THE VICTIM TRIANGLE: BASIC CONCEPTS
The most popular/most practiced relationship pattern in the world.
~ or ~

How to do relationships that don’t work and produce unnecessary stress, frustration, suffering, sadness, anger, violence, general upset, etc.

By Michael Zaccardi, LCSW. (© 2009)

Please use these pages as worksheets. Write on them. Check off the items you understand. Put a “?” next to the things you may disagree with or do not understand. Use a “!” for items you really like. Make notes. Change the wording if you like a better way of saying something. Go through this material many times and notice how these ideas translate into more nurturing and graceful relating with yourself, with others, and with the world around you. I encourage everyone to be an ongoing student of relationships.

● When our relationships with self, with others, and with life (or the world around us) function and function well, that’s when we enjoy living. When our relationships do not function well, we experience uncomfortable and painful stress unnecessarily. So notice and observe relationships everyday. Be alert and learning and practicing effective relationship skills for relating well and gracefully.

● There is a very flawed relating pattern which we all learn normally & naturally as small children (between the ages of 0 – 5 years old). Because we are so dependent during that early part of life, we employ this primitive pattern to try to manipulate and manage others to meet our needs. When used after early childhood this pattern results in painful relationships that don’t work. Furthermore, this pattern can be found/observed in all relationships that don’t work and cause distress. As with learning to eat with a spoon or to count using our fingers, we usually do not remember learning this relating pattern. And we continue to use this pattern of relating all through life, as we do with so many automatic basic skills learned in early childhood, unless we learn or are taught to relate differently.

● In this pattern there are roles and rules, and we can come to understand these roles and rules and how they erode and wreck relationships and add needless stress to living a life. When we understand and are able to recognize this pattern we can then choose to break these rules, throw off these roles, and discard the practice of this pattern and replace it with healthy relating.

● The three unhealthy roles with their variety of masks may be summarized as: Victim, Rescuer, Meanie. (By contrast, in healthy relating, we relate in a wide variety of healthy roles which provide nurturing to self and others, like family member, student, worker, friend, musician, member of a sports team, etc.)

● The basic rule for participating in this pattern is to talk, think, or act in one or more of the three unhealthy roles. Taking on any one of these roles results, sooner or later, in participating in the pattern’s other two roles as well. Thus a participant moves from one role to the other. The speed of changing roles varies from person to person and from one situation to another.

● This pattern has usually been called the Karpman Triangle, the victim triangle, or the drama triangle. I have added a number of additional descriptive names: soap opera (or media) triangle, anger triangle, addiction triangle, co-dependence triangle, control triangle, should triangle, pain triangle, enmeshment (over-involvement) triangle, manipulation triangle, etc., in order to make clear that the range of uninformed relating difficulties are all variations on Triangle pattern relating.

● Some of the spin-offs or results of doing this pattern are upset, stress, meanness, hurt, pain, sadness, depression, anxiety, worry, frustration, blame, guilt, anger, violence, jealousy, control, chemical use/abuse, addiction, preoccupation, health problems, and negative or painful drama (and so on.). Conversely, the presence of these emotions and experiences signal the presence of triangle relating.

● When you are unaware that you are relating in this pattern, it continues to be an unrecognized pattern which causes unnecessary stresses and difficulties in your relating…when you can recognize that you are using this pattern, you can choose whether or not to continue to relate so stressfully.

● The Victim Triangle relating pattern, thus, can also be thought of as a game. A game has roles and rules, and players play to have fun, amusement, entertainment, win prizes and/or pass time. Games have winners and losers. And, most importantly, people CHOOSE whether to play a game or not. We do not have to play...
a game if we do not want to. In this triangle game the roles are **Victim, Meanie,** and **Rescuer.** The rules are that you play each role and move from one role to another, quickly or slowly. And while this game is possibly entertaining at times, the “prizes” or “rewards” for playing are stress, upset, pain, and so on. Everybody loses in this game. (Whenever we play this game, ultimately we experience being victims of this pattern.) However, we can CHOOSE to engage or not engage in this pattern. Once we become aware of this game and how we may be playing or participating in the pattern, we could decide not to participate and, instead do healthy, truly rewarding relating.

