adult Children of Alcoholics, and Co-dependents*

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Recovery is often a long and painful process for Adult children of Dysfunctional Families, but sometimes it can be made easier when you understand the systems and patterns that run your life.

## **LIES**

If you were raised in a dysfunctional family, you have, for the most part, been raised to be inauthentic, to lie to yourself and others about what you are feeling and what motivates you. You have been raised to play psychological games with yourself and others. Although true insights about those games come from doing deep levels of process work, it often helps to have a framework of understanding from which to view your daily situations and some steps to follow to help you out of the dilemmas.

## **DRAMA TRIANGLE**

Developed in the late 1960s by Stephen Karpman, the drama Triangle is a description of one of the most persuasive and damaging psychological games play today.

In 1978, after recognizing the value of the Drama Triangle, I began working with Dr. Arthur Melville to clarify the Triangle so that it could be used as a major tool in the understanding of dysfunctional families. We added some information to the basic Triangle to develop a more complete model of human dysfunction. We also found that while the original Triangle could be used to describe the complicated interactions of psychological games, it did not pay enough attention to the emotional processes that keep people caught in the Triangle. So Dr. Melville developed a tool called the Feeling (Emotional) Diamond, based on the four basic emotions of Joy, Fear, Sadness and Anger, and we began to use that with the new information we had added to the Triangle to support people in moving out of drama and chaos in their lives.

The Drama Triangle now can be used to describe the various processes characteristic of all dysfunctional families, including addictive families. By understanding the roles designated in the Triangle, the way they interact and the rules that ensnare you, you can learn to avoid becoming entangled in the Triangle and the drama that the Triangle precipitates.

If you come from a family suffering from alcoholism, incest, emotional or physical violence or chronic co-dependence, you are probably aware of the chaos and drama that was part of growing up in a dysfunctional home. Having been raised in a dysfunctional family, you realize that you were expected to act out a particular role in the family for the family's benefit. You were expected to be inauthentic. You were not allowed to be in touch with who you are, how you were feeling and what truly motivated you.

If you were raised in a dysfunctional family, you are already familiar with the Drama Triangle, although you never had a name for what you were experiencing. All you would know is that you felt awful and nothing seemed to turn out the way you had hoped or expected. What you were experiencing was being caught in the Triangle and having to play out the various roles and moves governed by the nature of the Triangle.

The Drama Triangle is the representation of a complex interaction process involving the three participating roles of victim, persecutor and rescuer. The triangle is based on blame and guilt and is put into operation whenever any type of lie or denial occurs. Without blame, guilt or lies there would be no Drama Triangle and no chaos. Instead there would be healthy responsible relationships based on honest communications.

If you look at the Triangle in figure 1, you will notice that it is placed upside down on one of the points, rather than on its side. This configuration emphasizes the pivotal position of the victim. To understand the Triangle, it would, therefore, be best to start with that position. Before exploring the Triangle in depth, it is important to remember that participating in any role in the Triangle does not mean that you are a bad person. It means that you are caught in the dysfunctional programming that you grew up within your family.

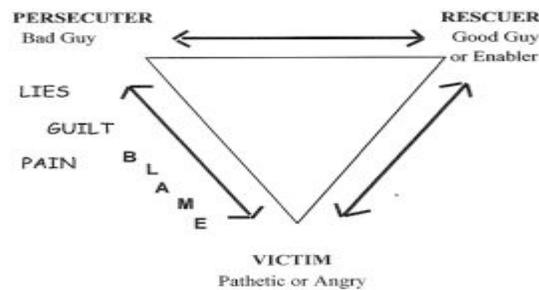


Fig. 1

## Victim

The victim position is the key role in the Triangle because it is the position around which the others revolve. People operating in the victim position take no responsibility for their actions or feelings. They truly believe that they are life's fall guys. Their perception is that everyone in the world is "doing it to them." They continually look for someone or something else to blame for things not working in their lives. Victims can frequently be identified by their usage of such language as :  
Everyone/anyone does it to me; you/they (the government, my mother, father, boss, spouse, children, etc.) do it to me; poor me!

## Pathetic Victim and Angry Victim

There are two basic types of victims, the pathetic victim and the angry victim. The pathetic victim plays the pity-ploy using woeful "poor me" looks and the desolate language of self-pity, while the angry victim pretends to be powerful, using phrases, such as, "I won't let you do it to me," "Look what you did to me," "You're not going to do that to me again," or "you're bad."

Both types of victim are looking for someone to blame for the emotions they are having and for their lives not working. In addition, they look for a rescuer, someone they can "hook" into taking care of them and their responsibilities.

Victims manipulate others into doing what they want with blame and guilt. They will find someone that they can blame for their unfulfilled lives. The victim sees this person as a persecutor. If that person believes the victim and accepts the blame, then he will feel guilty and try to remedy the situation. As soon as he tries to fix things for the victim, he moves from persecutor to rescuer.

