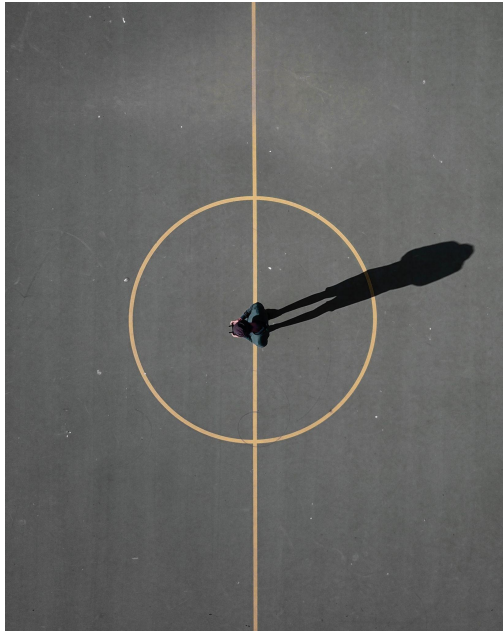


Mental Health Geometry 2: The Circle

Photo by [Luís Eusébio](#) on [Unsplash](#)



In my last blog, I discussed how the Triangle can be used to diagram the connection between a person's thoughts, feelings and actions. In this article, I'll describe how a circle can be used to illustrate how one's own emotions and behaviors are connected.

Emotions drive our behavior. Since our emotions are our interpretations of our safety situation, we need our bodies to be set up to react to our emotions in order to survive. (For a deep dive on this idea, see the works of [Joseph LeDoux](#)). Given the centrality of our emotions to how we behave, we learn surprisingly little about them in school, though this is changing as Social Emotional Learning is taking hold as a valued curriculum area.

Fortunately for anyone trying to understand how their emotions drive their own behavior, a set of circular diagrams called the Pain Cycle and Peace Cycle can be used to map this out. These diagrams are used in [Restoration Therapy](#).

Underlying this model is the idea that when we experience emotional pain, we react to try to feel better. This type of coping is often destructive outside a survival context. For example, when feeling threatened by a bear in the forest, I might raise my hands above my head to appear larger and harder to mess with. Quite likely to help. In a social situation however, if I feel threatened and try to puff myself up and brag to seem bigger, it's not likely to help, especially not in the long run. That's destructive coping.

Here is a word-bank from the Free E-book PDF, [Relate Strong. Leadership Series eBook](#) that describes the sources and types of pain we might be experiencing and trying to cope with.

Words Expressing Pain Rooted in Identity	Words Expressing Pain Stemming from Sense of Safety
Unloved, unworthy, insignificant, alone, worthless, devalued, defective, rejected, unaccepted, unwanted, judged, unappreciated, hopeless	Unsafe, insecure, unsure, used, unfair, guilty, helpless, powerless, out of control, controlled, vulnerable, disconnected, unknown, abandoned, inadequate, failure, invalidated, unable to measure up

Figure 1.1. Words People Use to Express Primary Emotional Pain

We can recognize destructive coping more easily in others. Maybe you've said this about a friend recently, "Well, that's just how they get when stuff is not going their way." Like it or not, we all have a 'way we get' when things aren't going our way. Said another way, when our survival mechanisms are triggered by non-survival situations, we feel emotional pain and react in a way that might have value in the right context, but probably isn't ideal today.

Here's how that can look specifically: The following diagrams are also from the [Relate Strong, Leadership Series eBook](#).