- Remember this important point: if we are engaged in this pattern, even knowingly, we are not bad people. We may do or say controlling or mean things, which are not OK or even wrong, but we could still be good people caught in a primitive, childish pattern.
- Consider thinking, feeling, doing and how they each influence each other. We play this Victim Triangle game/pattern whenever we think and/or act in the roles of Victim, Meanie, or Rescuer...and try to control or manipulate others (or self). Crummy feelings result and in turn influence more Victim Triangle relating.
- Know that every position in the triangle is at its core a Victim position. A person in the role of Meanie or Bully usually has been or is being victimized in some area of his/her life or feels victimized. A person in the role of Rescuer or Pleaser, similarly, usually has been or is feeling victimized in some way.
- We can relate on the triangle with two or three or four or ten - any number of people - or a person can do the triangle all by oneself. All that is needed, for the game to be re-enacted, is for the person or persons involved to take on at least one of the roles through talking, thinking, and/or behavior.
- When doing the triangle solo, a person may be feeling her/his life is so difficult and thinking s/he cannot handle her/his stress or s/he needs to rescue self from this stress...and the rescue is usually a form of escaping and/or bullying self or hurting or being mean to one’s self because of lack of knowledge of healthy, effective ways to deal with stress by meeting basic needs.
- "Am I automatically on the triangle whenever I help someone?" It is possible to help someone without getting into the pattern as a Rescuer if we practice healthy boundaries and do not move into the Bully or Victim role in the process of trying to help. We need to not act or talk in controlling/manipulative ways toward those we are helping. Also, while helping we need to be not victimizing self in order to help others.
- Due to the seeming capriciousness of life, almost everyone experiences setbacks and misfortunes at times. And since the Triangle is at least a significant default relating pattern, it makes sense that after a trauma or catastrophe we might engage initially in this pattern. However, it is possible to have been or to be a victim of life circumstances and sooner or later not continue to be involved in the Victim role or participate on the Triangle. It is possible to say eventually “I was a victim of circumstances in the past, but I no longer use the Triangle as my method of relating.”
- Being perceived to be in the role of Meanie does not necessarily mean that I am in that role. This misperception may occur to people in the Triangle pattern if I am not participating in the pattern or if I am in the process of exiting from it. If I practice healthy boundaries while being respectful, gentle, and firm about maintaining these boundaries, I may appear to be in the role of Meanie to someone who is active in the triangle game or pattern because healthy boundaries are not part of the Triangle pattern. Healthy boundaries may seem victimizing to someone who does not understand or honor boundaries. This person may be enmeshed (over-involved) (boundary problems) and can’t let go of engaging in the Triangle with me if I want to discontinue triangle relating or if I was not participating in the first place. At its core the Triangle pattern is about futility. It is an ineffective strategy for trying to get basic needs met. It doesn't work for pre-teens, teen-agers, young adults, or older adults. Doesn't even work for three-year-olds. There is an alternative strategy for getting our basic needs met and relating with self and others in ways which result in meaningful, enjoyable life experiences.
- While the Triangle is about manipulating other people or various substances or distracting activities to haphazardly and ineffectively meet my needs, when I am no longer a totally dependent child I can begin to learn to address my own **Basic Nurturing Needs** ("BNN") (Nurturing: to feed, care for, provide for). By the time I am an adult, I am in charge of responsibly addressing my own needs. One definition for adult could be: a person in charge of meeting their own BNN. If at any moment a person decides not to be relating in Triangle fashion (whether s/he has been in the Triangle for years or just returns momentarily), then there are seven "Bridges", which lead to healthy relating instead. These bridges lead to focusing on meeting our **80 to 100 Basic Nurturing Needs** ("BNN") and each bridge happens also to be one of the BNN. To exit or avoid the Triangle pattern, focus on one or more of these eight thoughts and continue on with thinking, talking, and acting/doing/behaving as a nurturing person toward self and others. As it happens Nurturing Relating and Triangle Relating are mutually exclusive: if you are doing one of these patterns,
you are not doing the other. If Triangling, not Nurturing. If Nurturing, not Triangling. As you come to understand the difference, you get to choose how you would like to relate.

- In order to remember these Bridges think: 3 B’s, 3 R’s, a V, and a big K. In order to exit the triangle, choose any bridge to start with and experience how the other bridges merge into the one you choose on the way to your changing focus from Triangle Relating to Nurturing Relating.
  
  **B** – Breathing
  
  **B** – Boundaries
  
  **B** – Balancing
  
  **R** – Respect for self and others
  
  **R** – Re-frame the situation
  
  **R** – Responsibility for self nurturing
  
  **V** -- Validation of feelings and of self
  
  **K --** Kindness with boundaries

- **Breathing:**
  I remind myself to observe my breathing. I may take some deeper breaths to move more oxygen into my system. Conscious breathing helps with centering, grounding, awareness, and clear thinking. I can then choose to continue participating in Triangle Relating or choose to move toward healthy Nurturing Relating.

