



Three Legs of a Triangle

Based on the work by Nancy Pizzo Boucher

- I. Introduction
 - A. Living with a family member who can be unstable, at times, leading to crises, can be very challenging.
 - B. The strategies that families use have mixed effectiveness as many of you have shared. These include calling the police (without having done the education or legwork in advance); throwing the family member out; involuntary hospitalization; harm to self or others; and, generally not considering what would be a more effective way to manage, ie no pre-planning.
 - C. Using the image of a three-legged triangle (or stool), it is clear that it would topple were even one of the legs withdrawn. In other words, just withdrawing one of the legs would defuse the situation enough to manage more effectively.
- II. Triangle Leg One is “proximity, opportunity, and access to things that can be used as a weapon.”
 - A. Proximity means within reach, in the vicinity of, nearness, closeness.
 - B. Opportunity is the chance, the opening, the break.
 - C. Access is approach, contact, opening.
 - D. A weapon can be obvious like a knife, scissors, other sharp objects. However, a weapon can also be furniture, books, other loose objects. Don’t forget about hands and legs.
 - E. Remove alcohol and other drugs. A lock box or a locked closet may be viable.
- III. Triangle Leg Two is when individual with serious mental illness is experiencing symptoms of high emotion that is disinhibiting, drive, and impulsive. These are symptoms such as paranoia, delusions, and confused thinking.
- IV. Triangle Leg Three is person or persons in the home for the loved one in crisis to outlet his/her intolerable internal distress onto.
- V. Points to Ponder:
 - A. Remove one leg and the situation is likely to be defused.
 - B. Family members have some control over the first and third legs which greatly reduces the likelihood of injury.



Grow A Strong Family, Inc.

Building resilience one family at a time.

- C. Family members leave the situation, quietly. Leave a note somewhere that your loved one can see it. Express concern in the note by acknowledging that they are not feeling well; having serious symptoms, your words are threatening and your behavior is not safe. Use your strategies (name a couple). You can calm down, and when you are calm and safe, call us! We love you. We believe in you.”
- VI. Family CPRR:
 - A. Compassion: Be kind.
 - B. Parental/Partner Guidance: Direction.
 - C. Reassurance: Comfort; Faith; Encouragement.
 - D. Responsibility: Loved one is responsible for their behavior.
- VII. Exercises:
 - A. Look around your environment and determine what may be used as a weapon.
 - B. Locate medicines, alcohol, cigarettes and matches, etc. and lock up.
 - C. Relocate sharp objects, sprays, toxic liquids
 - D. Review WRAP or other soothing plan.
 - E. Implement crisis/safety plan.
- VIII. Summary:
 - A. Implement whatever crisis plan is in place.
 - B. Get help; whether or not your loved one wants it. Better to err on the side of acting than not acting.
 - C. Be clear about your boundaries and implement them kindly, respectfully, lovingly, and firmly.
 - D. Your mental health and well-being is just as important for your loved ones as for you. Oxygen masks on YOU first.

Resources are on

What is Grow a Strong Family? GASF is a family life education organization that offers services to families uprooted by mental illness. Grow a Strong Family Inc. is a tax-exempt non-profit corporation which is dependent upon fee-for-service contributions, donations, and grants.

What is Family Life Education? Family Life Education focuses on healthy family functioning within a family systems perspective (whole family) through a primarily preventive approach through education and support.

For more information, visit us: <https://growastrongfamily.org/>