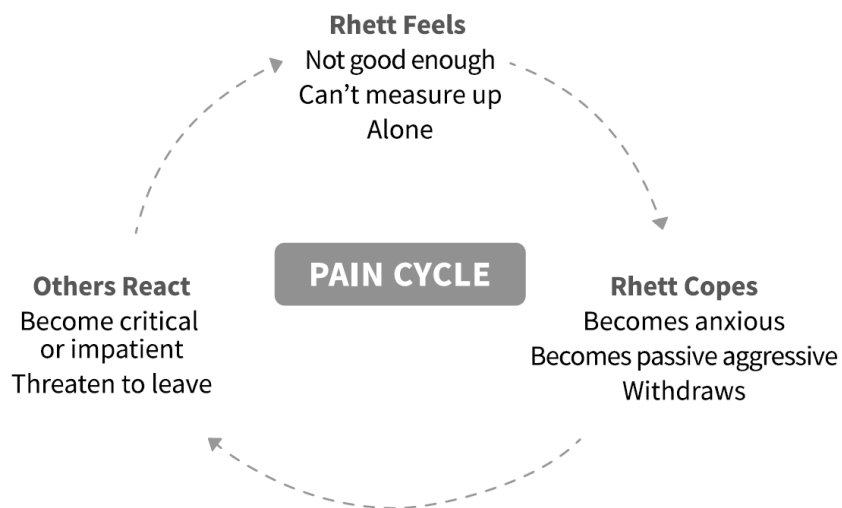


Figure 6.1. Rhett's Pain Cycle

Fortunately, reactive, destructive coping is not all there is to emotional power. If instead of reacting to pain, we are responding to something settling that we know to be true, our natural actions are completely different.

Truths People Feel When They Experience Peace in Their Identities	Truths People Feel When They Experience Peace in Their Senses of Safety
Loved, worthy, significant, not alone, prized, valuable, precious, approved, accepted, wanted, appreciated, hopeful, free	Safe, secure, adequate, sure, fulfilled, capable, empowered, in control, protected, connected, intimate, competent, validated, enough

Figure 1.6. Truths People Feel When They Experience Primary Emotional Peace

Grounding one’s self in what is really true is a skill and details of how to do this are too much for this blog, but briefly, it involves finding evidence of a settling, grounding truth perhaps from you memories, perhaps from what trusted people tell you. It also involves learning how to remind yourself of these truths in such a way that you really feel it. For example, by looking at a photo that proves that someone loves you, or calling someone who cares about you and experiencing that care.

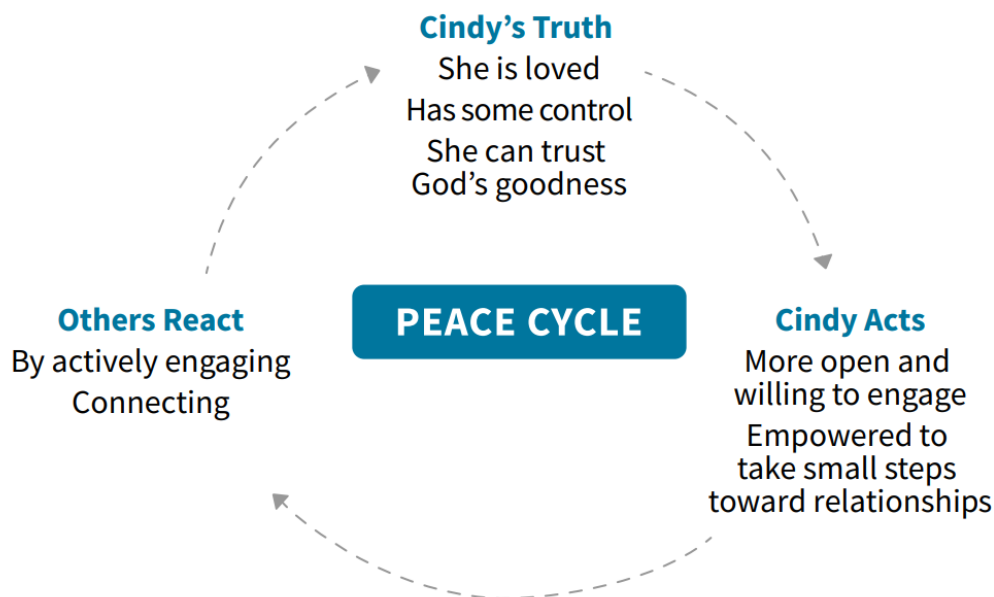


Figure 2.2. Cindy's Peace Cycle

By working out and diagramming what tends to set you off, how you usually react, what's true instead and how you act when you are at peace and free to be at your best, you have a map that can change your life. It helps to have it written down, but anytime anywhere you can use these four steps:

1. **Say what you feel.** (What kind of safety or belonging threat are you feeling?)
2. **Say what you usually do.** (That destructive, reactive coping).

3. **Say what is true.** (What is true that can reassure you and bring you peace in the midst of what is distressing you?)
4. Say what you will choose to do. (How will you act when the truth has set you free?)

Are you more of an auditory learner? Here is a podcast on this same topic:

<https://rhettsmith.com/2015/11/rhett-smith-podcast-39-how-violations-of-love-and-trust-construct-your-pain-cycle/>

Read about therapy based on this model:

<https://www.restorationtherapytraining.com/rtt-overview/>

Find a therapist trained in this model:

<https://www.restorationtherapytraining.com/find-a-therapist/>