

**14th International Conference on  
Child and Adolescent Psychopathology**

July 22–24, 2019

Whitelands College, University of Roehampton, London



## ***Is there anybody out there...?***

Disorganized attachment style and the drama triangle in children who suffered from “Invisible” Attachment Trauma.

**Doris D’Hooghe**

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*Is there anybody out there...?*

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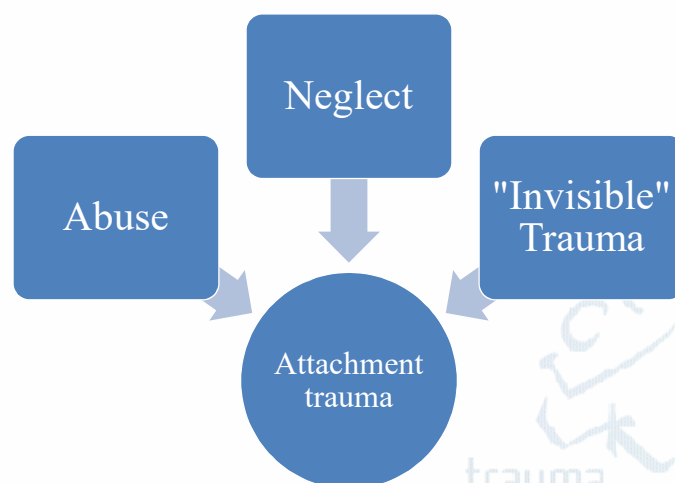
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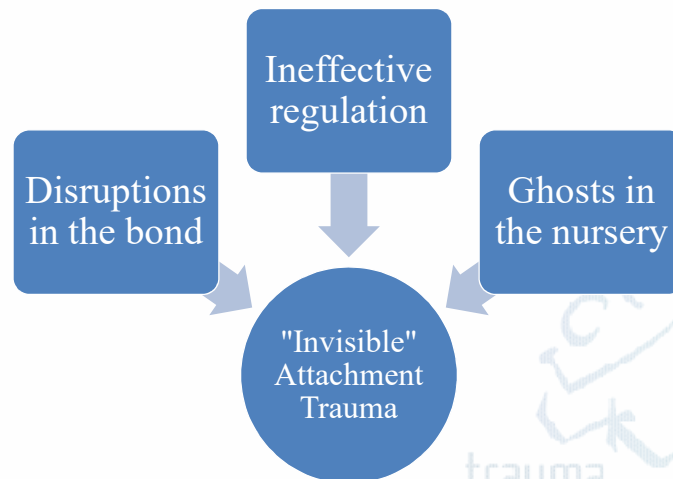
## Attachment Trauma



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## “Invisible” Attachment Trauma



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## Disruptions in the Attachment Bond



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## Disruptions in the Attachment Bond

- Fear of abandonment is among the most anxiety-provoking situations in childhood
- Bowlby
  - Continuous relationship
- Physical availability
- Emotional availability
- When not fulfilled = disruption in the attachment bond

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## Physical Inaccessibility

- Forced separation very early in life from the primary caregiver
- Prolonged separation resulted from parental illness
- Early loss of primary caregiver
- Changes in primary caregiver
- Or other family disruptions: divorce

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## Psychological Inaccessibility

- Psychological/ emotional disruptions:
  - Inappropriate response
  - Stressful life episodes
  - Suicide threat
  - Parent psychopathology
  - Relationship problems



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## Ineffective Regulation



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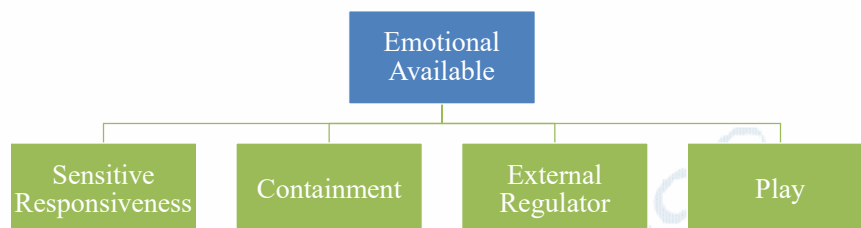
## Mother as External Regulator

- Regulatory theory (Allan Schore)
- Be attuned to the internal state
- Able to regulate the own arousal state
- Down- Up regulate

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## Effective Regulation = Emotional Available



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## Ghosts in the nursery



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## Ghosts in the nursery

- Parents unresolved trauma- and attachment history
- Parent's lack:
  - Reflective functioning
  - Mentalization



