

Understanding the Enneagram

By: Michael Shahan





What is the Enneagram?

More than a personality test.

Why Over What

The Enneagram is a personality test with a crucial distinction over similar personality tests like Meyers-Briggs, the DISC, etc.) Instead of focusing on WHAT you do, the Enneagram focuses on WHY you do what you do.

What It Looks Like

The Enneagram consists of nine different numbers, each number representing a different core motivation and core fear that each drive the decisions you make, whether you're aware of it or not.

Why It Matters

More than anything, the Enneagram, at its best, helps you develop compassion for yourself and for others. It is an amazing tool for growth. The Enneagram allows you to see some of the most difficult parts of yourself that you can't see without intentional reflection. It gives you a blueprint for understanding why you act the way you do. And if you are able to do the hard work and look at those blueprints, you will finally have what you need to begin growing in a long-lasting, transformative way.

Breaking Down the Enneagram

The Basics:

- 01.** Your number does NOT define you. It shows you the defense mechanisms you most readily and subconsciously go to in life.
- 02.** The Enneagram is based on WHY you do what you do. Your number is always based on your core motivation.
- 03.** Being categorized into one number does not make you identical to other people with your number. Think about it as shades of a color: we have scarlet, crimson, burgundy, and mahogany are different from one another, but they are all still iterations of red. The same concept applies to your Enneagram number.
- 04.** Knowing your number is not the end. It's the beginning of your growth journey with the Enneagram.

Answers To Common Questions:

- 01.** You don't change numbers throughout your life.
- 02.** No one but you can truly decide what your number is.
- 03.** You cannot be two numbers at the same time. We all have a little of each number in us, but you have a single dominant number.
- 04.** The Enneagram uses numbers because numbers are arbitrary and don't say anything about character or personality. Enneagram numbers are often given names by different people, but don't immediately hold onto or dismiss a number due to its name.

Tips To Help Find Your Number More Accurately

- 01.** If you see a number and think, "Yes! I would love to be that number!" It's probably not your number.
- 02.** Finding your number can be a long discovery process for some people. Don't be discouraged!
- 03.** Once you find your number, you may not love it. This is because your subconscious starts to get uncomfortable when you get close to touching unconscious motivations behind your number.
- 04.** Look into the things that each number needs to do in order to grow. If you find yourself very averse to doing those things, then it is very likely that is your number.

Introducing Enneagram Triads

The circle of the Enneagram is split into three equal parts with three numbers in each triad. Each triad represents a different way that we process information.

Do we process information more with our gut (the Instinctual Triad), with our heart (the Feeling Triad), or with our head (the Thinking Triad)?



GUT



HEART



HEAD

As human beings, we process things through all three of these, but the triad that your Enneagram number lands in shows you which way of processing you naturally lean on the most.

Instinctual Triad: Overplays the importance of their own **gut instincts** and therefore struggle with issues of control.



Thinking Triad:
Overplays the importance of their own **thoughts** and therefore struggle with issues of safety and security.

Feeling Triad:
Overplays the importance of their own **feelings** and therefore struggle with issues of identity.

Understanding Your Triad Struggles

Each number within each triad handles the struggle of their triad in a different way. They either look to solve the specific struggle of their triad externally, internally, or both internally and externally.

It's important to understand that deciding which triad you land in can actually be very difficult. It's possible that you don't even realize just how much you are driven by your emotions, for example.

Which Reaction Would You Have?

Jim Gum, the creator of Story Enneagram offers a great illustration of how to decide which triad you are in. He shows a video of him that went viral a few years ago, where he is crawling to the edge of a cliff, too scared to look over. He noticed people reacting to this scenario in three different ways, which revealed how the three different triads respond to things differently:

- 01. Instinctive Triad:** People had a visceral reaction. Their stomach dropped and they physically felt the fear of being so close to a cliff edge just by watching the video.
- 02. Feeling Triad:** People loved the relationship they saw between his wife filming and him crawling. They pointed out the banter and how wonderful they were as a couple. Their hearts were stirred by what they saw.
- 03. Thinking Triad:** People thought that it made total sense that he was so afraid. Falling off of a cliff that high would kill him. They thought about the danger of the situation.