## Manipulation

Let's take an example of two friends and watch how the victim operates and tries to manipulate the friend into rescuing him.

Neil and Martin have known each other since grade school. Martin holds down a responsible position as an assistant manager for a large food chain, achieving his position by working his way up since graduation from high school, six years earlier, when he began work as a box boy.

Neil has never held down a job for more than three months. He is rarely on time anywhere, especially work, but always has some excuse. Neil is a victim. He claims that the world picks on him and no one understands him.

One day Neil shows up at Martin's, wanting to borrow Martin's car. Neil's car is in the shop. He didn't check his oil, and he destroyed his engine. Neil says that he has a job interview and that he tried to borrow his mother's car, but she refused to let him use it. Neil has taken no responsibility for not taking care of his own car. Neil, the victim, enters Martin's house, blaming his

mother for stopping him from going to his job interview and calling her names because she would not lend him her car. Neil's mother is cast in the persecutor role, and Neil is trying to manipulate Martin into the rescuer role by implying that Martin will be to blame if Neil cannot get to his job interview.

The last time Neil had car trouble, Martin loaned Neil his car even before Neil asked for it. Neil was supposed to borrow it for a few hours, but he kept it for several days, and Martin had to take the bus to work until he could get his car back. When he finally got it back, it had two dents in the door that Neil claims were there before and refused to repair. Martin was upset, but never learned how to communicate his feelings or take care of himself in this type of situation. His parents had taught him that it was not nice to get angry with people.

When Neil came back to borrow the car again, he tried to make Martin feel guilty and believe it would be Martin's fault if Neil could not get to the interview. If Martin were to feel guilty, he would be "hooked" again into the Triangle because he doesn't know how to deal with guilt in a healthy way. He would lend Neil the car and become the rescuer.

If Martin did not lend Neil the car this time, Neil would then make Martin into the persecutor. Even if Martin attempts to help Neil by making suggestions to Neil about getting to the interview by bus, Neil would still find a way to blame Martin. Neil would claim that Martin was trying to make Neil look bad by having him show up by bus.

Martin was raised in the Triangle without ever knowing it. He was trained by his parents' and his church's standards to believe that in order for him to be good, he had to take care of other people - physically, emotionally, or spiritually - even at the cost of his own well-being. Martin was drilled with the idea that to take care of himself was selfish and that selfishness was bad. Therefore when Neil, the victim, approached him the first time with his tales of woe, Martin was a prime target for the manipulative hook of guilt. Martin already believed that he should take care of other people's problems, and that if he did not, he was bad. Because he did not wish to be cast in the bad guy, persecutor role, he quickly jumped in to rescue Neil, the victim. He ended up doing something that was not in his best interest.

Martin did not realize that he was raised to be a rescuer. His parents did not realize that they were teaching him not to be selfish for their own selfish reasons, so that they would look good to those around them whom they wished to please. They did not realize they were setting Martin up so that no matter what he does with Neil, he will feel awful because they raised Martin in the Triangle, and he does not know how to get out of it. All that he knows how to do is move positions in the Triangle, but moving positions in the Triangle only produces more pain.

### **Rescuer**

In the Triangle, the position of the rescuer is the position of the good guy. Because of the way that most people are raised, whenever they feel guilty and believe that they have been "bad" and done something wrong, they will usually try to get out of the guilt by moving into the rescuer good guy position. Martin is an example of someone who feels guilty and moves into the rescuer position. Martin prefers the position of rescuer to the position of persecutor, because the rescuer position affords him some relief from the guilt, giving him an opportunity to pretend that he is acting unselfishly for someone else's good. Martin gets a momentary high from helping. As any recovering co-dependent knows, this high is what makes the rescuer position so addictive.

Martin believes that by helping others, he is being unselfish. He does not realize that he is actually motivated by very selfish reasons. He does not want to feel bad, nor appear to be a bad person. Martin believes that he should share, no matter what the circumstances. He does not realize that he was taught by his parents to share his toys, even when he didn't want to share them, because his parents believed that if Martin did not share his toys, he would make them look bad as parents.

One of the things that Dr. Melville and I realized in doing this work with the Drama Triangle is that most people will choose a favorite position to start from in the Triangle, usually the victim or the rescuer.

For the person who prefers being a rescuer, there is another important point to understand about rescuers. Because of the very nature of the Triangle, rescuers must have a victim, someone to take care of, someone to control; someone, who by their very need makes the rescuer feel good.

When people are co-dependent and therefore addicted to the high of the rescuer role, they will find that they actually have a need to rescue. In order to fill that need, they will have to have a victim around whom they can "help." If there isn't one available, the rescuer will attempt to make one.