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## “ Invisible” Attachment Trauma



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## “ Invisible” Attachment Trauma → Disorganized attachment

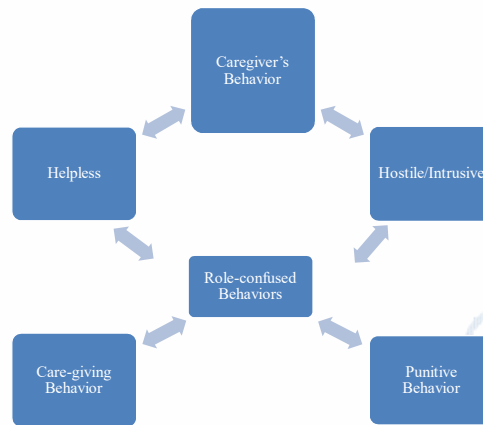
- Care-seeking or attachment system
- Inborn control system activated by distressing experiences
- Throughout the life span (“From the cradle to the grave”)
- “Unresolved” parents → “The source and the solution”
- The simultaneity of approach and avoidance → lack of organization

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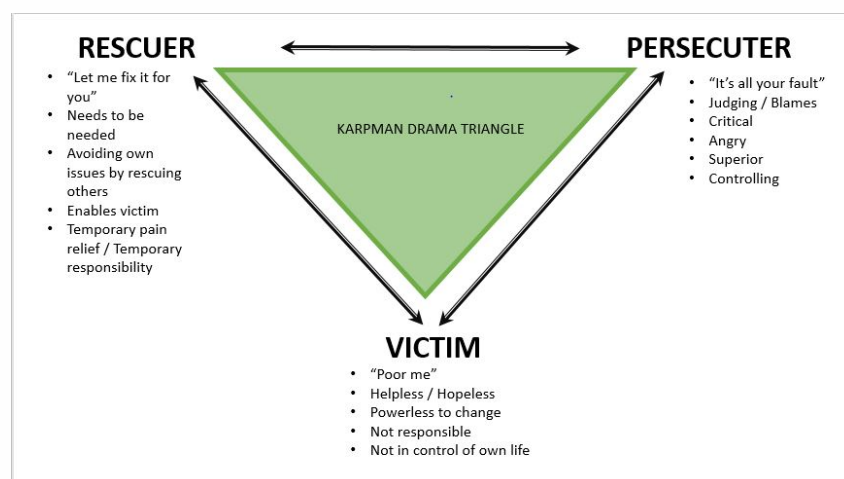
## Caregiving styles



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## The Drama Triangle

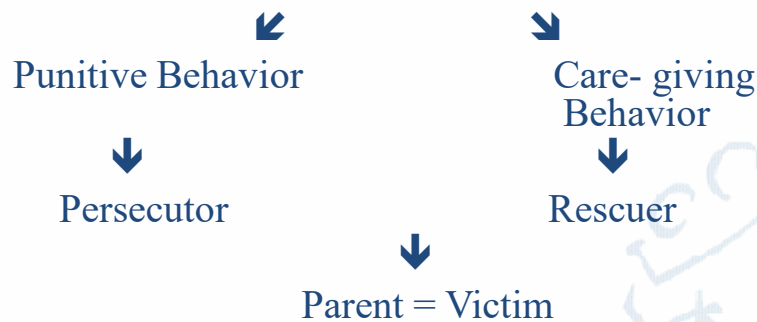


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## Disorganized Attachment and The Drama Triangle

### Child:

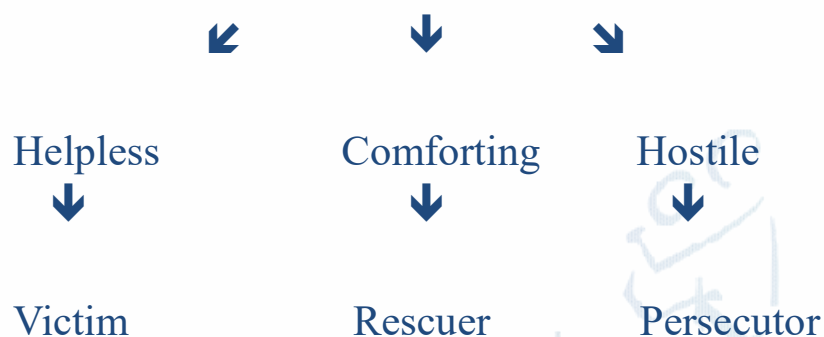


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## Disorganized Attachment and The Drama Triangle

