The drama & trauma triangles

*Correlates with p. 32 of the Participant workbook.*

**The Drama Triangle**

Unconscious, repetitive sequence of transactions, perceptions and interactions with self and the environment

---

**The Trauma Triangle**

Unconscious, repetitive sequence of transactions, perceptions and interactions with self and the environment
Trauma triangle discussion, and possible role play with sensitivity and caution

A discussion of the drama and trauma triangles can be particularly useful when discussing relationship histories, patterns, and dynamics. The below described ‘role play’ can assist some group participants in developing an experience of the different points of view. However, it does require a careful assessment of, and sensitivity to, the group participant’s own circumstances and experience, as well as the facilitators’ skills, knowledge and comfort.

Role play

Having one of the facilitators role-play the original three roles of the victim, persecutor, and the abandoning authority is the best way to demonstrate the trauma triangle. To do so, he or she can demarcate the three points of the triangle on the floor using sheets of paper or other such markings. The men should be told that the first depiction they will see will be of the abuse experienced by the child. Give the 'child' a name and an age. Prepare the participants by saying that harsh language will be used in the role play, but no depiction of physical or sexual abuse will be shown.

The role-play could look like this:

1) First, the facilitator stands on the point of the triangle marked as ‘Persecutor’. The facilitator needs to ‘present’ the abusive parent to the participants, and by doing so, acting in role by shouting down at the invisible child (at another apex of the triangle), taunting him, making fun of him, threatening that he needs to do things or else ‘he will be sorry’.

2) Next, the facilitator moves to the ‘Victim’ position. Acting like the little child who is hurt, the facilitator role-plays a stammering, fearful, and apologetic child who will say anything to appease his abusive parent.

3) Finally, the facilitator moves to the ‘Abandoning authority’ position. With his back to the other two, the facilitator now depicts the irritable and uncaring other parent who won’t get involved with either the conflict or supporting the boy. For example, he or she could shout: ‘Will you both knock it off out there! I am trying to watch TV!’

At this time, suspend the action and hold the scene for a moment of silence. Frame this as the original ‘relational injury’ for the child.

Next, have the facilitator ‘grow up’ in front of the participants. Instead of being a child, the boy has turned into a forty year old man:
1) Standing on the point of the triangle marked as ‘Persecutor’, the facilitator needs to ‘present’ the man as self-loathing—critical of himself, putting himself down, calling himself names (e.g., ‘idiot,’ ‘stupid’), saying he is not good for anything, etc.

2) Next, the facilitator moves to the ‘Victim’ position. Now the facilitator portrays himself as a hopeless in his narrative: believes himself to be powerless (e.g. ‘I don’t know what to do’), helpless, feels all alone, etc.

3) Finally, the facilitator moves to the ‘Abandoning authority’ position. With his back to the back to the participants, the facilitator now depicts a man who, with the excuse of a hard day, is getting drunk, distracted by a video game, shouting out to his family that he is leaving the house ‘to get some peace’, he doesn’t know when he will be back, and that the partner look after the kids.

Once the three roles are portrayed, the facilitator needs to step out of role and sit down. The other facilitator now needs to debrief the participants on what they witnessed. Some of the men may be triggered in their reaction—either seeing their past relive itself, or by seeing themselves in the present tense. During the debriefing, keep focusing on the three presenting roles, and underline the ability to ‘get off the triangle’ as a result of their personal work in the program.

While the participants may be able to identify the persecutor and victim in their own narrative, they may need assistance to flush out the abandoning authority. Ask specifically about this and ask for examples, such as:

- Drinking and drugging.
- Working too much.
- Participating in behaviours that pose a safety risk (e.g., fights, unsafe sex, careless driving, extreme sports).
- Pre-occupied with hobbies, projects and other interests that distract from relational responsibilities (e.g. as a partner or parent).
- Any other behaviour they see as compulsive.