



Transactional Analysis for Self Help

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ABSTRACT

All transactions in our life are made with certain expectations. Occasionally contracts are made with multiple parties - with all parties to the contract having their own expectations. If these expectations are all compatible then things work out, if they are ambiguous, it is better to discuss out everybody's expectations which will lead to greater understanding and therefore to a clear contract. Contracts need to be outlined in positive words i.e. what is wanted, rather than what is not wanted. Transactional Analysis helps in improving communication, it helps the sender to send clear expectations.

KEYWORDS

Eric Berne, Transactional Analysis, Parent ego state, Adult ego state, Child ego state, Negotiation skills, Self-talk, Thomas Harris, I am ok, you are ok.

In the 1960s, Dr. Eric Berne designed a communication style called Transactional Analysis (TA). Dr. Berne proposed that verbal communication is the core of all social interactions, especially the face-to-face communication. We find that some people are authoritative in their tone and body language, some are vulnerable – childlike while some are curt -straight forward and tend to take instant decisions. Dr. Berne observed that people interchange into their ego states of Child, Parent and Adult depending on situations they face; any person is made up of 3 alter ego personas. Their responses depend on conditions; in vulnerable situations their communication is not all that effective.

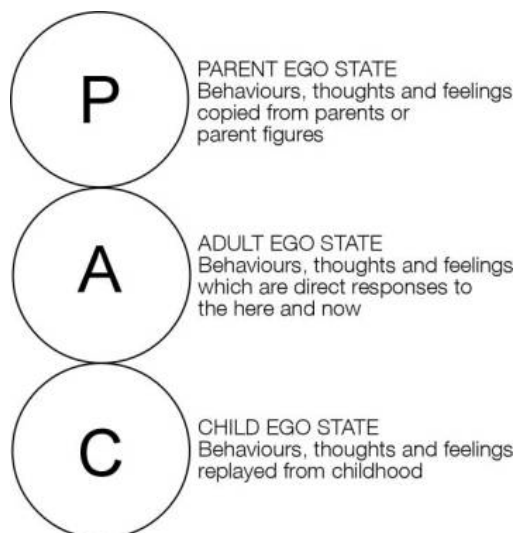
In an ideal situation, communication between 2 individuals should always be in Adults state. In that way, both individuals are thoughtful, reasonable, and able to make mature decisions. But in reality, that does not happen. TA helps in understanding why someone wants to do something, why someone wants to deal with some particular person, what they want to do, by when they want to complete some work and in exchange of what.

For example, your boss talks to you in Parent state; as though, he/she knows everything better than you know. Your friend is undergoing a divorce and is not too sure of her feelings, she is in a Child ego state; all that you are talking to her in logical sense loses its essence, because she is vulnerable at that moment. These sorts of communication problems often occur in our lives, but we just don't understand how or why they happen. Dr. Berne's work is now used to examine and improve conversation between individuals conducting business.

All transactions in our life are made with certain expectations. Occasionally contracts are made with multiple parties - with all parties to the contract having their own expectations. If these expectations are all compatible then things work out, if they are ambiguous, it is better to discuss out everybody's expectations which will lead to greater understanding and therefore to a clear contract. Contracts need to be outlined in positive words i.e. what is wanted, rather than what is not wanted. Dr. Berne observed that our minds tend to focus on the negative aspects first, which encourages failure. For example, we are so suspicious in nature, that when we are given certain instructions we tend to do what we are not told to do.

People who are good in negotiation skills seem to have mastered transactional analysis. It is very important to adopt to a suitable ego state to resolve differences and to get the best deal. Conflicts and disagreements are inevitable; from time-to-time they keep arising due to our expectations and wants. We don't realize that each person has a different belief system.

Without negotiation, such conflicts may lead to argument and resentment resulting in one or all of the parties feeling dissatisfied. The point of negotiation is to try to reach agreements without causing future barriers in communications.



Dr. Berne's concept of ego states helps to explain how we are made up, and how we relate to others. These are drawn as three piled circles and they are one of the building blocks of Transactional Analysis. They set the ways we think, feel and behave and are called Parent, Adult, and Child. Each ego state is given a capital letter to denote the difference between actual parents, adults and children.

Parent ego state



This is a set of feelings, thinking and behavior that we have

copied from our parents and significant others in our lives. As we grow up we get inspired and take in ideas, beliefs, feelings and behaviors from our parents and custodians. If we live in an extended family then there are more people to learn and take in from. When we do this, it is called interrupting and it is just as if we take in the whole of the care giver. At times, we realize that saying things just as our father, mother, uncle, aunt or grandmother or an elderly neighbor. We use some statements by which we are influenced greatly. Consciously, even if we don't want to, we do this as we have lived with this person so long that we automatically replicate certain things that were said to us, or treat others as we might have been treated. The parent ego state can be of two types: a nurturing parent or a controlling parent.

