It’s Not Always Depression

Working the Change Triangle to Listen to the Body, Discover Core Emotions, and Connect to Your Authentic Self

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Audiobook Reference PDF

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At any given moment, we will find our psychological state on one of the three corners of the Change Triangle or below it in the openhearted state.

At this point my defenses were still working well, meaning I had no symptoms of anxiety or depression. But I was not aware of or in touch with my underlying emotions.
THE CHANGE TRIANGLE

Defenses
Anything we do
to avoid feeling

Inhibitory
Emotions
Anxiety,
shame,
guilt

Core Emotions
Fear, anger, sadness, disgust, joy,
excitement, sexual excitement

Openhearted State
of the Authentic Self
Calm, curious, connected, compassionate,
confident, courageous, clear

• joking
• sarcasm
• smiling
• laughing
• worrying
• ruminating
• vagueness
• changing the
subject
• avoiding eye
contact
• eye rolling
• mumbling
• not talking
• talking too much
• not listening
• spacing out
• tiredness

• criticizing
• perfectionism
• procrastination
• preoccupation
• irritability
• negative thinking
• judging others
• judging ourselves
• prejudice
• racism
• arrogance
• misogyny
• misguided
aggression (i.e.,
getting angry at
your partner when
you’re really angry
at your boss)

• working too much
• numbness
• helplessness
• overexercising
• overeating
• undereating
• being secretive
• cutting
• obsessing
• addictions
• suicidal ideas
Fig. 05

**MY TRIANGLE WHEN I WAS DEPRESSED IN MY THIRTIES**

Depression

I was here

Anxiety

and here

Block

Fear

I needed to get here

Calm and clarity

so I could get here.

Fig. 06

**FROM DEFENSE TO CORE EMOTION**

Defenses

Negative thoughts, playing solitaire

Anxiety

Fear

(of failure)

Calm, courage, clarity

I am here.
Fran had an unconscious conflict about experiencing her grief. The fear of her grief raised her anxiety. She felt she had to avoid anything that might connect her with her sadness.
Fran’s defenses were lowered and her anxiety was calmed, so she was able to fully experience the grief that had been stuck in her nervous system. Fully experiencing her grief allowed her to enter the openhearted state. In the openhearted state, Fran felt calm and spontaneously gained insight into how her trauma had affected her.

When I first met Sara, she fluctuated between defenses and high states of anxiety. She had no access to her core emotional experience and was always dysregulated; she was never calm, confident, or any of the other C’s.
Sara now had access to anger and could assert her wishes, but doing so often triggered anxiety, thrusting her back up the Change Triangle to the inhibitory corner.

Sara inhibits her anger with fear/panic/anxiety/shame. She runs away to stop these painful feelings. But it costs her the relationship as she needs to avoid the other so those bad feelings don’t resurface.
From the perspective of the Change Triangle, the baby/child gets anxious and develops shame from the lack of caring, which makes it impossible for the baby/child to process core emotions.
With the defense of vagueness put aside, Bonnie moved from the top left (defense) corner of the Change Triangle to the top right (inhibitory) corner. She was able to then move her guilt aside so she could access her core anger toward her father. Then guilt arose again, inhibiting the experience of core anger, and moved her back up the Change Triangle to a guilty (inhibitory) state. The anger did not yet feel safe to experience.
Anger was blocked by anxiety. To avoid both the anger and the anxiety, Sally became passive and obedient (the defense).
Fig. 19

WHEN EMOTIONS COLLAPSE ON EACH OTHER THEY CAUSE ANXIETY

NOTICE EACH CORE EMOTION AND HOLD IT SEPARATELY

Fig. 20

Write thoughts here:
1. 
2. 
3. 

Write emotions here:
1. 
2. 
3.
**MOVEMENT UP THE TRIANGLE**

- Calm, connected, curious...
- She triggered my shame
- Then...my friend triggered my shame
- C's

**MOVEMENT BACK DOWN THE TRIANGLE**

- I am here. I go to bathroom to reconstitute.
- Shame
- Anger and sadness
- I reached my core emotions.
- Calm, curious, connected, but maybe a little more self-protective

**BETSY MAPPED OUT HER DEFENSE, INHIBITORY EMOTION, AND CORE EMOTIONS ON THE CHANGE TRIANGLE**

- **Defense**
  - Should: “I should be a better friend”
- **Inhibitory Emotion**
  - Shame: “I’m not good enough (as a friend)”
- **Core Emotions**
  - Sad—because lonely
  - Angry—friends don’t call
- **Solution (Adaptive Action):**
  - Call a friend
MARIO’S CHANGE TRIANGLE
AROUND A TRAUMATIC EVENT
WHEN HE WAS FOUR YEARS OLD

Defenses
Dissociation
(black hole),
depression,
avoidance of
intimacy,
low sex drive,
low self-esteem

Inhibitory
Emotions
Anxiety,
freeze state

Core Emotions
Fear/terror

MARIO’S CHANGE TRIANGLE:
GUILT AND ANGER
(MURDEROUS RAGE)

Softer
Defenses

Inhibitory
Emotions
Guilt

Core Emotions
Anger

Guilt blocks
access to anger.
Core emotions of rage and grief are finally unblocked and experienced. Healing begins, the past is perceived by the brain as truly past, and gratitude and pride in the Self emerge.

SARA’S TRIANGLE
FROM JOY TO THE OPENHEARTED SELF

Core Emotions
Joy

Gratitude and pride in the Self

Increasing confidence, calm, clarity, connection, and compassion for herself

She is here.
The Self learns to communicate with other parts and helps build communication between parts. In neuroscience terms, we are integrating dissociated neural networks. As a result, the nervous system calms down and is not as easily triggered.

This is a summary or “cheat sheet” for what to do to work the Change Triangle. Each corner you find yourself on requires you to do something to move to the next corner going clockwise so you end up in the openhearted state of the authentic Self as much as possible.