- **Boundaries:**
  I remind myself that it is essential to observe and honor healthy boundaries in relating with self and in relating with others. The first boundary to observe is between self and Triangle relating (“I choose not to go there, not to participate in the Triangle”). Other examples of healthy boundaries: not invading the physical or emotional space of another person with meanness, yelling, or hitting or other inappropriate touching; not being mean to self in any way; no abuse of chemicals, drugs/alcohol, prescription medications. I remind myself that another kind of boundary (not too much, not too little, but just...in the effective Nurturing Zone) is involved with maintaining balance in areas such as spending money, eating healthily, getting enough exercise and sleep, and so on...Meanwhile, speaking of balance...

- **Balancing:**
  Nurturing Relating is about ongoing balancing and learning to fine tune my skills in addressing BNN. There are a lot of essentials that I need to be addressing. Balancing my life as I endeavor to do this Nurturing involves focus on these Nurturing skills. I remind myself that I need to be moving in the direction of meeting the basic 80 – 100 BNN for self and relating in Nurturing ways with others. This art form becomes my focus and replaces the Triangle focus on manipulation.

- **Respect:**
  I remind myself to respect **myself** and respect others with whom I am interacting as wonderful people, even though I or they may just have been participating, unfortunately, in triangle relating. All three Triangle positions disrespect self and/or others. Once a person genuinely practices respect s/he is off the triangle and moving toward addressing BNN.

- **Re-frame the situation:** I recognize that the drama, upset, and stress I am experiencing are signals that I am indeed triangling or caught on the triangle (thinking/feeling, talking, acting in the roles of Victim, Meanie, Pleaser). I read the feeling signals. I take the picture of this situation and deliberately decide to replace the Triangle/stress frame around it with a new frame of the Feelings Gauge/Nurturing Relating around it. I now recognize that my Feelings Gauge is telling me that I am low or out of nurturing in one or more areas. I have changed my view/understanding of the situation from being a victim of the Triangle to being a self-actuating Nurturing person on my way to the "Nurturing Station" to put some good nurturing in my Life Tank and to give off Nurturing kindness (with healthy gentle/firm boundaries) toward others involved in this particular situation.

- **Responsibility for self nurturing:**
  I remind myself that I am responsible for my choice about whether I do Triangle relating or healthy Nurturing relating. I can **choose** to think, talk, or act as a Victim, Meanie, or Rescuer. Or instead, I can choose to relate and interact in balanced, Nurturing ways toward myself, toward others, and with the world around me.

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(I am not responsible for making other people choose not to play the Triangle game. However, if I am a parent I am responsible for helping and instructing my children to gradually grow out of the victim triangle pattern of relating (which is the usual pattern for a small child) and for teaching them and modeling for them how to relate in healthy Nurturing ways toward self and others. Also, if I am a parent, I need to be taking good care of my BNN so that I have the energies needed for nurturing my child's (children's) growth and development and for relating Nurturingly with my co-parent.)

- **Kindness with boundaries:**
  I remind myself to relate in interested, friendly, caring, sensitive and nurturing ways toward self and others WITH BOUNDARIES. One way to simply describe Nurturing Relating and addressing BNN: it's all about thinking and practicing Kindness with boundaries toward self, others, and the world around us.

  (Genuine, unmanipulative kindness is not rescuing or “supercaretaking” or pleasing or fixing others -- or, in general, doing for others what they need to be doing for themselves, usually while not caring for my own BNN. Furthermore, kindness does not mean allowing people to walk on me or take advantage of me. "With boundaries" helps with understanding healthy Nurturing kindness, because without boundaries, too often kindness can move to Victim when the kindness gets taken advantage of...or kindness can move to Meanie if the kindness is not appreciated in the way the kind person expects, or the kind person responds in mean or angry ways to being taken advantage of.)

- **Validation:**
  In exiting the triangle I remind myself frequently (sometimes through days, weeks, and months) that my feelings make sense and that I, the good person having the feelings, make sense -- even if I am not sure at the moment what the sense is specifically. Just participating in the process of triangle relating produces stress and upset. So I validate myself and my feelings as a way of genuinely and effectively nurturing myself off of the triangle. Remember there is no true nurturing available in triangle relating; validation is so rarely practiced (invalidation and put downs are the norm the world over); and frequent validation practiced toward self and others is one of the most powerful nurturing practices available to human beings.

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**The “B - SPIES List of 80 to 100 Basic Nurturing Needs (“BNN”) for Adult Human Beings**

**B-SPIES** is an acronym for the six categories of basic nurturing needs: **Boundaries, Spiritual, Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, and Social needs.**

Use this list as worksheet. Add to, subtract from, or make changes to this list to get it to fit what you think are your basic nurturing needs. The range "80 to 100" designates an approximate number because we may add to or subtract items from this list as we grow in our understanding of nurturing. And, most importantly, think about, talk about, and act on these nurturing items to maintain your focus on healthy relating with self and others and the environments we live in.

