

Using Triangles
for
Psychodynamic
Case
Formulation

A Training for
Counselors & Mental
Health Practitioners

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Learning Objectives

Describe

- Describe the Triangle of Conflict

Describe

- Describe the Triangle of Person

Apply

- Apply both to case formulation

Identify

- Identify defenses, anxiety signals, and underlying feelings

Recognize

- Recognize relational patterns across time

Why Triangles?



Simplify complex emotional and relational data



Organize client material into coherent patterns



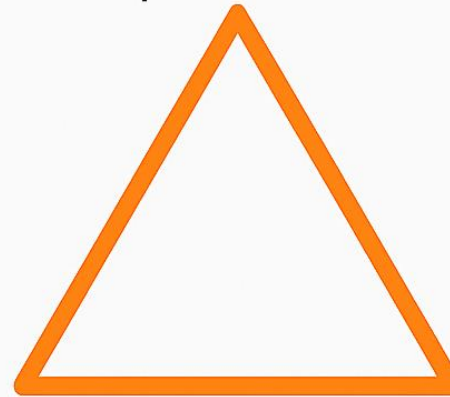
Reveal emotional drivers and relational templates

Triangle of Conflict

TRIANGLE OF CONFLICT

FEELING / IMPULSE

Core emotional
experience



ANXIETY

Signal that the
feeling is threatening

DEFENSES

Strategies to avoid
or manage anxiety

Feeling / Impulse

Core emotional experiences



Often developmentally rooted



Examples: anger, grief, longing,
shame



Anxiety




- SIGNALS THREAT OR DANGER



- SHOWS UP AS TENSION, WORRY,
CONFUSION, OVERTHINKING

Defenses

- STRATEGIES TO AVOID ANXIETY



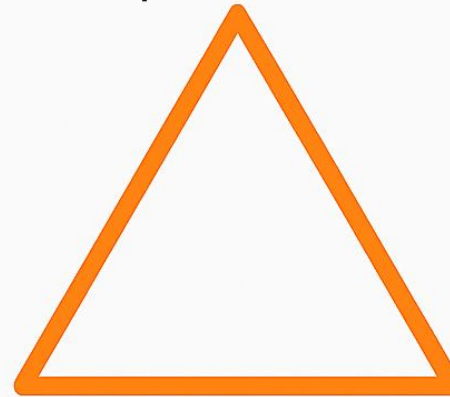
- EXAMPLES: HUMOR,
INTELLECTUALIZATION,
AVOIDANCE, PEOPLE-
PLEASING

Triangle of Conflict

TRIANGLE OF CONFLICT

FEELING / IMPULSE

Core emotional
experience



ANXIETY

Signal that the
feeling is threatening

DEFENSES

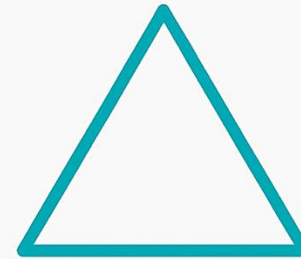
Strategies to avoid
or manage anxiety

Triangle of Person

TRIANGLE OF PERSON

PAST RELATIONSHIPS

Early caregivers,
attachment experiences



THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP

How the client
relates to
the counselor

CURRENT RELATIONSHIPS

Partners, friends,
coworkers, family

Past
Relationships

Early caregivers,
attachment
templates

Emotional rules
and
expectations

Current Relationships

Repetition of past patterns

Shows up in conflict, communication, attachment

Therapeutic Relationship

Therapy as a
relational
microcosm



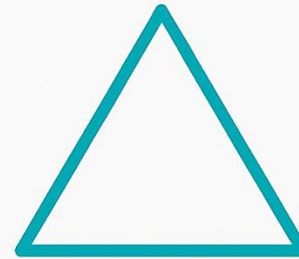
Watch for
transference,
avoidance,
closeness-seeking

Triangle of Person

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Early caregivers,
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Integrating Both Triangles