### Caregiver



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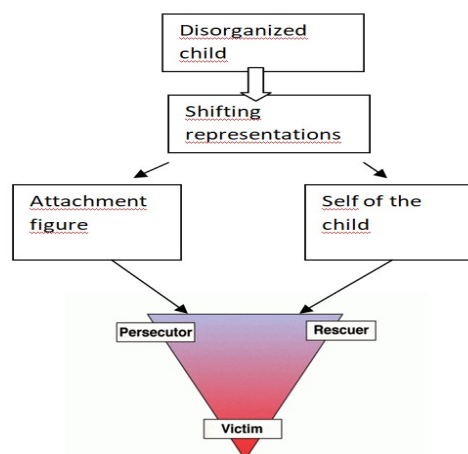
## Disorganized Attachment and IWM

- IWM
  - Internal working model (IWM)
    - Memories of attachment interactions → accessibility
    - Mental representations of self/others
    - Cognitive structure
    - Typical emotions
    - Implicit memory

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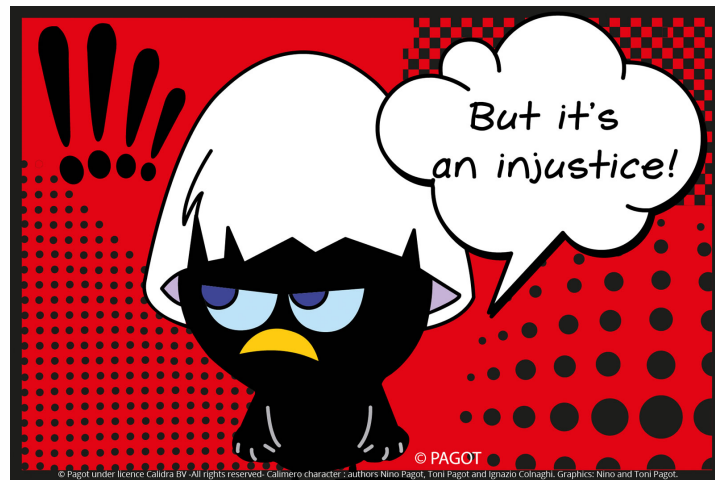
## Disorganized Attachment and The Drama Triangle



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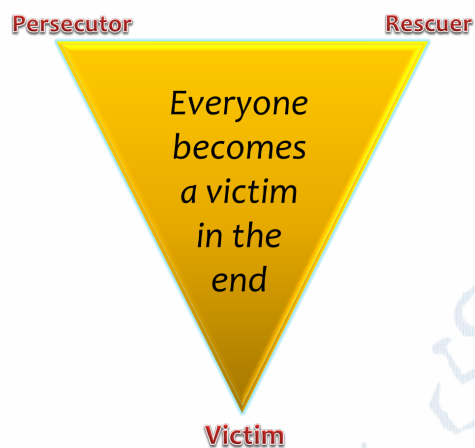
## Victim- hood



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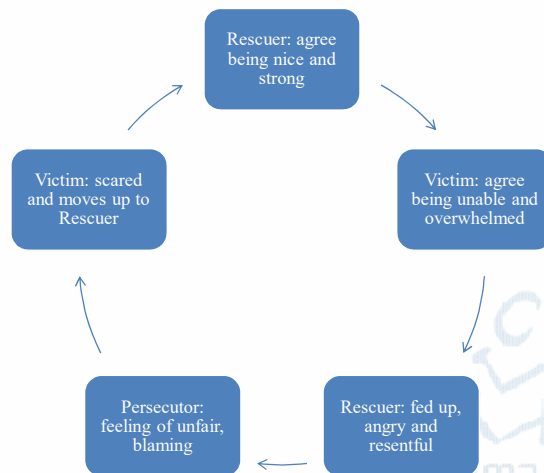
## Victim- hood



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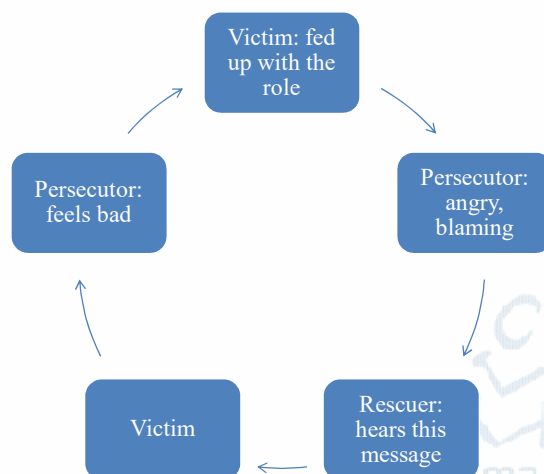
## Moving Around