You see how each triad reacts to the same scenario in a different way? This illustrates how each triad processes things differently. Identifying how you respond to things, whether it is from your gut, from your heart, or from your head, can help you narrow down which Triad your Enneagram number lies in.

Instinctive Triad

Struggle: Wanting to resist and control the environment.

Mindset: "I am what I do."

Focus: The present

Wants: Autonomy

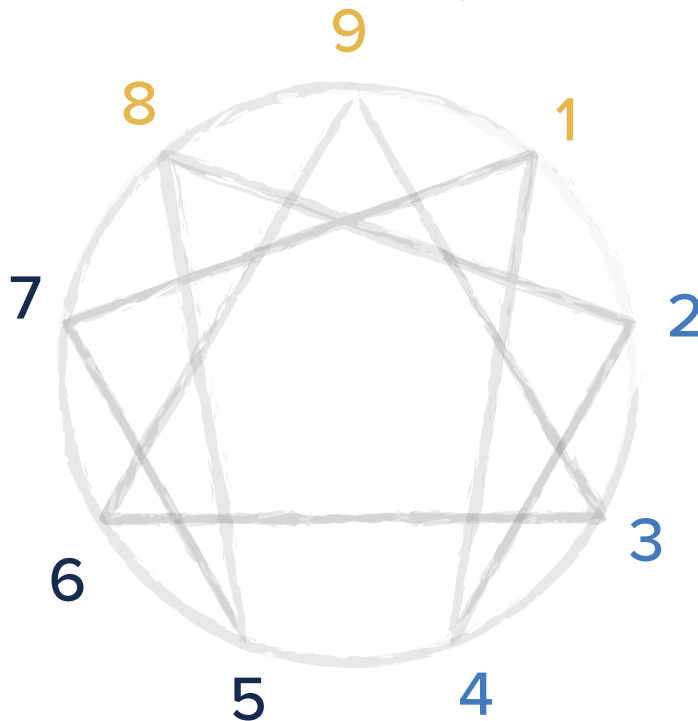
Primary Emotion: Anger

People in this triad put their practical wants and needs in the background. This is what each number ignores:

8s: Rest and relaxation

9s: Priorities, preferences, opinions

1s: Play and pleasure



Thinking Triad

Struggle: Wanting to find support and guidance.

Mindset: "I am what I have."

Focus: The future

Wants: Safety and security.

Primary Emotion: Fear

People in this triad experience fear that causes them to:

5s: Detach and minimize their need for others.

6s: Understand threats and uncertainty.

7s: Focus on what is positive and exciting.

Feeling Triad

Struggle: Wanting to find a sense of identity.

Mindset: "I am what other people think of me."

Focus: The past

Wants: Attention

Primary Emotion: Shame

People in this triad try to gain approval from others through:

2s: Having a likable and pleasing image.

3s: Creating an image of achievement and success.