Triangle of Conflict = emotional map

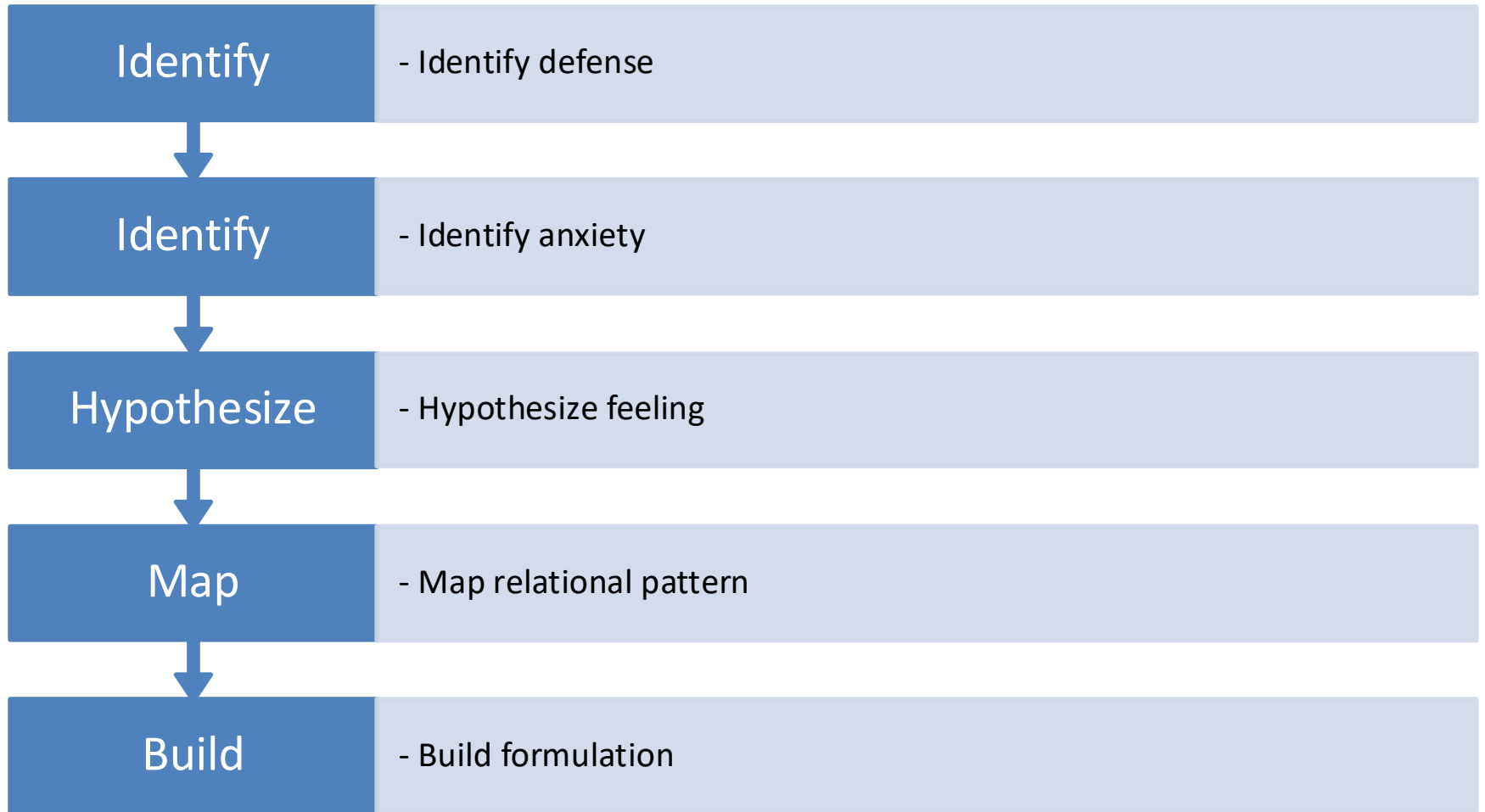


Triangle of Person = relational map



Together: 360° formulation

Step-by-Step Integration



Case Vignette

- “I don’t want to bother anyone with my problems.”

Triangle of
Conflict
(Case)

- Defense:
Minimizing

- Anxiety: Fear of
burdening

- Feeling: Longing,
anger

Triangle of Person (Case)

- Past: Overwhelmed
caregiver

- Present: Overfunctioning,
resentment

- Therapy: Hesitant to ask
for help

Formulation Summary

- Learned to suppress needs

- Repeats pattern in relationships

- May appear in therapy

Practical Uses

1

- Organize client narratives

2

- Understand emotional drivers

3

- Anticipate therapy dynamics



Reflection

- Think of a client where the triangles clarify their patterns. What stands out?

Contact

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