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## Moving Around



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## Victim Consciousness

- Denial of personal responsibility
- External locus of control
- Lack of affect regulation
- Needs not being met
- Lack of development of a coherent self
- Not completed two psychological tasks:
  - Be emotionally separate from your parents
  - Develop “both/and” thinking

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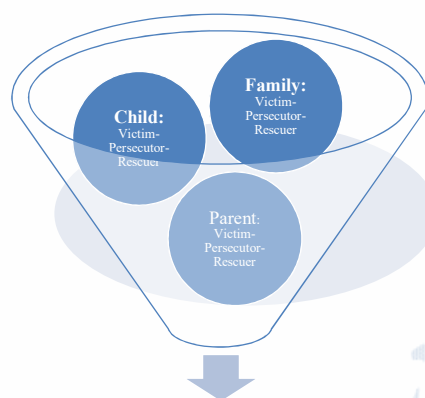
## The Drama: The Victim Role in the Child

- Survival strategy:
  - To respond to fears and to seek a sense of safety and security.
  - An attempt to become organized internally.
  - Help to meet the needs.

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## The drama



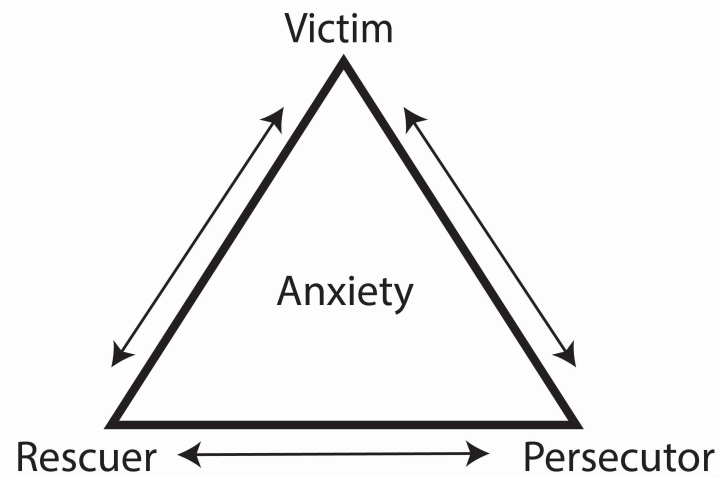
The drama Triangle

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## Anxiety Based



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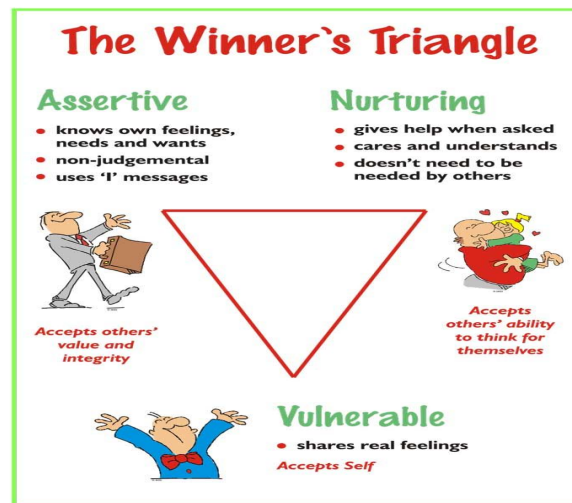
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## The Winner's Triangle