In general, rescuers need to be needed, and they need to be in control and be right, no matter what the cost. Being in control and being right allows the rescuer to avoid dealing with any emotions or discomfort that might arise from facing life honestly. Remember that in all addictions, the addictive substance or behavior, in this case rescuing, is used by the addict to avoid feelings.

Rescuers are so determined not to feel and not to pay attention to anyone else's feelings, they do not realize that the underlying communication they are transmitting to their chosen victim is, "You are insufficient; you are inept; you cannot take care of yourself. You are not good enough. Therefore, I should be in charge."

This position of rescuer in the Triangle fits the traditional role in the alcoholic family syndrome of the enabler, the co-alcoholic. This is the person in the family who enables the alcoholic to continue the disease process by taking care of the alcoholic's responsibilities and not leaving the alcoholic to be responsible for his own actions.

When I work with people who choose the rescuer-enabler position as their first choice in the Drama Triangle and who tell me how much they like to help people, I usually do a little exercise to allow them to experience how degrading it is to be placed in a position of being inept and not good enough. Rescuers are usually so involved with the high of feeling good because they have helped someone that they fail to notice how awful the person being rescued is made to feel in the process.

Often I will ask the rescuer to imagine being the other person while I play the role of the rescuer and verbalize key phrases, such as, "Here, let me do it for you!" or "Isn't it better to do it the right way?" I will especially look for phrases that the rescuer uses when rescuing others or phrases that their own parents may have used when rescuing them.

### **One for One rule**

Still another important aspect of the Triangle that is pertinent to the rescuer role is the one for one rule that says that every time someone rescues another person, the rescuer will end up the final victim in that particular play.

Let's look at Martin and Neil to see if this is how it happens. Neil borrowed Martin's car for a few hours, kept the car for a few days without Martin's permission. Martin had to take the bus to work, which made his daily commute two hours longer and left him exhausted. On top of that, Neil returned the car with two dents in it. Martin has known Neil since childhood and knew that he was irresponsible, so Martin knew that lending the car was not acting in his own best interest. He was taking care of Neil in order to try to feel good about himself and to avoid feeling guilty. By looking for the emotional high of helping Neil, instead of the healthy action of taking care of himself, he ended up the victim, having to pay for two dents in his car and jeopardize his own well-being by adding stress to his job situation.

Frequently the person starting the maneuvers in the Triangle as a rescuer is a rescuer-martyr, who will end up as the victim-martyr. This is the person who helps others with strings attached. This person has a hidden agenda, an expectation that is never openly communicated nor agreed upon and is rarely, if ever, achieved.

The rescuer-martyr believes that if he does something nice for people, they should feel obligated to do something nice for him. This sense of obligation gives the rescuer-martyr a false sense of control over people. Without necessarily saying it out loud, the rescuer-martyr is thinking, "Look at all that I've done for you. You owe me."

### **Persecutor**

The role of the persecutor is the role of the bad guy, the villain. It is the one role that few people consciously choose as their starting place in the Triangle. In fact, it is the role that keeps the

Triangle going because people in the Triangle are attempting to avoid that position by moving into the rescuer role or by perceiving themselves as victims. No one likes to see himself as the bad guy. Even criminals in prison want to be seen as the victims of society, rather than society's persecutors. The persecutor role is the one that victims use, along with blame, to maneuver others into rescuing them. What makes this position truly unique is the fact that once a person is in the Triangle and he decides to leave it, he must leave from this position. In other words, when a person removes himself from Playing the Triangle, anyone still playing will perceive him as the persecutor.

### **Positioning, Maneuvering And Rules In The Triangle**

Now that you have a basic understanding of the positions in the Triangle there are a number of key points to consider remembering:

1. The Triangle is based on lies. Tell a lie to yourself or someone else, whether it is a lie about data or a lie about your emotions or your experience, and you move immediately into the Triangle and the addictive process.
2. All *shoulds* are a lie. Therefore, *shoulds* will throw you into the Triangle. (An important piece of your healing process is learning how to go about getting your needs and wants met after you learn to distinguish them from your *shoulds* or the things that other people have told you are your needs.)
3. All positions in the Triangle cause pain so no matter what position you are in at any given moment in the Triangle, you will be in pain.
4. There is no power in the Triangle. When you are in the Triangle, you are operating from powerlessness and irresponsibility no matter what position you are playing.
5. Everyone has a favorite starting position which is usually either the rescuer or the victim. Few people choose persecutor as starting position.
6. Once you are hooked into the Triangle, you will end up playing all the positions, whether you like it or not, because of the nature of the Triangle. You may have perceived yourself as a rescuer who wound up as someone's victim while at the same time that person perceives you as the persecutor.
7. Guilt is the experience that books you into the Triangle and therefore you need to learn a few points about guilt:
  - a. Guilt is a signal that someone is attempting to pull you into the Triangle.
  - b. To stay out of the Triangle you need to learn to give yourself permission to feel guilty without acting on that guilt. In other words, do not let the guilt push you into the rescuer position.
  - c. Learn to sit with the guilt and be uncomfortable. This experience called guilt is a learned response; it is not the same thing as being out of integrity with yourself.
8. The "escape hatch" out of the Triangle is located at the persecutor position. Telling the truth and feeling your emotions opens the escape hatch out of the Triangle. In other words, in order to leave the Triangle or stay out of the Triangle, you have to be willing for others (the victims or the other rescuers) to perceive you as the bad guy. This does not mean that you are the bad guy; it does mean that others choose to see you that way. If you are not willing to be seen as a persecutor, you will get hooked into rescuing and place yourself back or keep yourself in the Triangle. If you are already in the Triangle and wish to leave, you have to be willing for those in the Triangle with you to see you as the persecutor.

