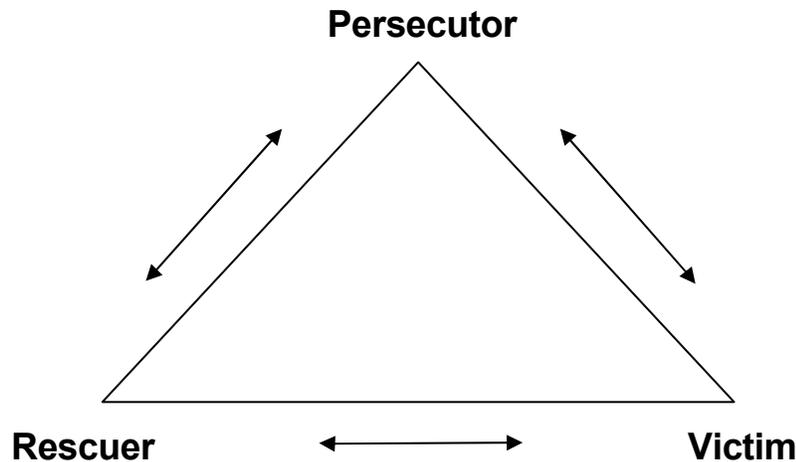


# The Karpman “Drama Triangle”

The *Drama Triangle* shows the dramatic roles that people act-out in daily life that are unstable, unsatisfactory, repetitive, and *emotionally competitive*. Largely unconscious, these roles will generate misery and discomfort for all persons involved.



The *Drama Triangle*, first described by Dr. Stephen Karpman a pioneer in the field of transactional analysis, identifies 3 predictable (often unconscious) roles that people in problem situations can find themselves in. The 2-way arrows indicate that the roles can switch.

Example: Patty was staying with her friend Mary and Mary's daughter, Ann. One day a pair of Patty's earrings came up missing and she asked if anyone had seen them. Everyone said "no". Suspicious of Ann, Patty went into her bedroom and looked in her jewelry box. And, they were there! Patty took them back and announced where she had found them. Patty was clearly the **Victim** here (of Ann's obvious theft). And, the **Persecutor** was clearly Ann (the thief). Mary became the **Rescuer** by chastising her daughter, Ann. However, Ann denied taking the earrings and all the roles suddenly switched. Now, Patty was seen as the **Persecutor** (falsely blaming Ann who was now the **Victim**). Mary stood up for her daughter Ann, and became the **Rescuer**. Then, asked Patty to leave her home which made Patty the **Victim** and Mary the **Persecutor**..... and so the drama continues.

Such *Dramas* are so common in our society that we may not even notice we are in one, until the hurtful feelings occur. Karpman says you can tell when you are in such a *Drama* because you can see all three roles, how the roles can suddenly switch up on you, and how every person involved will feel upset. The *Drama* will continue as long as someone is willing to be "Victimized."

As Karpman puts it: "Win-lose always turns into lose-lose. A win in the *Drama Triangle* is always temporary". The (unconscious) purpose is to *act out* a person's Life-script, and maintain a psychological "advantage" in relationships. The switching that happens between the roles generates the *Drama* and the painful feelings that occur when people have hidden agendas and secrets, and then manipulate for dysfunctional personal advantage.

Without realizing it, a particular role can become a "*comfortable life habit*" for a person. For instance, someone who sees himself as a **Rescuer** may be drawn to become a nurse, doctor, or policeman. A person can learn to be comfortable with the *benefits* of being a **Victim**. A bully may feel a sense of power or security in his role as **Persecutor**, etc.

## Getting Off The “Triangle”

Becoming aware when you're in the *Drama Triangle* is the first step to getting off of it. The next step is to identify the role you've been “assigned” and ask yourself some soul-searching questions: Is this a “comfortable” role? A familiar role? Am I aware of personal history with this role? Etc. Finally, what **new** action is called for?

It's helpful to remember that: “*Other than survivors of floods, car accidents, shootings, etc. there are no **Victims** after age 18, just volunteers.*” Here is more information about the roles.

### **Persecutor Stance:** “It's all your fault”-

- Sets strict limits unnecessarily
- Blames and Criticizes
- Keeps **Victim** oppressed
- Is mobilized by anger
- Has rigid, authoritative stance
- Like a “Critical Parent”

“If you keep doing what you've always done, you'll keep getting what you've always got”

If you find yourself in this Role, get off the *Drama Triangle*, by setting healthy, realistic boundaries & consequences.

### **Victim Stance:** “Poor me”-

- Feels victimized, oppressed, helpless, hopeless, powerless, ashamed
- Looks for a **Rescuer** who will perpetuate their negative feelings
- If stays in **Victim** position, will block self from making decisions, solving problems, feeling any pleasure, and self-understanding.
- Maintains “dejected” stance

If you find yourself in this Role, get off the *Drama Triangle*, by getting help with problem solving.

### **Rescuer Stance:** “Let me help you”-

- Rescues when really doesn't want to
- Feels guilty if doesn't rescue
- Keeps **Victim** dependent
- Gives permission to fail
- Expects to fail in rescue attempt
- Like a “Marshmallow Parent”

**Change =  
Awareness  
+  
New Action**

If you find yourself in this Role, get off the *Drama Triangle*, by giving help without “enabling” and allow the person (Victim) to learn, and grow, by **solving their own problems**.

## Accepting Help to Change old Habits

The next step after having **new** awareness is taking **new** action. This can be a very scary step because you are risking leaving “The Familiar” (your comfort zone), and this brings up anxiety. It's suggested that people get support from others facing the same type of challenges. It's helpful to realize you're not alone and that you can give and receive encouragement, support, and new ideas for solving problems from other people. People with the same challenges you have, so you can relate to them, and build trust with them. This is the basic premise behind all self-help groups.

**“You have to do it yourself, and you can't do it alone”**