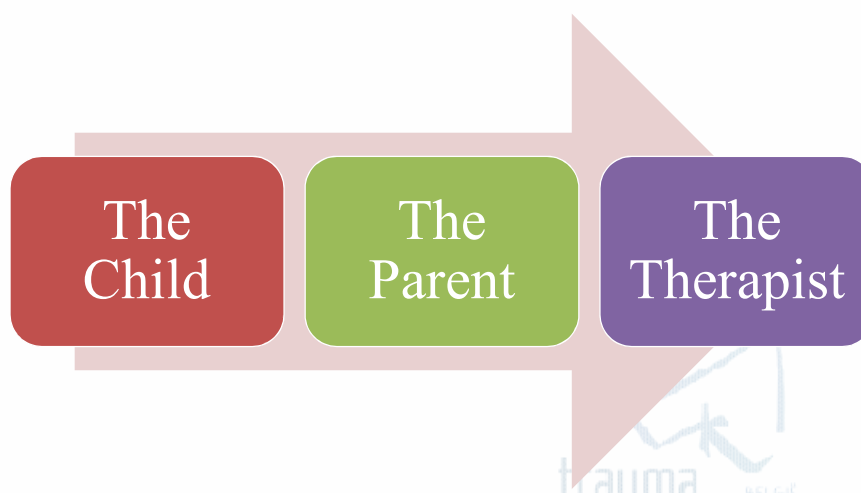


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## The toolbox



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## The Child



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## The Child



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## Develop Self- Awareness in the Child



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## Develop Self- Awareness

- Psychoeducation on:
  - Mentalization
  - The Drama Triangle
- Symbolize/ Recognize/ Understand
  - Mentalization capacity
  - The three roles of the drama triangle

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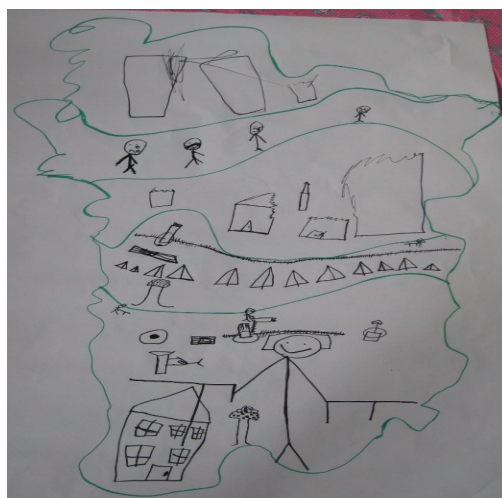
## Psychoeducation on Mentalization

- Internal world as a metaphor for the mental states.
- Visualize the Internal world as an island:
  - Let the child draw an island
  - There are 4 States:
    - Body
    - Feelings
    - Thoughts
    - Needs

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## Internal World Symbolized: Island



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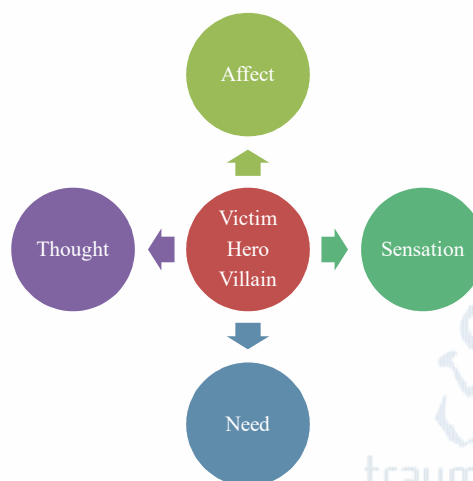
## Internal World Symbolized: The Tree



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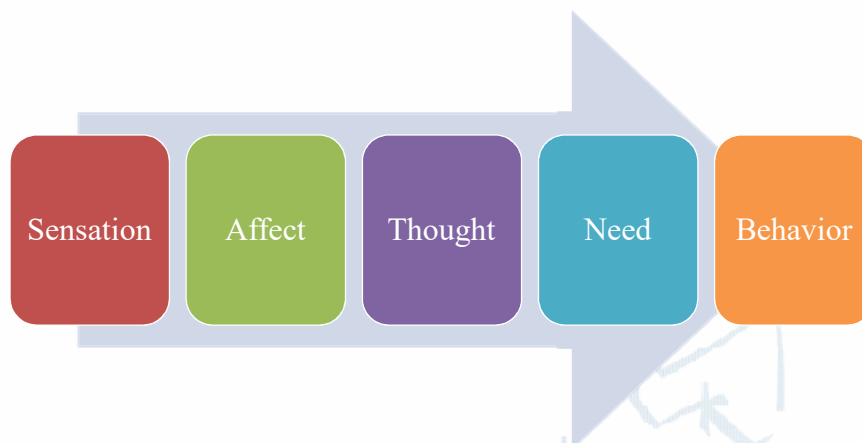
## Recognizing the Three Roles



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## Recognizing and Understanding Behavior



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## Puppet show



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## Different Characters



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## Emotionregulation



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## The Rescuer - Anxiety

- Grounding
- Breathing
- Here and now
- Dual awareness
- Safe place
- Meditation
- Relaxation
- Yoga
- Sports/ movement
- Increase endorphins ( laughter/ humor)