Regarding the placing of nurturing items in categories, I put each item in the category it seemed to immediately fit in. With a little reflection you will recognize that each nurturing item may fit into more than one category. The purpose of using the categories is to provide some basic organization to help with understanding the BNN. This categorizing also provides a checklist for doing a quick inventory when needing...
to remind myself about overall nurturing, as, for example, when I want to exit the Triangle. I check with myself thus: “Am I taking care of my spiritual needs or needs for meaning and purpose?” “How am I doing with nurturing myself physically?” “What do I need to be doing for myself intellectually, to feed my brain some healthy, challenging/stimulating ideas to think about?” ...and so on.

(The list of nurturing needs for children and adolescents contains nearly all of these items, but many are modified and the number of items ranges from 120 to 140.)

**Boundaries** (Nurturing care needs to do with the lines (physical, conceptual, and/or psychological) between Nurturing and non-nurturing.)

Ask yourself: What purpose do boundaries serve? How do I maintain boundaries for myself in various Nurturing areas? How do I respect and honor the boundaries of others?

It is a basic nurturing need to:

- practice honoring the essential relationship boundary between healthy Nurturing balancing and Victim Triangle relating. I honor this boundary by choosing to address my Nurturing Needs myself as a regular practice, and choosing not to participate in the Victim Triangle pattern to manipulate others into meeting my needs. Simply put, there is a boundary between me and the Victim Triangle -- I CHOOSE not to go there and participate in Triangle relating. Rather, I CHOOSE to focus my attention on addressing my BNN.
- understand that Nurturing balancing involves recognizing where my responsibilities start and end.
- understand what is too much, what is too little, and what is in the effective Nurturing zone in many areas such as food, exercise, kindness, etc.
- understand that to take over doing for others what they need to be doing for themselves is Triangle relating, not Nurturing.
- understand that touch needs to be only in healthy, Nurturing ways. No hitting, no manipulative or predatory touch. (Manipulative - trying deviously to get something from someone or to manage or control them or their feelings. Predatory - trying to take advantage of someone sexually or to force someone to do something or to give you something.)
- understand that yelling and/or saying mean, hurtful things is Triangle relating, not Nurturing, regardless of intention.
- understand how to recognize and validate others’ feelings and moods without taking responsibility for managing these feelings and moods.
- practice respect for myself and respect for and toward others.
- practice maintaining my own personal safety limits, physically and emotionally, by communicating clearly and respectfully to others what behavior and situations are Nurturing for me and what behaviors I do not accept, what situations I choose not to be part of.
- practice noticing what ideas and behaviors fit for me as different from ideas and behaviors that others offer, suggest, or demand which may not fit for me; then I

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CHOOSE to Nurture myself by being true to who I am and who I am becoming.

SPIRITUAL / MAKING MEANING (Nurturing care needs of my spirit for meaning and purpose.)

Ask yourself: Who am I? Who am I becoming? How do I discover Why I am here and what my purposes are? How do I relate with the worlds or environments around me? Why is making meaning important for each one of us?

It is a basic spiritual nurturing need to:
- answer or discover all through my life my own answers to the question "why?" (as in "Why am I here? Why are things in life the way they are?" “What are my purposes in life?” and so on.)
- discover meaning and purpose for my life on a continuing basis; and discover what I can do with my time that fits with this meaning and purpose that I am discovering. And whenever I have difficulty figuring out my meaning and purpose, it is very nurturing to choose to make discovering meaning and purpose my meaning and purpose.
- discover the many aspects of my identity all through my life by asking myself in various ways, "Who am I?". (Some examples: noticing, making lists of, paying attention to, and acting on my likes, my favorite things to do, my favorite ideas, my passions in life, and my ambitions or dreams about who and how I would like to be.)
- develop a healthy, comfortable relationship with whatever spirit (or Spirit) means to me. Discover and cultivate healthy, mutually Nurturing connections to the world around me, with people, with the Earth we live on and all its creatures, and with the universe.
- talk about and discuss my spiritual discoveries and understandings of meaning and purpose with others if I choose to. When I engage in these discussions I respect and allow others to discover and come to their own beliefs and understandings, even if these ideas are different from mine.
- remind myself often of spiritual self-care/Nurturing/exploring/learning/discovering/making meaning in whatever ways feel comfortable and Nurturing for me. (Journaling provides an effective tool for cultivating this awareness.) (Also this need may in part be met by participating in meaningful community activities or religious practices with people who have similar understandings and beliefs.)
- live my life consistent with my answers to the questions: Why am I here? Who am I? and How am I connected to the environments around me? That is, I endeavor to live my life consistent with my understandings, beliefs, and values.
- breathe consciously often as a form of grounding, centering, and cultivating overall awareness and clear thinking while reducing stress.
- cultivate the idea that the quest for meaning and the development and practice of Nurturing skills are spiritually meaningful and Nurturing in themselves.
PHYSICAL (Nurturing care needs of my body which carries my spirit, mind, and emotions.)