When you are in the process of leaving the Triangle, you are in the process of telling yourself the truth about your feelings, your motives and the situation in general. You are willing to experience whatever feelings you are having and you are willing to let others experience their feelings without your having to rescue them. If the other people in the Triangle are willing to tell the truth and experience their feelings, the Triangle disappears. If they are not, as is more often the case, then you leave looking like their persecutor.

Let's go back to Martin as an example. In order for Martin to leave the triangle that he is in

with Neil, Martin must be willing to feel his fear of looking like the bad guy and his sadness that his friend wants to blame him. This does not mean that he actually is the persecutor even though Neil perceives him that way. To stay out of the Triangle, Martin must also be willing to Let Neil leave the friendship.

**9.** You can play the Triangle alone, with yourself. (Once you have been raised in a dysfunctional family, you do not need anyone else to push your into the Triangle.

- a. The way you play the Triangle by yourself is by listening to the negative voice inside your head that beats you up, puts you down, and constantly *shoulds* you.
- b. Remember, *shoulds* are a lie. They have nothing to do with who you are or how the universe works. They are someone else's interpretation of what to do and what is good.
- c. When you play the Triangle with yourself, your *Should-er* will persecute you so that you will feel like a victim. At the same time you will be feeling guilty. This will trigger the belief that you are the persecutor. The guilt will drive you to rescue someone (or some situation) even when no one except you is attempting to manipulate you into the rescuer position.

**10.** When you actively participate in a relationship with someone who lives in the Triangle, you must be very careful of the hooks. It is difficult to be around people who constantly operate in the Triangle and not get hooked into the Triangle yourself, especially if your personal boundaries are not clear, and you have not learned to recognize the Triangle.

**11.** Your internalized *Should-er* is also the voice that pushes you into the Triangle when others around you are in the Triangle and attempting to hook you. The *Should-er* is your false-self, the part inside you that is actually someone else but that you believe is you. It is controlling, negative, rigid, perfectionistic and righteous. Without that part of you operating, you would not participate in the Triangle.

**12.** Being in the Triangle is not being alive; it is a living death. It is a life of pain, inauthenticity and lack of love and acceptance.

**13.** Suicide is the ultimate victim act, the ultimate act of self-pity. When the victim perceives that he cannot get anyone to come to the rescue anymore and he does not have the courage to seek new alternatives, he may turn to suicide.

**14.** Telling the truth and experiencing your emotions is the only way out of the Triangle. To do that you have to learn to know and define your boundaries and take responsibility for recognizing, experiencing, expressing and completing your emotions.

Let's look at another example of the Triangle positions and how they relate to co-dependence and the Alcoholic family syndrome.

I once worked with a young woman who entered therapy as an acknowledged Adult child of an Alcoholic. When I asked her what her purpose was for being in therapy, she said that she had come in to work on herself and her co-dependence. After relating that healthy-sounding purpose, she then proceeded to spend a large part of the session telling me about her husband. He was not living up to her expectations. He would stay at home, depressed, and not go out job-hunting. In her estimation her unhappiness was based on his behavior, and he needed fixing. She said that she kept trying to push him to get a job. When I probed further, I found out he had abandoned the career he had liked because she was embarrassed by it.

When I pointed out to her the co-dependence involved in what she was telling me, she was able to recognize her need to control matters in order not to feel uncomfortable, but she did not want to change. Although she had come into the session stating that she wanted to work on her co-dependence, what she was really hoping to do was to get me to help her find a way to change her husband.

When we explore this scenario relative to the positions in the Triangle (which the three of us did later on), we find that her husband in an effort to rescue her, to take care of her embarrassment and to avoid guilt, left his job in a career that he enjoyed. He ended up experiencing himself as the victim-martyr

and her as the persecutor. She, on the other hand, saw herself as the victim of her husband's unacceptable career and had hoped to get me to rescue her.