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## The Victim- Sadness

- Release
- Cry
- Share
- Develop emotional resilience
  - Emotion regulation
- Soothing:
  - Soothing yourself
    - Music
    - Relaxation
  - Soothed by others
    - Safe touch/ hug/ massage

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## The Persecutor - Anger

- Be safely angry → three rules:
  - Don't harm anyone
  - Don't harm yourself
  - Don't destroy anything
- Safely discharging anger:
  - Physically:
    - Sport/ Kicking a ball/ Trampoline...
  - Visualization
  - Writing

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## Self-Awareness about their own Emotional Needs.

**BOLDED: TOP 10 EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF CHILDREN & MOST ADULTS**

**basic human emotional needs**

<b>accepted</b>	free	private
acknowledged	fulfilled	productive / useful
admired	heard	reassured
appreciated	helped	recognized
approved of	helpful	respected
<b>believed in</b>	important	<b>safe</b> / secure
capable	in control	<b>supported</b>
<b>cared about</b>	included	treated fairly
challenged	listened to	<b>trusted</b>
clear (not confused)	<b>loved</b>	understanding
competent	needed	<b>understood</b>
confident	noticed	<b>valued</b>
<b>forgiven</b>	powerful	worthy

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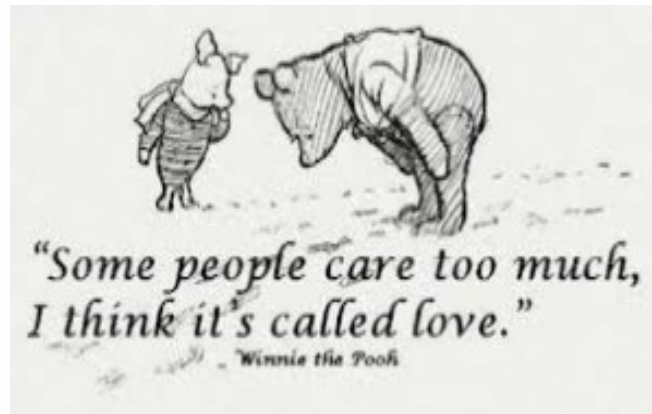
## Types of Safety

- Physical safety:
  - Your body is not in danger.
- Mental safety:
  - You are able to choose belief systems and patterns of thinking and awareness that get you where you want or need to go.
- Emotional safety:
  - That you are able to identify how you feel in situations
- Spiritual safety:
  - When you learn and identify and trust in your beliefs about Higher Power, God.

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## Love and Belonging



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## Love and Belonging

- Become:
  - Non-defensive by exploring the thoughts and the roles you are identified with
  - Non-controlling/ non-manipulative/ non-threatening
  - Understand the other ( mentalizing capability)
  - Open
  - Allow physical affection

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## Stimulating the Seeking system



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## Stimulating the Seeking system

- Jaak Panksepp ( Affective Neuroscience)
- Seven major emotional tendencies of the brain.
- The seeking system is integral to our:
  - Motivation
  - Urge to explore
  - Desire to understand.
- Responsible for
  - our feeling alive and alert
  - for the positive experiences we seek in our lives.

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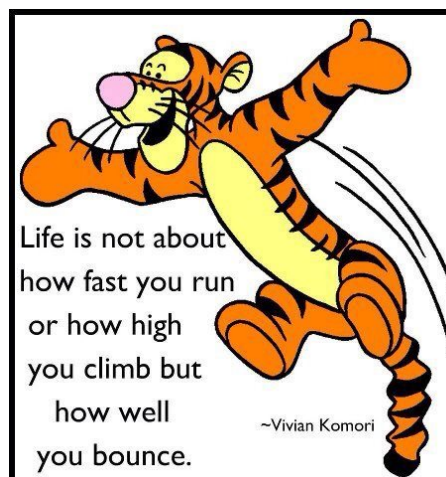
## Stimulating the Seeking system

- Increasing Dopamine
  - Exercise
  - Gratitude
  - Touch/ massage
  - Music
  - Remembering happy events
- Play
- Social joy
- Encourages exploration, investigation, curiosity, interest and expectancy.