Ask yourself: How do I take good care of my body, including getting some physical activity into my everyday routines?

It is a basic physical nurturing need to:
- respect, care for, and value my precious physical being.
- sleep seven to nine hours every 24 hours.
- breathe clean, smoke-free air.
- eat nutritious (not empty of nutrients) food.
- enjoy warmth (as in comfortable body temperature) (includes clothing and shelter).
- drink water (8 cups per day for adults).
- engage in physical activity or exercise daily.
- experience daylight each day (the mind, spirit, and physical body systems love daylight, even on cloudy days).
- practice personal hygiene/cleanliness (includes being internally "clean" of chemicals of abuse).
- earn enough and save enough money to be financially liquid and secure, to be able to buy things needed for daily living and to be able to address contingencies which may arise in the future.
- have access to professional health care for prevention and to address injury or illness.
- have my body feel comfortable by being conscious of caring for and maintaining overall healthy functioning of bodily systems and addressing pain when it may present signals that some part of my system is damaged or out of balance.
- experience loving or caring touch by others and by myself (for example in personal hygiene, and in not doing harm to myself, not harming others, etc.)

INTELLECTUAL (Nurturing care needs of the brain / mind, both the "hardware" (physical brain) and the "software" (programming) of the mind.)

Ask yourself: How do I care for and maintain optimal functioning of my brain and my mind? What do I feed my mind with? How do I maintain the health of my physical brain?

It is a basic intellectual nurturing need to:
- practice awareness, paying attention, and focusing.
- learn new ideas and skills all through life.
- read and notice.
- travel (near or far) and notice.
- participate in interesting conversations.
- engage in a variety of activities.
- experience humor and laughter frequently.
- cultivate healthy curiosity and amazement.

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• contemplate the mysteries of life.
• have problems to solve.
• practice thinking clearly and analytically.
• engage in creative thought and action.
• play and recreate.
• develop at least one skill set for earning a living.
• find employment and do work which involves the brain in interesting, stimulating, and meaningful ways and which contributes to the community as well.
• listen to others, to life, and to yourself.
• receive information and guidance from genuine, Nurturing mentors, guides, and teachers.
• think about what you hear and learn and sort out what has value and what does not.
• understand typical ages and stages of development while not allowing these concepts to limit achievement of positive potential.
• learn and practice Nurturing-based decision making skills (including use of coulds instead of shoulds: CHOICE instead of "have to").
• learn about and engage actively in personal growth to activate our potentials.
• discover internal measures for appreciating self -- not relying on how other people "measure" or evaluate people by money, clothes, popularity, etc.
• be informed about the BNN (this list) and to be active in meeting these needs.
• comment freely and respectfully.
• experience the arts, music, crafts as an observer and as a participant.
• know that our bodily systems (body, mind, psyche, spirit) have built-in self-healing abilities and tendencies. We need to allow and encourage our systems to heal when injured or ill with the assistance and guidance of competent professionals if needed.
• embrace personal responsibility for my own life-long self education and continuing intellectual unfolding. I always need to go further with my learning and brain development.
• practice mental relaxation as a regular part of my lifestyle.
• deeply enjoy beauty, through each sense -- sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch.
• get plenty of oxygen to my brain through conscious breathing and physical activity and exercise.
• get the most effective nutrients to my brain by consuming a healthy diet and avoiding mind destructive chemicals of abuse.
• sleep, so that my brain can regenerate and serve me well.
• seek out a healthy mix of consistency and routine in daily living blended with variety and change.
• have fun.
• laugh often, even if only silently chuckling to yourself.

EMOTIONAL (Nurturing care needs for experiencing my life energy in positive, enjoyable ways and for maintaining the main signaling system of my being -- my feelings.)

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Ask yourself: What is the essence of a feeling? What purpose do feelings serve? What is nurturing and healthy to do with a feeling when I experience one myself? What is healthy and nurturing to do when I am interacting with a person who is experiencing a feeling or feelings, like for example some unusual or strong feelings?