When she came into my office, she did not realize that she was trying to bring me into the Triangle. She was not even aware that she lived in the Triangle. She didn't see that she was trying to fix him in order to avoid dealing with herself. Toward the end of the first session, I told her that in order for me to work with her, she would have to be willing to let go of trying to control his life, starting with letting go of controlling his career. She told me she couldn't do that. I told her that this would be her last session. I would not work with her as long as her primary goal was to fix him. She sat there stunned. She had really thought that I would help her by showing her how to fix him. I watched the fear rise in her eyes as she realized that I was not going to do what she wanted, which was to rescue her.

She sat for several minutes more. Then she took an important step in her recovery. She agreed to be willing to let go of trying to fix him. She went home and told him that she was willing to stop running his career and that he could go get any job that he wanted. He did. This was the first time that they had been able to consciously step out of the Triangle.

It was obvious to me when this woman came in that she had only a superficial understanding of co-dependence. With the help of the Drama Triangle and the Feeling (Emotion) Diamond and much deep process work, this woman was quickly able to recognize when her co-dependence was operating.

### **The Feeling (Emotion) Diamond**

As human beings we are all born with the ability to experience all emotions and the potential to distinguish the various emotions from each other. Through our dysfunctional upbringings, we suppress those abilities and are forced to go back and relearn how to identify, experience and express our emotions. In order to make that process easier, I begin by teaching about the four basic emotions, joy, fear, sadness, and anger.

First, let us look at an experience circle. (see figure 2.) Now let us assume that this circle represents a portion of life. Emotions are among the many types of experiences that we have in life. Emotions are an important part of the experience of self and provide the energy for living. The four basic emotions are joy, fear, sadness and anger.

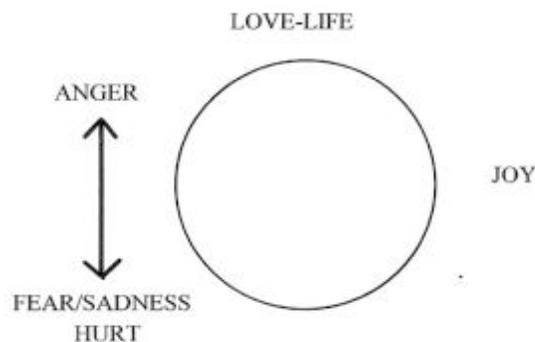


Fig. 2

Looking at the circle, you will notice that joy is placed alone on the right side of the circle.

This is done because many people seem to believe that joy is the only good emotion and fear, sadness and anger are bad emotions. This is not so. All emotions are good. Fear, sadness and anger are good.

The reason that most people believe that fear, sadness and anger are bad is because they are unable to distinguish the emotions from the actions associated with them. While emotions can provide the energy for actions, they are not the actions.

For example, most people have a tendency to confuse the emotion called anger with the action of violence. Dysfunctional families do not teach the difference between emotions and actions, because in many dysfunctional homes violence often follows anger or takes the place of it. This leads people raised in that dysfunction to believe that violence and anger are the same thing and that anger is, therefore, scary and bad and must be avoided. Avoiding anger causes people to amass huge amounts of it, and when they can hold no more, they burst out in violence or react with passive aggression. If people can learn to experience their anger when it happens, they do not need to use violence.

### **Primary and Secondary Emotions**

If you look at the left side of the circle, you will notice an interesting configuration. Fear and sadness/hurt are on the same line while anger is above them and connected to both of them. Fear and sadness/hurt are soft receptive emotions. Anger is a hard emotion; it is powerful and dynamic. It is our protective defensive emotion. Often it is the only way we know to defend our boundaries.

Although anger does not trigger first, once it is triggered, it must be experienced and completed (not acted out) in order to return to and complete the fear and/or the sadness/hurt from which the anger was activated.

If you have been taught, as men in particular have been taught, that fear and sadness are bad, anger is probably the only emotion that you will experience. If you have also been taught that anger is bad, you will suppress that as well and begin to behave with passive aggression. Unable to directly express anger, you will seek indirect covert ways of expressing it. Because most women have been taught that anger is bad, women shut down on anger and either turn it against themselves or become victims of everyone else's anger.

To further simplify understanding the emotional process, Dr. Melville developed the Feeling (Emotion) diamond (see figure 3). He took the circle that we were using and created a diagram to demonstrate the way the emotional process operates.