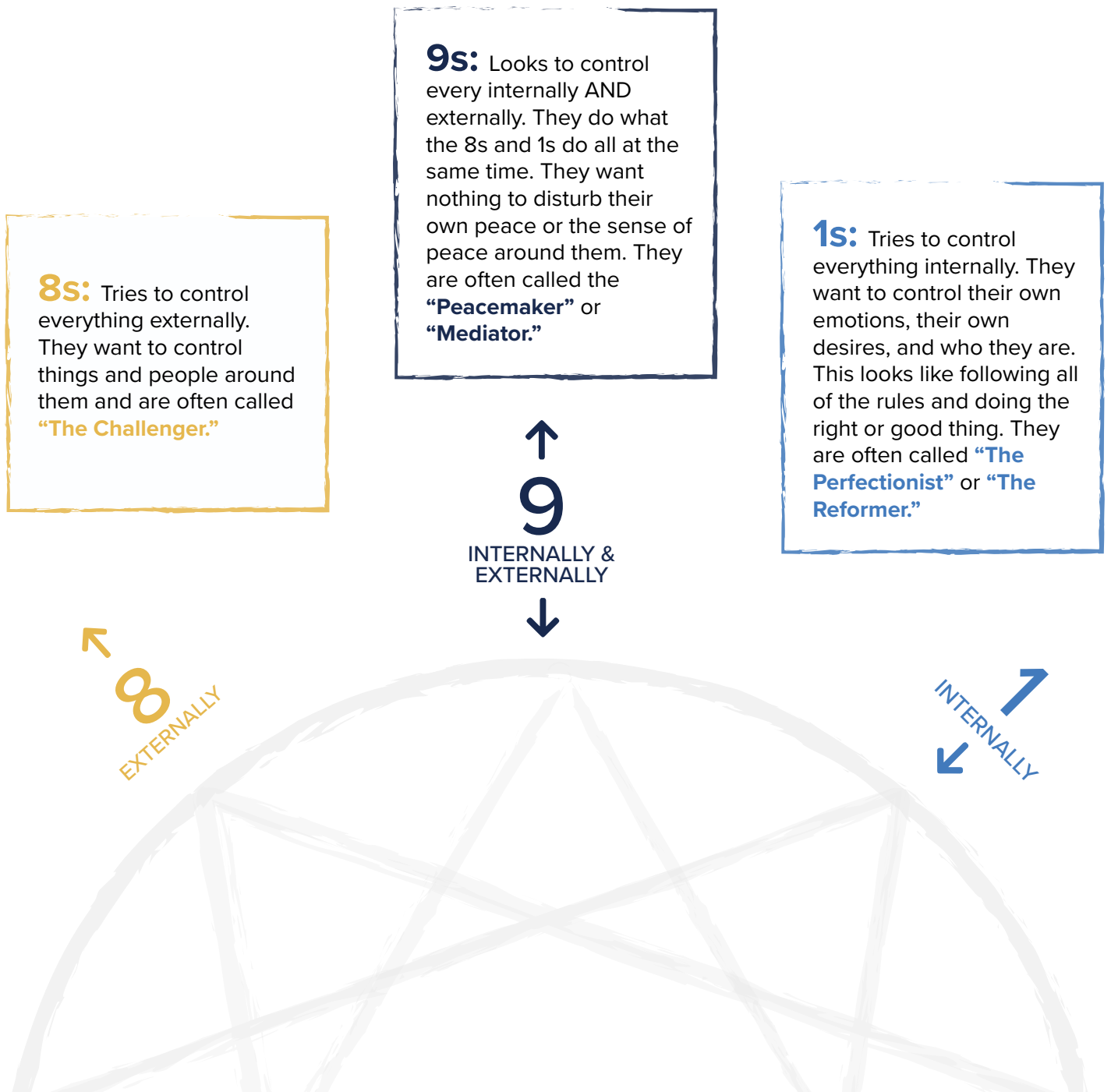
4s: Being unique and special.

Triad Struggles and Reactions

Each triad shares common struggles among its numbers, but each individual number processes and reacts differently to that struggle. Depending on the number, people will either process their struggle internally, externally, or both. Here's how that plays out:

