

Positive Communication

Positive communication does not mean only saying nice things and avoiding conflict.

- Be brief** Most people say more than necessary when they haven't planned in advance, especially when nervous or angry. Try to plan what you will say ahead of time and stick to it. Script, edit, and rehearse what you want to say as concisely as possible. Going off script and extra words can drown out your core message.
- Be specific** Being vague is easy to ignore or misunderstand, and is often difficult to translate into concrete behaviour. In contrast, referring to specific behaviours instead of thoughts or feelings makes change observable, measurable, and reinforceable. For instance, instead of telling your loved one to 'be more responsible,' specify a behaviour you want to see more of: 'On school days, I want you to get up when your alarm goes off.'
- Be positive** Where 'positive' entails describing what you *want*, instead of what you *don't want*. This shifts the framing from critical and complaining to supporting and doable, and ties into positive reinforcement strategies, since it's easier to reward someone for doing something - a concrete, verifiable *thing* - than for not doing something. Being positive in this way decreases defensiveness and rebellion and promotes motivation. Frame positively, 'you always embarrass me when you are drinking' becomes 'I love spending time with you when you are sober.'
- Label your feelings** Kept brief and in proportion, a description of your emotional reaction to the problem at hand can help with empathy and consideration from your loved one. For best results, state your feelings in a calm, non-accusatory manner. Using 'I' statements help to reduce accusation and can encourage your loved one to think about the impact it is having on you. It is important you are honest with your feelings and do not try to evoke guilt. For example, rather than saying 'you are breaking this family up, you don't care about our feelings and how your alcohol/drug use is affecting this family' you could say 'I feel your alcohol/drug use is putting strain on the rest of us, I sometimes feel like you don't realise the affect it is having.'
- Offer to help** Especially when phrased as a question, an offer to help can communicate non-blaming, problem-solving support. Try asking, 'is there any way I can help?' Or simply, 'how can I help?' A little goes a long way to improve communication and generate ideas. ('Yeah, if you texted me a reminder, that would help.')

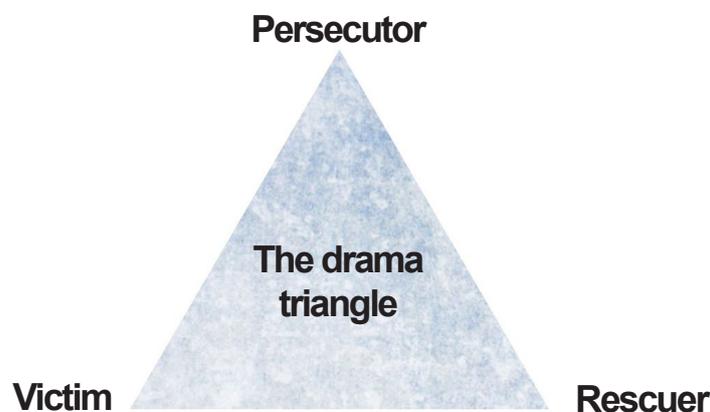
Take partial responsibility

Sharing in a problem, even a tiny piece of the problem, decreases defensiveness and promotes collaboration. It shows your loved one that you're interested in solving, not blaming. Accepting partial responsibility does not mean taking the blame or admitting fault; it communicates 'we're in this together.' An example of this may be, 'I know in the past I have made things worse by arguing with you, but I want us both to start getting on better.'

Offer an understanding statement

The more your loved one believes that you 'get' why they are acting the way they are, the less defensive they will be and the more likely to hear you and oblige. Plus, trying to understand your love one's perspective builds empathy, which will help the relationship.

Negative roles people fall into:



The persecutor

- Inflexible
- Blames
- Angry
- Accusatory
- Critical
- 'This is your fault'

The victim

- Feels guilt
- Needs someone to help
- Gives help even when not needed
- Assumes others need them
- 'You need my help'

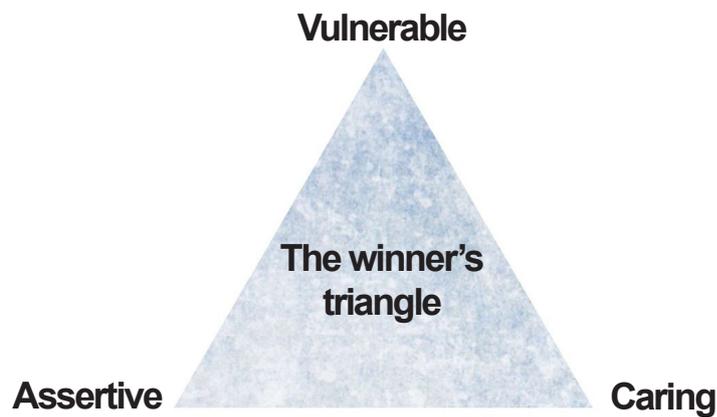
The rescuer

- Feels hard-done by
- Powerless
- Takes blame
- 'Poor me, I give up'

People often start in one role and move onto another. 'I was just trying to help (rescuer), and they turned on me (victim), so I had to defend myself (persecutor).'

Sometimes people maintain their role. For example a loved one can always take the role of persecutor while you maintain the role of rescuer.

It is important we recognise where we are on the triangle so we can get ourselves out of it. The cycle will continue until someone moves to clearer and healthier communication patterns.



Assertive

Accepts others values and integrity
 Knows own feelings, wants and needs
 Non-judgemental
 Uses 'I' statements

Caring

Accepts others ability to think for themselves
 Gives help when asked
 Cares and understands
 Doesn't need to be needed by others

Vulnerable

Accepts self
 Shares real feelings
 Does not need to feel in control

The winner's triangle shows us how to change our role to encourage more positive communication and breaking away from the drama triangle. If you recognise yourself as the persecutor try to be honest with yourself about what is making you angry, anger is a secondary emotion that usually happens when someone cares deeply about something or someone. Think about how you are honestly feeling and try to talk about that. It is okay to be vulnerable.

If you can associate with the rescuer you obviously care for your loved one, but also like to be needed. Does the person want or need your support? A caring role is about the development of listening skills that involve empathising with the vulnerable person. Listening is often the only caring response needed.

Assertiveness is about getting your needs met without punishing and becoming the persecutor. Self-awareness is essential in all three roles.

For you to try and support your loved one and find helpful ways of coping yourself, communication skills are important. Communication can help you to set boundaries that are healthy to all relationships. Sometimes families need additional help when communication breaks down. Learning more about positive communication can help.

Contact Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs' free, confidential helpline on 08080 10 10 11, helpline@sfad.org.uk for more information about this.