Drama Triangle Worksheet

Part 1. The conflict that keeps happening

Item	Entry
Client name or initials	
Clinician	
Date	
Session number	

The conflict, in the client's words

Include: who is involved, where and when it tends to happen, how often and how it usually starts.

The most recent time it happened

Include: when it was, and what each person said and did, step by step.

How it usually ends

Include: the familiar ending, and how the client feels afterward.

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Part 2. Who took each position

Map the most recent time it happened. One person can take more than one position, and positions can change within one conversation.

Position	Who took it	What they said or did	What the position gave them
Persecutor Blames or punishes, and refuses to negotiate			
Rescuer Takes over the other person's problem, beyond own limits			
Victim Feels helpless and holds others or circumstances responsible			

When the positions switched

Include: what happened just before each switch, who moved, and the positions they moved between.

What happened just before	Who moved	From	To

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Part 3. Responses to try

Rehearse each response in session before the client tries it.

The first sign that the pattern is starting

Include: the words, situations or feelings that come just before the first move.

Alternatives to each position

Include: what the client could say or do, in the client's words.

When the client takes this position	Try this position	What the client could say or do
Persecutor	**Assertive** *States needs and limits clearly, stays open to the other person's needs and leaves room to negotiate*	
Rescuer	**Caring** *Offers help, leaves the problem with its owner, keeps to own limits and follows through*	
Victim	**Vulnerable** *Admits what is hard and asks for help directly, and accepts that the answer may be no*	

What the client will try first

Include: the words the client will use, and when.

How sure the client is about trying it

Ask: How sure are you that you can try this before we meet again, from 0 to 10?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at all sure										*Completely sure*

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Clinician guide: using the drama triangle

- **When it fits.** Use the worksheet when a client describes a conflict that repeats with the same people and ends the same way. Karpman (1968) named three roles in such drama, Persecutor, Rescuer and Victim, and wrote that there is no drama without a switch in roles.
- **Map one recent episode.** Fill in the positions for the most recent time it happened, in the client's words. In drama, one person often plays two or three roles at once (Karpman, 1968), so the client may hold more than one position in a single episode.
- **Look for the switch and the gains.** Find each point where a position changed, ask what led up to it, and ask what each position gave the person who took it. Berne described a game as a recurring set of transactions with a concealed motive (Berne, 1961/1973), and games are built from the switches between the roles (Grigore et al., 2021).
- **Plan and rehearse an alternative.** Choy's winner's triangle pairs each position with an alternative: Vulnerable for Victim, Assertive for Persecutor and Caring for Rescuer (Choy, 1990, as cited in Burgess, 2005). Burgess (2005) describes taking responsibility for oneself as the central shift from one triangle to the other.
- **Watch the therapy relationship and safety.** Karpman (1968) noted that a client may see other people, the therapist included, in each of the roles in the client's script, so notice when you are invited to rescue or to blame. When a client reports violence, threats or abuse, attend to safety first and follow your setting's protocols.

Adapted from the description of the drama triangle in Karpman (1968) and of the winner's triangle in Burgess (2005). The layout and wording are original.

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Completed example: Priya (a fictional client)

Priya, 36, is a pharmacist in outpatient counseling for stress in her family. She mapped a recurring conflict with her counselor, R.N., at her fourth session, on December 4, 2026. Priya, her counselor and every detail of the case are invented.

Part 1. The conflict that keeps happening

Item	Entry
Client name or initials	Priya, 36
Clinician	R.N., counselor
Date	December 4, 2026
Session number	4

The conflict, in the client's words

"About once a month my younger brother Dev calls late at night, upset about money. I pay something and tell him how to budget. A few days later he says I treat him like a child, and I end up complaining to Mom."

The most recent time it happened

Last Tuesday at 11 p.m., Dev called about his phone bill. Priya paid it and sent him a budget spreadsheet at midnight. On Thursday she asked how he had spent his paycheck, and he said, "Stop treating me like a kid." She called their mother, who said Priya makes him feel small. Priya said, "You always take his side," and hung up.

How it usually ends

"Dev and I don't speak for a week. I feel used and guilty at the same time."

Part 2. Who took each position

Position	Who took it	What they said or did	What the position gave them
Persecutor	Dev after the switch; later Priya, with her mother	Dev: "Stop treating me like a kid." Priya: "You always take his side."	Dev, as Priya sees it: a way to push back without talking about money. Priya: a moment of feeling in the right.
Rescuer	Priya at the start	Paid his phone bill and sent a budget spreadsheet at midnight.	Priya: feeling needed and in control.
Victim	Dev at the start; Priya after the switch	Dev: "I'm going to lose my phone and then my job." Priya: "I do everything and still get blamed."	Dev, as Priya sees it: help without having to plan. Priya: sympathy from her mother, she hoped.

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When the positions switched

What happened just before	Who moved	From	To
Priya asked how he had spent his paycheck.	Dev	Victim	Persecutor
Dev said she treats him like a kid.	Priya	Rescuer	Victim
Their mother said Priya makes him feel small.	Priya	Victim	Persecutor

Part 3. Responses to try

The first sign that the pattern is starting

A call after 10 p.m. that starts with “I’m in trouble again,” and her urge to fix it before he finishes talking.

Alternatives to each position

When the client takes this position	Try this position	What the client could say or do
Persecutor	**Assertive**	“I won’t pay your bills anymore. If you want help with a budget, I’m glad to sit down with you on Sunday.”
Rescuer	**Caring**	Listen first and ask, “What are you thinking of doing?” Offer one thing she is willing to do, and stop there.
Victim	**Vulnerable**	Tell Dev herself that the “kid” comment hurt, and ask if they can talk about it.

What the client will try first

When Dev calls about money: “That sounds stressful. What are you thinking of doing?” Then wait before offering anything.

How sure the client is about trying it

Ask: How sure are you that you can try this before we meet again, from 0 to 10?

0	1	2	3	4	5	**6**	7	8	9	10
Not at all sure										*Completely sure*

R.N. mapped the last episode with Priya and asked what happened just before each switch. Priya saw that she moves from Rescuer to Victim within two days, every month. When Priya asked R.N. to tell her exactly what to say to Dev, R.N. noticed the invitation to rescue and asked what Priya wanted to say. They rehearsed the caring response twice, and Priya agreed to note the next call and bring it to session.

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References and further reading

Books for clinicians

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Articles

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