Adult ego state

The Adult ego state is about direct responses to the here and now. We deal with things the way they need to be dealt with without allowing our past experience to hinder with it. Adult state does not allow our past to influence our decisions.

The Adult ego state is about being spontaneous and aware with the capacity and familiarity. When we transact through our Adult ego state, we are able to see people as they are, rather than what we project onto them. We seek information for taking rational decisions. Assumptions have no room in our decision making. Taking the best from the past and using it appropriately in the present is a combination of the positive aspects of both our Parent and Child ego states. So this can be called the Integrating Adult. Integrating means that we are constantly updating ourselves through our everyday experiences and using this for our rationality. The Adult in us is the 'grown up' rational person who talks reasonably and assertively, yet neither trying to control nor reacting aggressively towards others. The Adult is comfortable with himself/herself and is, for many of us, our 'ideal self'.

Child ego state

The Child ego state is a set of behaviors, thoughts and feelings which are replayed from our own childhood. They say our core personalities are developed from 0-5 years in our childhood.

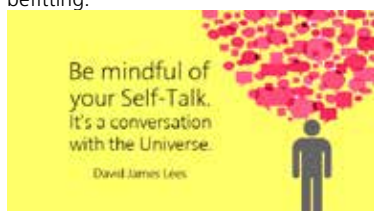
Perhaps the boss calls us into his or her office, we may immediately get a churning in our stomach and wonder what we have done wrong. If this were explored we might remember the time the head teacher called us in to tell us off. Of course, not everything in the Child ego state is negative. We might go into someone's house and smell a lovely smell and remember our grandmother's house when we were little, and all the same warm feelings we had at five years of age may come flooding back.

Remember that both the Parent and Child ego states are constantly being updated. There are three types of child we play:

Natural child is aware of himself/herself. They are open to new ideas, they are playful and vulnerable.

Another is a cute professor. This child is curious and exploring. He/she always tries out new things, such as child often annoys the parent.

The third one is Adaptive child who tries to adapt himself/herself to the surrounding by changing or molding according to situation. At times they rebel against forces which are not fitting.



Self-talk needs observation:

In structural model of TA, the Integrating Adult ego state circle is placed in the middle to show how it needs to coordinate between the Parent and the Child ego states. For example, the internal Parent ego state may beat up on the internal Child, saying "look you did it wrong again, you are no good, you are shabby, you are stupid, you are useless". The Child may then respond with "I am no good, I am useless, I am stupid, I can never do it good, I never get it right." It is so important to nurture the child in us. It is therefore, very important to keep a tab on our self-talk. When we do not pay attention to our internal dialogue, as it goes on constantly, we make or break our self-image. An effective Integrating Adult ego state can intervene between the Parent and Child ego states. This might be done by stating that this kind of parenting is not helpful and asking if it is prepared to learn another way. Alternatively, the Integrating Adult ego state can just stop any negative dialogue and decide to develop another positive Parent ego state perhaps taken in from other people they have met over the years.

Emotional growth of child: People unknowingly only concentrate on the stages of their child's physical development and have little insight or understanding about the importance of child's emotional development. It is so important to understand child's emotional development. Rarely, we see parents who acknowledge how their child might be feeling at a particular time and what impressions they are making on the child. It is important to remember that each child develops in his/her own unique way depending on its personality.

TA rests on these facts: the human brain acts like a tape recorder, and while we may 'forget' experiences, the brain still has them recorded. Along with events the brain also records the associated feelings, and both feelings and events stay locked together. It is possible for a person to exist in two states simultaneously. Hidden experiences when replayed are intense, and affect how we feel at the time of replaying. The body reacts to our mental condition; the link between the biological and the psychological states is very strong, psychological fear of cockroaches might create a biological feeling of vomiting.



I am ok, you are ok:

Thomas Harris wrote the famous book 'I am ok, you are ok' based on Eric Berne's TA. The phrase *I'm OK, You're OK* is one of four «life positions» that each of us may take. The four positions are:

I'm Not OK, You're OK

I'm Not OK, You're Not OK

I'm OK, You're Not OK

I'm OK, You're OK

Harris observes in his book that people who have troubled

childhood conclude *I'm Not OK, You're Not OK* or *I'm OK, and you are Not OK*. The emphasis of the book is to help out people understand how their life position affects their communications (transactions) and relationships.

others.

TA gives people a choice about how they react when confronted with an interpersonal situation which makes them feel uncomfortable. Harris provides practical suggestions regarding how to stay in the Adult ego state, despite provocations from