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## Building Resilience



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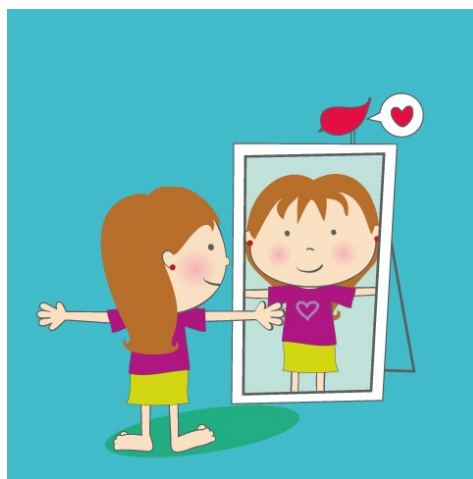
## Building Resilience

- Feel as strong as possible:
  - Developing internal resources
  - Positive experiences
  - Installing positive cognitions
- Basic skills set:
  - Independence
  - Problem solving
  - Optimism
  - Social connection
  - Emotional safety

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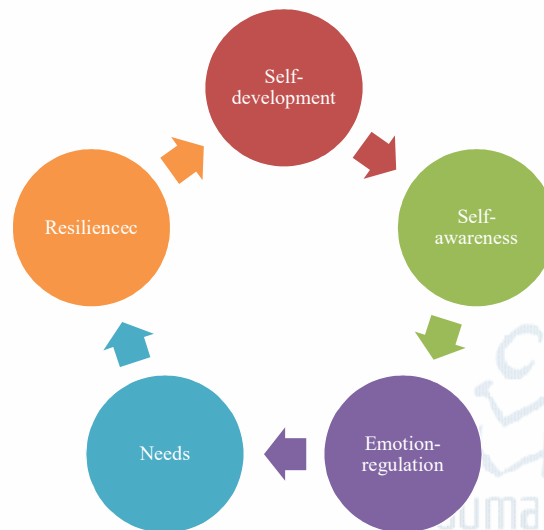
## Self-development



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## Self-development



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## The Parent



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## Psychoeducation on the Drama Triangle

- Be aware of the game
- How does the game work?
- Which roles do you play?
- What role did you play as child?
- Identify the roles family members play

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## The Parent

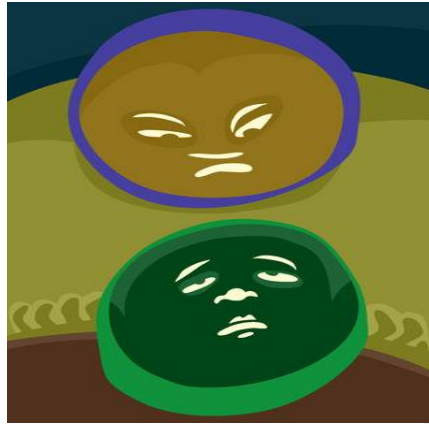
- Develop a secure attachment with the child:
  - Sensitive responsiveness
  - Mentalization
  - Reflective functioning
  - Caregiver as external regulator
  - Containment
  - Shared pleasure/ play

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## The “ Frightened” Victim



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## Victim → Creator “ I can do it”

- Skill: Problem solving
  - Use creative thinking
  - Belief in your capabilities
  - Make clear decisions
- Envision your future and set goals
- Vulnerable:
  - Share real feelings
- Self- acceptance

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## Victim → Creator “ I can do it”

- Work with the “ frightened” part:
  - Triggerwork
  - Ghosts in the nursery
  - Traumawork
  - Anxiety reduction
    - Feeling centered, grounded
    - Internal locus of control

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## The “ Frightening” Persecutor



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## Persecutor → Challenger “ You can do it”

- Skill: Assertiveness
- Developing ways of getting needs met →
  - Parent :
    - Resolve “ Ghosts in the nursery”
    - Learn about the developmental stages of the child
- Call for growth
  - When secure base and safe haven is installed →
    - The child:
      - Independence
      - Exploration
      - Resilience

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## The Rescuer



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## Rescuer → Coach “How will you do it”

- Skill: Listening
- Caring
  - Building relationship
  - Belonging
  - Love
- Understanding = Mentalizing

↙  
Parent

↓  
Child

↘  
Parent- Child

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## Therapeutic relationship



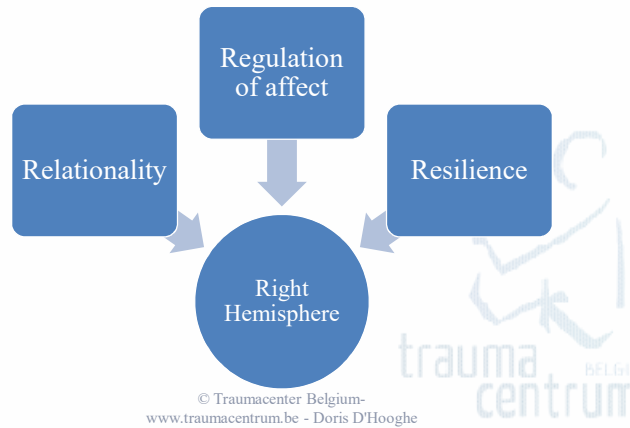
"Doctor, I'm not sure I can trust you."