It is a basic emotional nurturing need to:

- experience a sense of personal safety.
- have a home.
- practice mindful awareness of myself and my surroundings.
- care for myself (actively practice addressing the BNN).
- be listened to by others and to listen to myself.
- be understood by self and by others.
- be accepted by self and by others.
- be cared about by self and by others.
- be liked and appreciated by self and by others.
- be respected by self and others.
- be loved by self and others.
- receive and give kindness with boundaries.
- understand that life is messy, that things frequently are not the way we would like them to be.
- develop flexibility, adaptability, and resilience to help myself deal with life’s large and small predictable and unpredictable challenges.
- have fun and laugh often.
- achieve, to accomplish, to feel competent, and to experience success (as you define success for yourself) resulting from your own efforts individually and/or from working as part of a team.
- experience some order and organization in my personal life.
- deeply experience the beauty and wonder of my own being and and of the people and the world around me.
- experience action, including taking action myself.
- experience calm, including bringing myself into calm states of being.
- understand what the essence of a feeling is, what function feelings serve, and what to do that’s healthy when I or someone else is experiencing a feeling or feelings.
- understand that a feeling or emotion is energy moving through my body which gives me signals in the present moment about how I am doing with caring for my BNN.
- understand that I need to learn how to read and understand my own feeling messages and keep practicing these interpretive skills.
- understand that feelings, like clouds, are continually changing and passing through. (However, feelings will stay around if I "should" at them. They stay to fight the "should".)
- learn how to just “be” with my feelings(s), and observe them as they slowly move across my internal sky.
- understand that feelings do not submit to control; rather I influence the speed
of change and kind of feelings I am experiencing through my thoughts and my actions/behavior (including talking with self or others).

- learn to calibrate the intensity of my feelings through my use of clear, informed thinking and healthy actions/behavior (including talking with self or others).
- understand the high value of validating feelings, my own feelings and the feelings of others. (Basic validating concept: whether through words, tone of voice, or body language conveying the nurturing message that the feeling makes sense and the person having the feeling makes sense -- even if the sense is not immediately clear.)
- learn to express feelings in healthy ways to help me recognize, validate, and use their messages to maintain my overall Nurturing balancing. (Healthy, non-Triangle expressing can also help with releasing stress and "steam", resulting in changes in my energy field, that is, my emotions.)
- practice the number one best stress reducer: focusing on my immediate inhale or exhale and continuing to direct my attention to my breathing for a while (the basis of meditation).

SOCIAL (Nurturing care needs involved with relating well with others.)

Ask yourself: How can I relate with others in healthy and kind and even graceful ways that are mutually Nurturing?

It is a basic social nurturing need to:

- enjoy relating with others in mutually Nurturing, Triangle-free relationship patterns.
- experience kindness (with boundaries) and friendliness from others, including family members.
- practice friendliness and kindness (with boundaries) toward self and others, including family members.
- have/experience a home community and a home culture.
- experience healthy connections with a network of family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances.
- engage in healthy friendship, close friendship, intimate relationship (as an adult).
- receive and give recognition, acknowledgment, validation, and caring in relating with the people in your life.
- be active and engage in interesting, enjoyable and meaningful experiences with others.
- endeavor to understand and be understanding toward others while maintaining healthy boundaries.
- contribute to and receive benefits from participating in my communities, both my immediate household community and the larger communities I am part of.
- recognize, respect, enjoy, appreciate, and care for the natural world: plants, animals, and natural systems. This larger community enhances, supports and makes possible our human community.
- Laugh and have fun with the people in my life.

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WORKSHEET INSTRUCTIONS

The following pages contain worksheets for helping further understand the nature of each of the Triangle roles. Then there is a worksheet about talking, thinking, and behaving in Nurturing ways. These worksheets demonstrate the contrast between Triangle relating and Nurturing relating.

For each of the Triangle lists I suggest putting a check mark next to each item you do either occasionally or frequently. These items are likely to indicate that there are some Nurturing needs which you need to be meeting more effectively. List the needs to which you may choose to give more attention.

With the Nurturing list, I suggest checking off the ones you think you might like to begin practicing or continue practicing more frequently / skillfully.

Of course, these lists are only a small sample of all the ways people do Triangle relating and Nurturing relating. As you think of more items for these lists, add them on. And if possible, tell me about them. I am very interested in new insights into these patterns.

The Role of VICTIM

(Also known as: needy, dependent, controlling, hopeless/helpless, sympathy seeker, martyr, chump, picked-on, scapegoat...)

In taking on this role here are samples of what a person might typically say, think, and/or do in order to participate in the victim triangle pattern. Can you add items to this list?

VICTIM STATEMENTS (to self or to others):

- “It’s all your fault! (Or his fault, or her fault...)”
- “I had no choice.”
- “I was forced to do it.”
- “You guys are always changing the rules on me.”
- “You make me mad.”
- “I can’t help it!”
- “I guess nobody likes me.”
- "Things will never change/get better.”
- “My life is so difficult/stressful.”
- "My family is not fair to me." or "Life is not fair to me."

