

Painful to Respectful Communication

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If we are not resilient in our connection with others it can affect our work, family life and health. Moving from painful to respectful conversation requires awareness followed by an assertive stand. It also requires a commitment of respect for yourself as well as others. Although you cannot rely on others to change, you can change a conversation cycle by altering your own words and actions.

When disagreements turn hurtful there is a tool that can help us bounce back and establish effective communication. **The Drama Triangle** was developed by Stephen Karpman utilizing Transactional Analysis (TA) theory. It provides a map of psychological and unconscious communication patterns that hook people into cycles of pain, blame, guilt and sometimes disconnect. Used diligently it facilitates both awareness and improved communication.

Playing out any or all of the three positions of Persecutor, Rescuer or Victim, results in a dysfunctional pattern. It is common in an argument to move around to different positions and postures. For example a Rescuer may quickly become a Victim or Persecutor—“After all I did for him and he didn’t change (to meet my needs).”

Mature adult to adult relationships require us to see ourselves and others as capable with a range of choices. TA founder, Eric Berne, proposed in, *I’m OK You’re OK* that we first need to acknowledge our own wholeness before we can have truly healthy relationships. When we move out of The Drama Triangle with assertive and boundary clear statements we break the painful cycle.

Remember, you can’t change others but you can change your own habitual reactions. Then, you can congratulate yourself on communicating more effectively. Below are descriptions of the three stress creating roles and how to get out of them. Use the “Move Out” pointers to help you speak honestly and fairly. Avoid focusing on “catching” others *playing* Persecutor, Rescuer or Victim.

PERSECUTOR

The Persecutor typically speaks angrily with comments such as, “This is your fault.” The Persecutor gives others the message “You’re not OK but I am so do what I tell you.” You will notice critical, rigid, bossy and dominating language. The Persecutor has a power-over posture and feels frustrated, irritated, revengeful or resentful.

Move Out of the Persecutor role by doing the following:

- **Create structure:** State clear actions you desire.
- **State boundaries:** “I am willing to listen to your story for ten minutes.”

- **Active listen:** “I am willing to listen to *your problem* without making it mine to solve.”
- **Make expectations clear:** “I want you to keep your agreement. Please have it done by Tuesday.”
- **Provide choices:** “You can either keep your agreement or I will no longer be involved. You choose.”

VICTIM

The Victim can feel helpless, oppressed, hopeless, ashamed, powerless, incapable or misunderstood. Self talk includes “Poor me. I give up.” Behaviours and words give the message “I’m not OK and everybody else is.” The Victim seeks to hook up with a Rescuer in an unconscious effort to validate her feelings. The Victim typically refuses to make decisions, problem solve, get professional help, do self-care or commit to healthy change.

Move Out of the Victim role by doing the following:

- **Problem Solve:** Tell yourself. “I’ve done hard things before. I can solve this one.”
- **Take Adult Responsibility:** Decide what you really want and take action.
- **Keep Agreements:** If someone helps, do your part by following through.
- **Ask Yourself:** “How can I get what I really want in a healthy way?”
- **Count Your Blessings:** Acknowledge your strengths and what is going well.
- **Remember *you make you*:** Minimize self pity and take action.

RESCUER

The Rescuer is addicted to saving others. The rescuer feels guilty and anxious unless on a rescue mission. Having a dependent Victim provides a temporary feeling of connection. The Rescuer often provides support when she doesn’t want to. The message the Rescuer gives others is “You need my help. You’re not OK but I am and I will fix you.” The Rescuer accomplishes a sense of *better than* the Victim and momentarily feels capable yet often expects the mission to fail.

Move Out of the Rescuer role by doing the following:

- **Offer clear support:** State precisely what you will and will not do.
- **Give the message:** “I care about you and know you are capable.”
- **Do nothing that *the victim* can do for him or herself:** “I know you can do this.”
- **Active listen:** “I will listen to your problem without making it mine to solve.”
- **State boundaries:** “I will listen for twenty minutes.”
- **Provide choices:** “I will listen for fifteen minutes now or you may call back next Tuesday. You choose.”

To further assist you please find **Painful to Respectful Communication** poster at <http://www.lightheartedconcepts.com/products.html>. Download, print and place somewhere at home or work as a coaching tool.

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