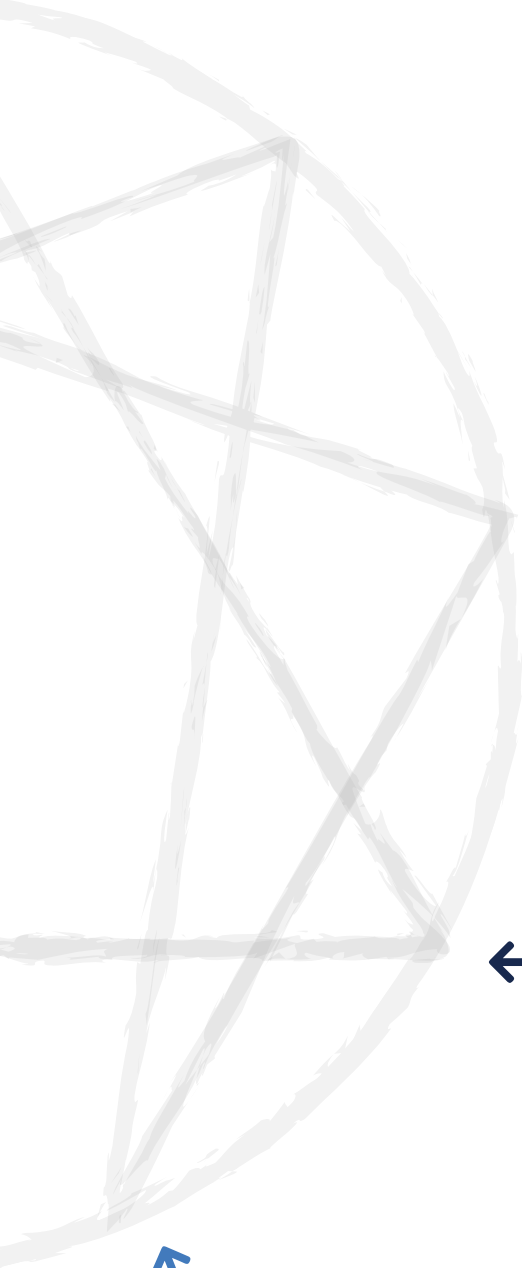
Instinctive Triad

Each Number within the Instinctive Triad struggles with issues of control more than the other six Enneagram numbers. They want to affect the world, but not be affected by it. While all three share this same struggle, they each do something different to solve their need for control.



Feeling Triad

Each number within the Feeling Triad struggles with the lack of a sense of their own identity more than other numbers. They are always looking to shed their false self and discover who they really are. While all three share this same struggle, they each do something different to solve their search for identity.



2s: Seeks sense of identity externally. They try to be seen in a positive light by others. They do this by giving their energy and attention to others, hoping to be kind, friendly, and helpful enough to be liked. They are often called **“The Helper.”**

2 EXTERNALLY →

3s: Look both internally AND externally to find their sense of identity. They try to create a unique and internal picture of themselves, while at the same time craving the external validation from others through achievements. They are often called **“The Achiever.”**

← **3** INTERNALLY & EXTERNALLY →

4s: Turns internally to find their sense of identity. The opposite of a 2, they over-identify with the negative aspects of themselves. They see themselves as different, unique, and unlike anyone else. They are often called **“The Individualist.”**

↑ **4** INTERNALLY

Thinking Triad

Each number within the Thinking Triad struggles with finding a sense of inner guidance and support. They are always seeking to find safety and security which they lack internally more than the other six numbers.

7s: Looks to find a sense of security from internal things. They are afraid of what is inside of them. They jump into the next adventure and are always looking for the next thing to do so that they don't have to come in contact with the feelings inside them. This is why they are often called "**The Enthusiast**" or "**The Adventurer.**"

6s: Try to find a sense of security from internal AND external sources. They pull inside for fear of external things like a 5, but then they can't trust even themselves, so they move into external actions. Then, they fear making mistakes and doing the wrong thing, so they pull back internally again. They look for support from others to feel okay, but then can't trust that support. They tend to be very loyal to the people they love and to their beliefs. This number is often called "**The Loyalist.**"

5s: Seeks security from external things. They're afraid of the external world. They shrink into their own heads and try to figure everything out so that they can be safe from the things around them. They are extremely cognitive and knowledgeable. They are often called "**The Investigator.**"

INTERNALLY 7 →

← INTERNALLY & EXTERNALLY 6 →

← EXTERNALLY 5



Enneagram Numbers at Their Core

As I mentioned earlier, there are infinite shades of what each number can look like. Often, people who are the same number can do very different things in life. Alternatively, people who are different numbers can do very similar things.

Understanding the basic overviews of characteristics and tendencies will really help you discover just how differently people see the world. I hope this will help you develop compassion for yourself and those around you. Remember, the Enneagram does not box you in: it is a tool for transformative growth and a guide to help you understand yourself and others on a deeper level.

ENNEAGRAM NUMBER 1

BASIC FEAR:

Being bad, defective, evil, corrupt.

BASIC DESIRE:

To be good, virtuous, in balance; to have integrity

MAIN FOCUS OF ATTENTION:

Errors and imperfections.

MAIN DEFENSE MECHANISM:

Reaction formation.

BLIND SPOT:

Their own efforts to be good and to do the right thing

DRIVING BELIEF OF SELF:

"You are good or okay if you do what is right."

