

# DRAMA IN REAL LIFE

## PARENTING AND THE ROLES WE PLAY

By Kathy M. Haskin

Ignoring the remainder of his lunch, the five year-old announced “I have an apple up my nose.” The statement certainly caught the attention of the parents. In rescue-mode, Mom peered up each tiny nostril. No sign of the fruit.

Dad sought to distract the fidgeting youngster. Telling him stories of kids in Minnesota putting beans up their noses only to have them sprout in the sinuses, caused the son to panic and mom’s face to hurt in sympathy.

As the son’s discomfort increased, so did the tension in the room. Mom sought to probe the nose; the boy protected his face and ran. Here, at that moment, the situation could proceed in two very different ways. Like most of the strange assortment of parenting situations, the moment could lead to either a problem-oriented drama or an outcome-oriented solution.

The drama began.

Since the beginning of time, the default orientation of humanity has often been that of the Victim. Living in an often hostile and dangerous world, we human beings have honed the fight, flight, or freeze reaction to our life experience.

Transactional Analysis pioneer and psychiatrist Stephen Karpman, MD, has observed that most human dynamics involve three roles – that of *victim*; *persecutor* (or *perpetrator*); and *rescuer* – which result in what he described as the “Drama Triangle.” In David Emerald’s book *The Power of TED\** (*\*The Empowerment Dynamic*), this triangulation is referred to as the Dreaded Drama Triangle (DDT) because of the toxic nature of the relationships that thrive in such an environment.



THE  
POWER  
OF TED\*

The *victim*, which is the central figure in the drama, sees life as happening *to* them and believes they are powerless in the face of the onslaught of the problems they encounter. Here the initial victim in the apple adventure is the son, who feels and reacts to the pain and discomfort. In order to be a victim, however, one must have a *persecutor*. The persecutor is very often a person, but it can also be a condition (maybe an illness or discomfort from having a foreign object up your nose) or a circumstance (perhaps a natural disaster or the fact that you have put a foreign object up your nose). When a victim encounters a persecutor, they then look for a *rescuer* to save them or, at least, to alleviate their suffering. Enter the concerned parent.

And so the drama perpetuates the roles and the roles engage in the drama. Consider as well the parents at this moment, feeling the urgency of the situation and fearing, not necessarily sprouting apples, but the chance that their son may have created a problem worthy of an emergency room visit. The anxious mother switches between the roles of victim “Oh my gosh!” to persecutor “What did you do?!” to rescuer “Come here Honey so that we can get that out of there!”

In order for this situation to have a more positive outcome, we need an alternative to the problem-oriented roles of the Dreaded Drama Triangle (DDT). *The Power of TED\** suggests the alternative, outcome-oriented roles of *creator*, *challenger* and *coach*.

The *creator* is the central role in TED\*. When this role is consciously chosen, a creator taps into his or her capacity to choose their response to their life experiences. This person also owns their responsibility and contribution to their current circumstances. This role is result- and goal-oriented, focused on desired outcomes.

In his book, Emerald goes on to describe the other roles in this new dynamic. Along the way, a creator invariably meets up with the *challenger*, which is the antidote to

the drama role of persecutor. Creators welcome challengers. Creators are able to transform their perspective toward difficulties with people, conditions and/or circumstances into challenges to be met, understood, and (whenever possible) overcome. The challenger calls upon a creator's will and ability to create, often spurring him or her to learn new skills, make difficult decisions, and do whatever is necessary to achieve a dream or desire.

In order to more effectively move toward their dreams and desires, a creator can benefit greatly by having in their life a *coach*, which is the antidote to the role of the rescuer. A coach supports, assists, and facilitates a creator in clarifying and manifesting a creator's desired outcomes through the use of helpful questions. Coaches help creators perceive new possibilities; coaches dare them to dream! Thus, a coach acknowledges and helps leverage the power and capabilities of a creator and holds them accountable for taking the steps necessary to move forward. Most importantly, a coach sees the other as a creator that is creative and resourceful – even if they do not know it themselves.

With these roles in mind, the apple encounter could play out differently.

“I think we can figure this out.” Dad slows the moment by sitting down at the kitchen table. The son continues to circle. The parents settle into their seats and roles.

“Which side of your nose hurts?” Mom begins to coach the son into discovery. “Let's try an experiment. Try closing that side of your nose and blow hard through the other side.” Still circling, the son tests the air flow out of each nostril.

“Yup, there is definitely something in the right side. Blow harder.” Dad motions for the flashlight. “Here, can we use this to get a better look up there? Stand still.” Focusing on the intended outcome, the roles turn toward creator, challenger and coach. Working together to solve the situation, Dad draws the son's focus to the quest, helping

*the son to stand still, while Mom pinches the tweezers onto the little piece now within view. Excalibur is drawn from the tiny nostril.*

“How did that get in there?! This thing looks bigger than your nose!” Squeals of excitement, frustration and laughter mix. In the end, parenting is not always about removing foreign objects from orifices. It is often about empowering our children and ourselves to view our situations through the eyes of co-creators.

While such a shift sounds simple, it is often not an easy thing to do. In order for our children to become the creators they are capable of, parents must resist the temptation to solve or rescue every situation for the child. Instead, parents must grow in their own capacity to be a coach who asks good, powerful and guiding questions to help their child articulate outcomes, consider intended and unintended consequences, and so on. At times the parent must also step into the role of challenger, setting boundaries and determining consequences for choices made by the child (especially when it comes to small items and small noses).

When a family is interacting from a problem-based victim orientation, the Drama Triangle’s roles of victim, persecutor and rescuer keep both parent and child in a reactive, negative approach to life’s circumstances. When a family is present to *TED\** (*\*The Empowerment Dynamic*) and it’s roles of creator, challenger and coach, the outcome-based creator orientation opens a world of possible growth and development as our children, and their parents, learn life’s lessons. As a result, we experience parenting and family life from a more resourceful, fulfilling and, even during stressful times, positive perspective.