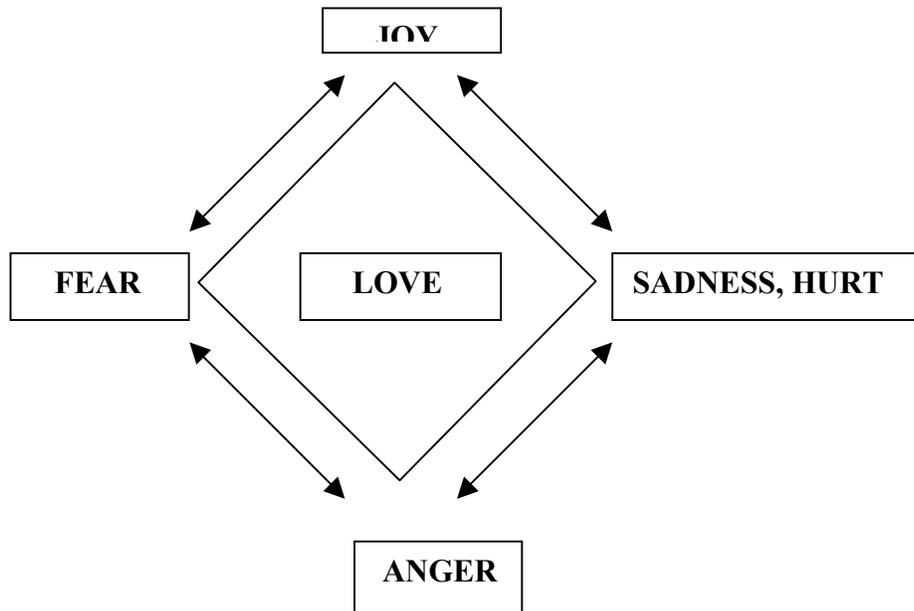


Fig. 3

When you look at the diamond, you will see that at the top of the diamond is joy, which is where all of us wish to be.

There is nothing wrong with wishing to experience joy. The problem comes when you believe you should be there all the time, and try to hold on to joy and avoid feeling fear, sadness and anger. Trying to hold on to joy (or anything else) removes you from reality and the ability to live in the moment. You have to be able to experience your joy and complete it in order to stay present in the moment. If you allow yourself to truly live in the moment, you will discover that you will have the opportunity to experience not only the other emotions, but all the richness that life has to offer. As you progress through your healing process, living in the moment becomes easier.

### **Complete And Release**

Looking again at the diamond, you will notice that when you leave joy you will go to either fear or sadness/hurt or both. If you complete and release those emotions, you can return to the place at the top to await joy. If you do not complete and release the fear or sadness/hurt, you will either store them or convert them to anger. When you store fear or sadness/hurt, you will find it difficult to return to joy, and the more fear and sadness you store, the more difficult it will become to experience any joy. If you are like most people who believe that being happy is right and being sad or angry is wrong, you walk around with huge phony smiles on your face, pretending to yourself and everyone else that you are happy.

If your emotional process also includes converting the fear and/or sadness to anger, then you will also walk around with large amounts of incomplete anger. Looking at the diamond, you will see that there is no direct pathway between anger and joy. In order to return to a place of joy, you must therefore not only complete and release the experience of anger, but you must also go back and experience the actual fear and/or sadness from which the anger was triggered. Only then you can you return to a possibility of joy.

Also remember that when the level of anger stored reaches the point at which you can no longer contain it, the anger will burst out, either as rage or violence or at the very least, passive aggression. You are like a storage vat. There is just so much volume available for the storage of emotions. That

is why storing and controlling emotions may work for a while but it eventually stops working. When there is no more room available, the pot boils over and the lid blows off.

Another important point to remember is that if you are not experiencing some form of joy (such as happiness or contentment), you are going to be experiencing some form of fear, sadness/hurt or anger in various combinations. There are very few people on the planet today who are so advanced in the process and so present in the moment that they experience no emotions. Most people who claim to feel nothing because they are either having an emotional response but are in denial about it, or they are so disassociated from their emotions that they are numb. Because western culture tends to prize intellect and degrade emotions, people often use this as an excuse to intellectualize all human experience and behave and communicate (as Virginia Satir has said) like living computers, very reasonable with no show of emotions.

If you are an Adult Child, you have had such poor emotional models and have lived with so much dysfunction that you have shut down your ability to experience your emotions. That does not mean that the emotions are not happening; it does mean you are out of touch with them. As a result, you are probably having several other types of experiences, ranging from anxiety attacks to addictive urges, all of which result from the inability to experience the true emotions that are there.

If you are in recovery, whether it is a 12-Step program or therapy, you are probably beginning to discover emotions and experiences that you never thought possible. If that is not the case, you need to do something else to move your process along.

Learning about the emotions and learning to experience them are not the same thing. You may have learned that you have emotions and you may even be able to recognize them when you sense they are there but that does not mean you know how to experience them or complete them. Learning to recognize emotions is like coming upon the ocean and learning what it is. You see the ocean and then you sit down and watch it. In order to experience it completely, you have to go in and swim in it.

### **Using The Emotion Diamond To Stay Out Of the Triangle**

If you wish to stay out of the Triangle, you must learn to tell the truth about what emotions you are feeling, and you must learn to take responsibility for them. Remember that no one else is responsible for your emotions. No one else can fix them for you or change them for you. People may support you in experiencing them, but ultimately no one but you can complete them and release them.

