

## Handout 3

# The Seven Laws of an Emotional Triangle

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1. The relationship of any two members, A and B, of an emotional triangle is kept in balance by the way the third party, C, relates to each of them and to the relationship.
2. It is generally not possible for the third party, C, to bring about change in the relationship of A and B.
3. Attempts to change the relationship of the other two sides of an emotional triangle are not only ineffective but often have the opposite result of what one intends.
4. The third party, C, who unsuccessfully tries to change the relationship between A and B, often winds up carrying the stress for the other two. Thus the “dysfunctional” member is often not the “weakest” but the one who “over-functions.”
5. Triangles are infectious and interlocking: Triangling in yet another triangle diffuses the anxiety in the central triangle. Think about alliance formation in families and society. Change in the primary triangle leads to change in the others.
6. One side of the triangle tends to be more conflict-prone than the other two. In a healthy system, different sides of the triangle experience conflict with relatively similar frequency. Put differently, less healthy systems are more predictable and consistent in terms of who experiences the conflict. Triangles serve to lower anxiety.
7. You can only change a relationship if you are in it and if you can manage your anxiety and define your own values and goals without requiring others to agree or go along.