Victim Thoughts (about self or about others):

- Nobody cares and/or nobody understands me.
- I can’t do it myself.
- Everyone is against me (or dislikes me, or hates me).
- I can never do anything right.

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• It is all [someone else’s] fault.
• I cannot function without a boyfriend or girlfriend or without my spouse or children.
• I can’t trust her/him or anyone (and/or I can’t trust myself).
• My life is boring. I’m not interested in anything.
• I’m helpless/hopeless.
• Others leave, reject, or abandon me.
• I deserve or need to get very upset if others do even the smallest thing that bothers me.

Victim Actions (toward self or toward others):
• Doing things just to aggravate someone who bullies me.
• Hiding real feelings and not talking about important things that need to be addressed.
• Drug/alcohol/tobacco abuse.
• Remaining in or maintaining emotionally abusive relationships.
• Employing facial expressions and body language that communicate feeling very “put upon”.
• Avoidance of participating in healthy activities either alone or with others.
• Acting hurt or emotionally wounded to elicit sympathy.
• Exaggerating physical or emotional hurt to elicit sympathy.
• Whining/sniveling.
• The "silent treatment"-- withdrawing and refusing to communicate.

The Role of MEANIE
(Also known as: bully, abuser, perpetrator, persecutor, criticizer, bad guy, villain, controlling, troublemaker...)

In taking on this role here are sample of what a person might typically say, think, and/or do in order to participate in the victim triangle pattern. Can you add items to this list?

Meanie Statements:
• “You’re so selfish!”
• “You’re ruining my life!”
• “Yah, but you’re the jerk.”
• “You’re a drunk.”
• “You’re stupid/not good enough/not able to do _____”
• “You’re fat.” (Or some negative statement about how someone looks.)
• “You’ll never amount to much”
• “Do it or else…”
• "I told you so, dummy."
• “Why is everyone else so incompetent?”
• Calling people (or self) names or saying mean things to others (or to self).
• Any kind of put down or mean statements/comments.

Meanie Thoughts:
• Everybody should do things the way I think they should be done.
• Everybody should be the way I think they should be.

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Everybody should see the world the way I see the world.
I need to control them/this and make them do what I want them to.
Control…I have to be in control.
Nobody will know what I really feel if I am loud and aggressive.
I take what I want from people however I need to.
I’m always making the wrong choice/messing up/I’m just no good (being the bully to self.)
The only way I can get what I need/want is to make others do what I want/need them to do.

Meanie Actions:
- Doing or saying mean things to others.
- Self-injurious behaviors or suicide attempts.
- Drug, alcohol, or tobacco abuse (mean actions toward self).
- Domestic violence.
- Making others feel guilty for not living up to my expectations.
- Being mean to people because they are different in some way.
- Invading the personal or psychological space of another person.

The Role of RESCUER
(Also known as: supercaretaker, enabler, pleaser, peacemaker, controlling, good guy, hero, clown, avoider, escapist...)
In taking on this role here are samples of what a person might typically say, think, and/or do in order to participate in the victim triangle pattern. Can you add items to this list?

Rescuer Statements (to others and to self):
- “I am the peacekeeper in the family (or relationship).”
- “I don’t have any problems.”
- "Just smile."
- “Other people need help more than I do.”
- “I’ll just do it.”(Rather than waiting for or allowing her/him to do what s/he needs to do.)
- “S/he didn’t mean it.”
- “S/he needs me to take care of her/him.”
- "It's not that bad.” or "Time will heal it.”
- "I always help people who are worse off than me...(then I suffer)."

Rescuer Thoughts (about others or about self):
- S/he knows more than I do (I give them the benefit of doubt – but not myself).
- I can make him/her/them happy (but not myself).
- I can make things better. They or s/he really need(s) my help.
- S/he wouldn’t be able to make it without my help.
- It’s more important that I meet her/his needs than that I meet my needs.
- I’ll make him/her love me by getting them to really need me or because s/he will feel like s/he owes me for all I have done for her/him.
- Don’t make waves.

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I know what's best for him/her.

**Rescuer Actions (toward or for others or toward/for self):**

- Doing things for people that they could (or need to) do for themselves.
- Seeking assistance for others when they could be asking for themselves.
- Taking control of situations which do not need to be controlled. Even with good intentions bossing people around.
- Manipulating others into doing things "for their own good."
- Doing homework for a child or friend (depriving them of the learning experience).
- Drug, alcohol and tobacco abuse (to escape from stress by damaging myself).
- Kids taking care of parents because parents are incapacitated physically or emotionally by drug / alcohol / prescription medication abuse and/or by engaging frequently in the victim role.
- Providing distraction to avoid dealing with concerns that need to be addressed.
- Hiding real feelings to protect or please or manipulate others.
- Covering up for a friend or family member’s behavior.