Frequently your dysfunctional family is so repressive that you cannot identify certain emotions or distinguish them from other types of experiences. If you want to heal yourself, you must learn to complete your emotional experiences to stay out of the Drama triangle. When you tell the truth about what you are feeling, no longer take on the guilt that others try to place on you and you are willing to feel the fear and sadness of being accused of being the persecutor by those who stay in the Triangle, you will step out of the chaos in your life. By being responsible for acknowledging and experiencing your emotions, you are also being responsible for your addictive process. Using the Diamond will give you some support in accomplishing that task.

1. Whenever you discover that things in your life are not working, you can assume that your addictive process has been activated and that you are caught in the Triangle.
2. Ask yourself which position you are in at the moment. Is this your primary choice in the Triangle?
3. How did you get there? What lie did you tell yourself or someone else?
4. Which emotion(s) are you avoiding? Use the Feeling (Emotion) Diamond here. If you are not experiencing some form of joy, you are experiencing some form of fear, sadness/hurt or anger. Are you having anger? If so, you must experience it and complete it; not act it out! Then look for the primary emotion from which the anger triggered. Is it fear or sadness/hurt or both? Again, experience that and complete it.

Remember that emotions must be experienced, not intellectualized. You cannot think your way into an experience. No matter how much I describe to you the color red in scientific terms of wave length and intensity, you will still not have the actual sensory experience of the color red if you have been blind since birth. Intellectual understanding of something is not the same as experiencing it.

If you answer the question, "What emotion are you avoiding?" by identifying a response such as disappointment, you have discovered a complex experience that combines the emotion of sadness associated with an unmet expectation. Keep looking for the four basic emotions. Remember it takes time after all the years of suppression to find and feel your emotions. Find someone who can help you experience your emotions.

Some people seem to be able to identify the emotions but cannot seem to complete them. There are several possible reasons for that:

1. You may have mislabeled an emotion so that you cannot really experience or complete it.
2. You may be having more than one emotion and experience activated at once. You will need to identify all of them.
3. You may need to process the tapes and the scenes that have surfaced with your exploration.
4. You may be "running" your emotions on yourself or the others in the Triangle. If this is the case, you will probably find yourself in the victim position and you will have great difficulty removing yourself from that role or the triangle in general.

### Running The Emotions

Here is what running your emotions is about: Let us look at the Experience Line (see Figure 4) as if it were the range between the inability to experience emotions (on the left) which I call, in jargon, "stuffing it" and the ability to experience and express emotions in a healthy way (on the right) which I label EXP.



**Fig. 4 Experience Line**

When you are stuffing emotions, you are denying, ignoring or disassociating from your emotions. You may be going numb. The emotions are occurring but you are not in touch with them.

You may have been raised in a family where only one emotion was acceptable. It might have been sadness or anger or fear. If this is so, you will translate all your emotions into the one the family has made acceptable so you will still be out of touch with what you are really feeling. You will not be able to complete your emotions until you discover what the real emotions are so that you can complete them.

At some point in your recovery process, you will begin to have a sense of the emotions and how they feel. This is the point at which you may begin running them. What happens is that you make some contact with the emotion, but you still do not know how to take responsibility for experiencing and completing it. Instead, you may use the emotion to try to manipulate someone into the Triangle to rescue you from your emotion. You will blame others for your emotion and expect them to do something to take it away. You are attempting to control with your emotions. You are running them or making them right so that you do not have to feel them.

You will probably sound like this: "I'm hurt (or angry or scared) and it's your fault," or "I'm feeling . . . (fill in the blank) . . . and you should do something about the situation." Or "What you did

made me feel . . . (fill in emotion) . . .and now you have to stop/change or I can't get through my feelings."

While it is perfectly acceptable to request that someone change certain behaviors, it is still not the other person's responsibility to fix your emotions. You must learn to complete your emotions whether the other person changes or not. Otherwise you will become addicted to controlling other people's behavior in order not to have to experience your own emotions.

Let us look at another form of running emotions. If you were raised in a family where only one emotion was acceptable, anger, for example, everyone will walk around with that emotion. As soon as you begin to feel any other emotion, you will convert it to anger, not because you have something to be angry about, but because that is the way your family acts. If you are sad, you will act angry; if you are scared, you will act angry. You may not even experience the anger; it has simply become an act for you and you will learn to use the anger act to control yourself and others. This is one of the ways you develop a false self.

When you are further along in your healing process, you will be able to recognize your various emotions. Then you will begin to express them to others in order to get further in touch with the emotions and to complete them, not to try to make someone else responsible for them.

Remember this is a process and you may slide back and forth along the Experience Line until you are very much in touch with your emotions and the way that you deal with them.

When you are operating anywhere to the left of the experiencing and expressing end of the Experience Line, you will find yourself operating in the Drama Triangle. As you learn to experience and express your emotions in order to have them and complete them and not to run them on other people or try to get some results from people, you will find yourself less and less in the Drama Triangle and less and less in your addictive process.