SUPERPOWER:

Being able to see what is wrong in any given situation and how to fix it.

ENNEAGRAM NUMBER 2

BASIC FEAR:

Being unloved and unwanted.

BASIC DESIRE:

To feel loved.

MAIN FOCUS OF ATTENTION:

Other people's needs and feelings.

MAIN DEFENSE MECHANISM:

Repression.

BLIND SPOT:

Their own boundaries and their unmet needs for love

DRIVING BELIEF OF SELF:

"You are good or okay if you are loved by others and are close to them."

SUPERPOWER:

Excellent friends who go to great lengths to take care of and support those they love. Keen ability to sense the needs of others in a room.

ENNEAGRAM NUMBER 3

BASIC FEAR:

Being worthless and without value apart from their achievement.

BASIC DESIRE:

To feel worthy, accepted, and desirable.

MAIN FOCUS OF ATTENTION:

Achieving goals and tasks and creating a positive image of success.

MAIN DEFENSE MECHANISM:

Identification

BLIND SPOT:

Their own true self, separate from how they want to appear.

DRIVING BELIEF OF SELF:

"You are good or okay as long as you are successful and others think well of you."

SUPERPOWER:

Their ability to make things happen by finding the most direct path to their goal, removing obstacles that might get in their way, and looking good the whole time.

ENNEAGRAM NUMBER 4

BASIC FEAR:

Having no identity or no personal significance.

BASIC DESIRE:

To find themselves and their significance; to create identity out of their inner experience.

MAIN FOCUS OF ATTENTION:

Their own inner experiences, their emotions, others' emotions, and their interpersonal connections.

MAIN DEFENSE MECHANISM:

Introjection.

BLIND SPOT:

Their own positive attributes.

DRIVING BELIEF OF SELF:

"You are good or okay if you are true to yourself."

SUPERPOWER:

Naturally emotionally intuitive and comfortable in situations involving intense feelings and usually empower others to feel and accept their emotions.

ENNEAGRAM NUMBER 5

BASIC FEAR:

Being helpless, useless, incapable, or overwhelmed.

BASIC DESIRE:

To be capable and competent.

MAIN FOCUS OF ATTENTION:

Their energy and resources.

MAIN DEFENSE MECHANISM:

Isolation.

BLIND SPOT:

Their own emotions and their need for love.

DRIVING BELIEF OF SELF:

"You are good or okay if you have mastered something."

SUPERPOWER:

Highly skilled at performing rational, objective analysis of issues or situations and the ability to stay very calm in times of crisis.

ENNEAGRAM NUMBER 6

BASIC FEAR:

Having no support and guidance; being unable to survive on their own.

BASIC DESIRE:

To find security and support.

MAIN FOCUS OF ATTENTION:

Potential threats.

MAIN DEFENSE MECHANISM:

Projection and splitting.

BLIND SPOT:

Their own authority, strength, and capability.

DRIVING BELIEF OF SELF:

"You are good or okay if you do what is expected of you."

SUPERPOWER:

Their talent for seeing through false pretenses and detecting ulterior motives and hidden agendas.

ENNEAGRAM NUMBER 7

BASIC FEAR:

Being deprived or trapped in pain.

BASIC DESIRE:

To be happy, satisfied, and fulfilled.

MAIN FOCUS OF ATTENTION:

Their own experiences and needs.

MAIN DEFENSE MECHANISM:

Rationalization and idealization.

BLIND SPOT:

Their own pain and discomfort.

DRIVING BELIEF OF SELF:

“You are good or okay if you get what you need.”

SUPERPOWER:

The power of positive thinking and the ability to see interesting ideas and positive possibilities anywhere.

ENNEAGRAM NUMBER 8

BASIC FEAR:

Being harmed or controlled by others; violation.

BASIC DESIRE:

To protect themselves, to determine their own course in life.

MAIN FOCUS OF ATTENTION:

Who has the power and who doesn't?

MAIN DEFENSE MECHANISM:

Denial.

BLIND SPOT:

Their own weakness and vulnerability.

DRIVING BELIEF OF SELF:

“You are good or okay if you are strong and in control of your situation.”

SUPERPOWER:

Hard workers who make order out of chaos, bring powerful energy to the table, and accomplish important tasks in the world.