**Practicing Addressing My BNN for a Life I Enjoy**

In taking good care of self and relating in kind and nurturing ways toward others (with healthy boundaries) here are samples of what a person might typically be saying, thinking, and/or doing. Can you add items to these lists?

**Nurturing statements to self or others:**

- Please...
- Thank you.
- Let's take a breath...or a bunch of breaths...Let's be breathin' easy.
- You're a good person (or words to that effect).
- "I like that." "You're right about that."
- Your feelings make sense and your overall system makes sense -- you make sense.
- You could do that if you decide to.
- Let's just live and get along even though we may think differently about some things.
- "What a gift!" "What a blessing!" "How amazing is that!"
- "I like you." "I care about you." "I love you."
- "Something I really appreciate about you is..."

**Nurturing thoughts:**

- What specific BNN could I be addressing now or could I be planning to address soon?
- What beauty can I notice about me in this moment?

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• What humor can I find in the present situation?
• Life is stressful at times, and I can handle the stress by practicing Nurturing kindness toward myself and others.
• People (including myself) are wonderful, multi-faceted beings. (And so are plants, animals, and the Planet.)
• I am a person who makes healthy Nurturing choices and decisions.
• What can I learn from this situation, even if it is a difficult one, which will help me Nurture my way through this rough time? And perhaps I can use this insight in the future.
• Using "coulds" helps me make decisions which fit me better. Changing my "shoulds" to "coulds" reduces pressure and stress.
• I can find humor in things that I say, think, and do; and I can laugh at myself at times too.
• I strive to take good care of myself everyday.
• I can observe how my thoughts and feelings change with healthy fluidity and flexibility.
• I am developing my skills for reading my feelings for information about my state of balance and which BNN may need attention in this moment.
• I am continually discovering who I am and how I am connected to the world around me.
• How can I make or find meaning in this moment...and in general in my life?
• I am a student of the art of relationship with self and with others.
• I notice the Triangle pattern enacted in the world around me, and I know that taking good care of my BNN helps me decide not to participate and not to get caught in that pattern.
• I am learning to just be with difficult feelings and breathe consciously as these feelings (my energy field) changes.
• I am learning to just be with enjoyable or exciting feelings and breathe consciously and relish these moments.
• I am relating in a Nurturing way/with kindness & boundaries toward myself in this moment.
• I am relating in a Nurturing way/with kindness & boundaries toward another person (or other people) in this moment.

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Nurturing actions:
- Laughing with life.
- Learning new things in every area of life, feeding my amazing brain.
- Expressing gratitude.
- Practicing conscious breathing frequently through the day and evening too, if only for a moment at a time.
- Practicing the paradox of just "being and breathing" with my feelings, even if they are uncomfortable, and observing these feelings change.
- Interacting in kind and Nurturing ways toward myself and with others.
- Clearly and gracefully maintaining my boundaries, gently and firmly.
- Practicing awareness and clear thinking at all times.
- Seeking and engaging in work that has meaning for me in order to earn a living.
- Reading daily.
- Exercising daily.
- Doing a variety of healthy activities that I enjoy doing.
- Speaking with self and others in respectful and kind tones.
- Respectfully declining "invitations" / opportunities to take on the roles of Victim, Meanie, or Rescuer / Supercaretaker (the name of the role in which a person is practicing boundaryless caring for others while not addressing his/her own BNN).
- Exiting the Triangle pattern by using one of the "Bridges to Nurturing" at the moment I notice that I have been drawn into the pattern without intending to be.
- Taking care of my BNN as a normal, everyday practice and attitude.
- Reading through these lists again and again to remind myself about caring for my BNN and relating with others in kind and Nurturing ways. Modifying and adding to these lists as I come to understand more and more about nurturing relating with self and with others.

A pre-test and post-test for Basics of Nurturing Relationships

When your relationships with yourself and with others work well, what is your life experience like? And when your relationships do not work well?

What does a person need to do in order to participate in Triangle relating?

How many people are needed to do the Triangle pattern?

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In what way is Triangle relating like a game?

What is the benefit / advantage of changing shoulds to coulds?

How can a person exit the Triangle pattern at any moment?

What does Nurturing mean?

What are the "BNN"?

What is a feeling? (Define "feeling" without using the words "feeling", "emotion" or "thought" in your definition.)

What do you do that's healthy with a feeling when you are having one or when someone else you are interacting with is having one?

How does practicing the BNN lead to relationships you love to be a part of?

Two questions to think about whose answers are not spelled out in the preceding pages:
At what age do you think a person can begin to learn and understand the basics of Triangle relating and Nurturing Relating?

Why focus on achieving healthy decision-making skills instead of focusing on achieving happiness in living our lives?