### **Barbara's Story**

My name is Barbara Oliver. I was the child victim of a five-year incestuous relationship perpetrated by an alcoholic stepfather, which began the night he raped me when I was ten years old. Twenty-five years later, near the end of three years of intense therapy with Marsha Utain, my mother and the rest of the family still did not know the Secret.

As a client of Marsha's, I was fairly well versed in the dynamics of the Drama Triangle and the Emotion Diamond. Marsha had given me many other tools as well, and the more my recovery progressed, as healthy behaviors were beginning to be a part of my life, the more uncomfortable the relationship became with my family, especially with Mother.

Having never outgrown the role of family Scapegoat (Wegscheider-Cruse) I was an integral part of the family myth. Mother, the co-dependent spouse of a non-recovering fourth-stage alcoholic, clung to the mistaken belief that she and my stepfather had been "good parents," who had taught their children values. In fact, their parenting techniques had been emotionally and psychologically damaging. As the Scapegoat and the "bad guy" in the family triangle, I was used to, although never comfortable with, falling short of family and parental expectations. They blamed me for making the family look bad, pointing to a disastrous first marriage and a chronic weight problem as further proof of my defectiveness.

As a child I had learned that Mother didn't want to deal with sadness and unhappiness and needed to be known as a good mother. How she appeared to others was important to her and I believed that it was my job to help her in that effort, which always placed me in the rescuer role. Inferences that she had been less than perfect were met with a tearful, "I guess I can't do anything right," which placed her in the victim role with me as her persecutor. Feeling guilty, I would then tell her that she was a good mother, send her flowers on her birthday and Mother's Day, visit when I could and call her often, never reversing the charges even though she said I could. This placed me back in the rescuer position.

I was addicted to making Mother happy in order to avoid dealing with my own fear of rejection. As I healed I wanted a truthful, rewarding and mutually supportive relationship with her. What I had was a

Drama Triangle. Mother was the Victim who needed to be told she was okay, I the Rescuer who protected her from the truth. With the Emotion Diamond, Marsha had taught me about the dynamics of feelings and being responsible for them. I wanted to get out of the Triangle.

The only way was to tell the truth and be willing for Mother to perceive me as the persecutor. As a child the Secret overshadowed every phone call, letter, visit; even the simple act of picking out appropriate greeting cards had become a painful chore. After a lifetime of fearing her rejection and having gone to great lengths to avoid that possibility, confronting that fear was the first step. Several painful teary sessions with Marsha, as well as work at home with the processes she taught me, helped me to become willing to face Mother's rejection. I began to separate my sense of worth from what she thought of me, an empowering success.

Allowing myself to feel guilty for the pain Mother would feel if she knew the truth was the next step. "Feel the guilt without doing anything about it," Marsha said. Part of the need to rescue Mother had been to discharge the guilt. Learning to sit with it without doing anything to make it go away was quite an assignment.

Having confronted many painful issues and being in the process of developing healthy relationships as a result was of some comfort. Mother could survive knowing the truth. I wasn't sure that our relationship would. Yet the reality was that there could be no healthy relationship without the truth. I became willing to step out of the Triangle.

Marsha supported me in beginning to write letters to mother, a process that would result in the one I would finally send. Years of anguish, emotional abandonment, anger, pain and sadness were poured into those pages as I shed decades of unwept tears. Finally a five-page letter, which told the truth and introduced mother to who I really am, was mailed early in March of 1982.

Mother's initial reaction was neither unexpected nor unreasonable, given her all-consuming need to look good and the effectiveness of her denial. She didn't believe me. Even so, she decided to confront my stepfather. At that time, still in denial himself, he said that it happened once when I was 16 and that it had been I who seduced him while he was drunk! That, she believed! Then she blamed me for making her entire life a lie and for having ruined her marriage. We rarely spoke for over a year.

Don't get the impression that I felt no pain during that year. I did! The difference from the way it had been before was that the willingness to feel the pain and sadness helped me to heal.

Today, nearly seven years later, my relationship with Mother has had many ups and downs. Mother is still very much concerned with looking good. My stepfather has since acknowledged the truth. While Mother will talk about the Secret within the family, she still wants to keep it hidden from the outside world, believing that, "We should not air our dirty linen in public." She does not understand my willingness for the whole world to know and continues to put me in the wrong for that.

While I understand her fear and acknowledge her pain, I no longer try to rescue her. If she could become willing to go through her pain rather than trying to make it go away, she could heal. On the up side, we have had some meaningful moments of truthful sharing, special times when we let down some of the barriers between us.

Learning and using the dynamics of the Drama Triangle and the Emotion Diamond supported me in a greater awareness of who I am and in doing so, freed me to find a place in my ever-expanding world.

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