ENNEAGRAM NUMBER 9

BASIC FEAR:

Loss and separation; annihilation

BASIC DESIRE:

To maintain their inner stability and peace of mind.

MAIN FOCUS OF ATTENTION:

Other people's expectations of them.

MAIN DEFENSE MECHANISM:

Disassociation.

BLIND SPOT:

Their own feelings, opinions, and truths.

DRIVING BELIEF OF SELF:

“You are good or okay as long as those around you are good or okay.”

SUPERPOWER:

Providing steadfast support to others in a way that makes everyone around them feel honored and included.

Enneagram Wings

There is a lot more to understand about your personality beyond just your number. Enneagram Wings and Instinctual Variants help you further identify your type and grow even more.

Wings: Your “wing” will be either one number to the right or left of your dominant number on the Enneagram circle. A lot of people talk about wings, but it’s very important to remember that your core motivation is still found in your main number. Wings simply add nuance.



More Notes on Wings

- It's VERY uncommon to have your personality even split in both wings.
- Your dominant wing is always adjacent to your dominant number on the Enneagram circle.
- Wings can be fluid throughout your life as your strengths and circumstances change.
- It's important not to let information about your wing distract you from working on the core aspects of your dominant number.

Instinctual Variants

Also called **subtypes**, I believe these hold a lot more value than wings. All social creatures have instincts that keep them alive and help them connect with one another and the group as a whole. These instincts are: **Self-Preservation (1)**, **Sexual (1+1)**, and **Social (3+)**. We all have these three instincts within us, but one of them will be dominant, one will be repressed, and one will fall in the middle.

When your dominant instinct is combined with the core motivation of your Enneagram number, they come together to create an even more specific “subtype.” Your dominant “Instinctual Drive” gives a slightly different “flavor” to your Enneagram number, creating an even more specific description of your personality.

Self-Preservation Subtype (1)

Drives us to pursue survival and material security.

Self-preservation is the desire to keep yourself safe and alive. Those dominant in this instinct are most preoccupied with getting and maintaining physical safety and comfort.

Example: Self-Preservation Instincts walk into a party and first notice how comfortable the room is. Is the lighting okay? Are there comfortable places to sit?

Sexual Subtype (1+1)

Drives us to search for connection and exciting experiences.

Sexual subtypes seek intense contact more than others. They have a wide-ranging, exploratory approach to life.

Example: Sexual Instincts walk into a party and notice who the most exciting person is, who has the most energy, and they spend time with them to revel in the experience.

Social Subtype (3+)

Drives us to want to be liked, approved of, and feel safe with others.

Social subtypes are more preoccupied with being accepted and necessary in their world than other types. They like to be involved and interact with others for a common purpose.

Example: Social Instincts walk into a party and notice the politics of the room: who’s in charge, who is friends with whom, which separate groups are here, and where is my place in the room.

Levels of Development

Coined by Don Richard Riso and Russ Hudson, the Levels of Development in the Enneagram outlines nine different levels of health within each Enneagram number. The more we are driven by our fear and defensiveness, the less healthy we are within our number.

On the other hand, the more we are aware of our automatic habits and unexamined belief systems, the more we are able to lay them down and work towards health.

When this happens, we become the absolute best version of our number. We are able to utilize the amazing strengths of our number, without being addicted to a certain desire or controlled by a certain fear of our number.

HEALTHY

- Level 1: The Level of Liberation
- Level 2: The Level of Psychological Capacity
- Level 3: The Level of Social Value

AVERAGE

- Level 4: The Level of Imbalance/ Social Role
- Level 5: The Level of Interpersonal Control
- Level 6: The Level of Overcompensation

UNHEALTHY

- Level 7: The Level of Violation
- Level 8: The Level of Obsession and Compulsion
- Level 9: The Level of Pathological Destructiveness

Directions of Integration and Disintegration

The Directions of Integration and Disintegration give us objective markers of what happens in times of growth (which can lead to a healthy level of development) and of what happens in these times of stress (which can lead to an unhealthy level of development).

One of the big theories of the Enneagram is that each number tends to start looking like one specific other number when they are growing in health, and another specific number when they are stressed out and getting stuck.

