



Karen Horney's Neurotic Framework Map

A systems view of how basic anxiety shapes needs, strategies, identity, pride, self-conflict and ongoing emotional patterns.

KEY DRIVERS

Basic Anxiety
Core feeling of isolation, helplessness and threat.

Neurotic Needs
Exaggerated needs for security, love, approval, power, prestige, etc.

Coping Trends
Three main directions we move in relationship to others.

Pride System
Built on the idealized self; creates rigid demands.

Self-Conflict
Inability to meet impossible standards leads to self-hate and more anxiety.

Cycle
The pattern is self-perpetuating until insight and change occur.

HEALTHY ALTERNATIVE

- ✓ Realistic self-acceptance
- ✓ Flexible use of all three movements
- ✓ Spontaneity & authenticity
- ✓ Capacity for intimacy
- ✓ Growth & self-direction
- ✓ Reduced basic anxiety

EARLY RELATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Rejection / Hostility

Insecurity / Instability

Lack of Warmth

BASIC ANXIETY
"I am isolated and helpless in a potentially hostile world."

NEUROTIC NEEDS
Excessive need for safety, approval, affection, control, recognition, etc.

THREE NEUROTIC TRENDS

MOVE TOWARD PEOPLE

Compliance
Dependency
Approval
Belonging

Hidden fear:
"I can't survive alone."

MOVE AGAINST PEOPLE

Dominance / Exploitation
Competition
Control

Hidden fear:
"Others will exploit me unless I'm stronger."

MOVE AWAY FROM PEOPLE

Detachment / Independence
Emotional Distance
Self-Sufficiency

Hidden fear:
"I will be trapped, controlled, or hurt."

RIGID COPING STRATEGY
A habitual way to reduce anxiety (descends from one of the three trends).

IDEALIZED SELF
"Who I believe I MUST become."

SHOULD / MUST RULES
"I should be perfect / powerful / independent / lovable..."

PRIDE SYSTEM
"I deserve to be the idealized self."

DEMANDS ON SELF
Perfectionism
Self-control
Invulnerability
High performance

DEMANDS ON OTHERS
"They should..."
Entitlement
Control
Ideal expectations

REAL SELF
Cannot match the ideal.

SELF-DISCREPANCY
Gap between real self and idealized self.

SELF-HATE
"I am inadequate / defective."

INNER TYRANNY
"I must fix myself → I still fail."

MORE BASIC ANXIETY
Anxiety intensifies and the cycle continues.

UNDERSTANDING THE THREE MOVEMENTS

We all use all three movements. The issue is rigidity and overuse of one.

TOWARD PEOPLE

- ✓ Seeks closeness
- ✓ Pleasant, yielding
- ✓ Seeks approval
- ✓ Risk: dependency, loss of self

AGAINST PEOPLE

- ✓ Seeks power
- ✓ Controls, dominates
- ✓ Competes
- ✓ Risk: hostility, exploitation, isolation

AWAY FROM PEOPLE

- ✓ Seeks distance
- ✓ Independent, withdrawn
- ✓ Avoids entanglement
- ✓ Risk: isolation, emotional coldness

OUTCOMES OF UNHEALTHY PATTERNS

Anxiety & worry

Relationship conflict

Chronic dissatisfaction

Perfectionism

Depression / emptiness

Burnout

PATH TO CHANGE

Awareness of patterns

Self-compassion

More flexible coping

Balance in relationships

Realistic goals

Ability to experience joy, connection and meaning