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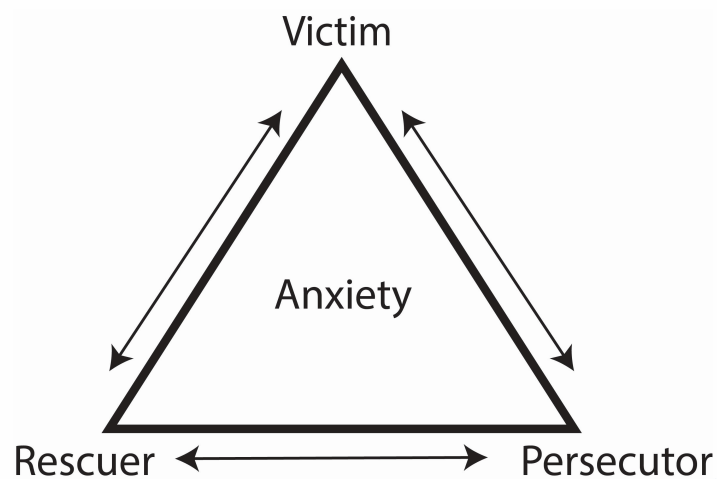
## Importance of the therapeutic relationship

- Right brain to right brain therapy
- Allan Schore: 3 R's



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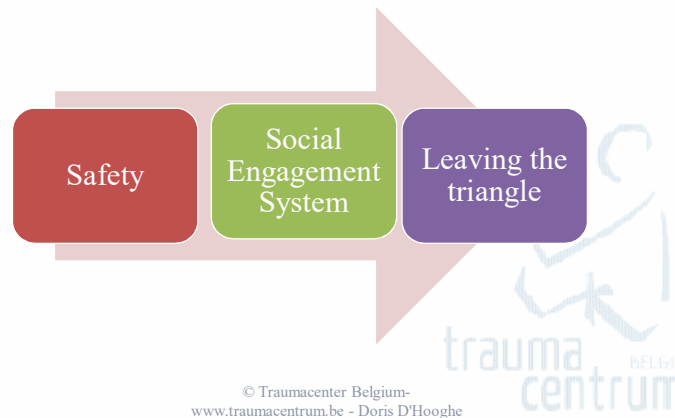
## Drama Triangle = Anxiety based



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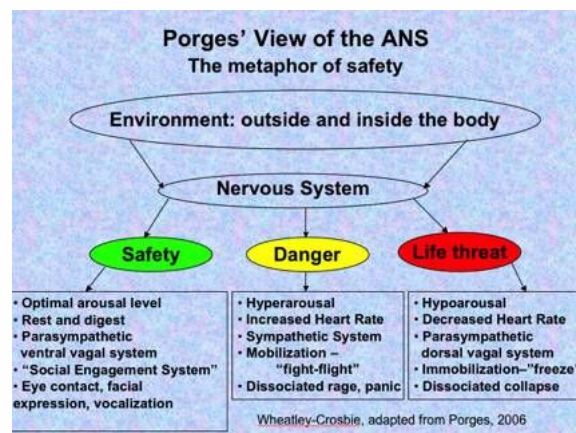
## Therapeutic Relationship Based on the Polyvagal Theory

- Overall therapeutic goal is to re-establish the Social Engagement System



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## Therapeutic Relationship Based on the Polyvagal Theory



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## The Therapist in the Triangle

- Therapist being aware of his own trauma- and attachment history.
- Become conscious of the various roles and use that awareness to ensure we don't act out the roles in the therapy room.
- Which position do you take in the triangle?
- Notice which positions you take more often.
- Do you take different positions with different people?
- How does your drama triangle position connect with your experiences in childhood?

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Wake me up when  
the drama stops!

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**THANK YOU  
FOR  
your  
ATTENTION!  
ANY QUESTIONS?**

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