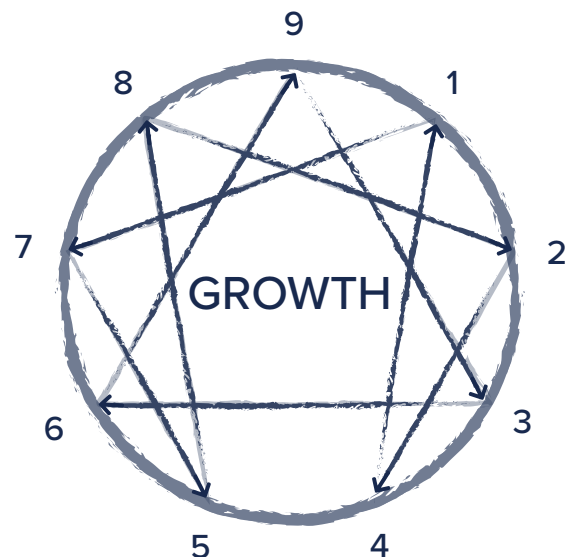
This is what the lines on the inside of the Enneagram point to. Each number is connected to two other numbers. This shows which number they move to in growth (integration) and stress (disintegration).

Understanding these concepts allows you to dive deeper into the many layers that make up your Enneagram number.



- 1 Methodical Ones suddenly become moody and irrational at Four.
- 2 Needy Twos suddenly become aggressive and dominating at Eight.
- 3 Driven Threes suddenly become disengaged and apathetic at Nine.
- 4 Aloof Fours suddenly become overinvolved and clinging at Two.
- 5 Detached Fives suddenly become hyperactive and scattered at Seven.
- 6 Dutiful Sixes suddenly become competitive and arrogant at Three.
- 7 Scattered Sevens suddenly become perfectionistic and critical at One.
- 8 Self-confident Eights suddenly become secretive and fearful at Five.
- 9 Complacent Nines suddenly become anxious and worried at Six.

- 1 Angry, critical Ones become more spontaneous and joyful like healthy Sevens.
- 2 Proudful, self-deceptive Twos become more self-nurturing and emotionally aware, like healthy Fours.
- 3 Vain, deceitful Threes become more cooperative and committed to others, like healthy Sixes.
- 4 Envious, emotionally turbulent Fours become more objective and principled, like healthy Ones.
- 5 Avaricious, detached Fives become more self-confident and decisive, like healthy Eights.
- 6 Fearful, pessimistic Sixes become more relaxed and optimistic, like healthy Nines.
- 7 Gluttonous, scattered Sevens become more focused and profound, like healthy Fives.
- 8 Lustful, controlling Eights become more open-hearted and caring, like healthy Twos.
- 9 Slothful, self-neglecting Nines become more self-developing and energetic, like healthy Threes.



Resources

There are so many amazing resources out there that provide profound insight on the Enneagram if you want to dive deeper. Here's a resource list of some of my favorites in case you want to learn more!

Books:

"The Road Back To You" by Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile

"The Wisdom of the Enneagram" by Don Richard Riso and Russ Hudson

"The Complete Enneagram: 27 Paths to Greater Self-Knowledge" by Beatrice Chestnut

"The Sacred Enneagram Enneagram: Finding Your Unique Path to Spiritual Growth" by Christopher L. Heuertz

Podcasts:

The Typology Podcast by Ian Morgan Cron

The Road Back to You: Looking at Life Through the Lens of the Enneagram

The Enneagram Journey with Suzanne Stabile

The Sleeping At Last Podcast

Instagram Enneagram Accounts:

@justmyenneatype - Especially for Instinctual Variants and Subtypes

@enneagramandcoffee - I love the creative mantras and encouragement for each number.

@enneagramexplained - Highly geared toward using the Enneagram as a tool for growth!

@enneagramjoy - Publishes really cool mini series posts for each number that are helpful, encouraging, and informative.

@enneagram.life - A great resource to help you type yourself more accurately and has some of my favorite posts about Enneagram Wings.

@storyenneagram - An amazing online resource for learning more about your Enneagram number and growing in your relationships!