

# **Enlighten Up Your Day**

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Three Ego States**

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## The Three Ego States

There are three ego states that a person will access dependent upon their particular circumstances. These are the Parent Ego state, the Adult Ego state, and the Child Ego state.<sup>i</sup> Each of these ego states serves an important function in the overall maintenance of our feelings and our ability to relate effectively with other people. To be clear, these are not separate personalities, but rather, represent aspects of the overall ego-function. Going forward, we will be referring to the ego states by their abbreviated name, i.e., Parent Ego, Adult Ego, and Child Ego.

### Parent Ego (Rules)

The Parent Ego is the part of the mind that is the storehouse of our internalized rules, morals, and ethics. When we are operating from this state we are concerned about doing the right thing. The Parent Ego is patterned after our primary caregivers and authority figures.

### Adult Ego (Strategies)

When we are operating in the Adult Ego we are managing our day-to-day concerns. We can balance reason and feelings without imposing our rules and sensibilities onto other people. Our emotions tend to be stable and we are more objective in our thinking. The Adult Ego is able to strike a balance between the Parent Ego and the Child Ego.

### Child Ego (Feelings)

The Child Ego is the source of feelings such as inspiration, wonder, charm, playfulness, and joy. Without access to the Child Ego we would lose much of what makes life fun and worthwhile. It is here that we can risk being vulnerable. When the Child Ego is tempered by the Adult Ego we can enjoy the pleasures of life absent of overindulgence or reckless disregard of the consequences. We are also able to express our feelings without venting, blaming, or repressing them.

### Parent Ego

Data base of rules, morality, and ethics.  
Derived from early interactions with parents and authority figures.

### Adult Ego

In the Adult Ego we can operate in an effective way that balances reason and emotion. It is here that we modify the rules of the Parent Ego and take responsibility for the feelings of the Child Ego.

### Child Ego

The Child Ego is the source of feelings and creativity. It is from this state that we allow for emotional expression and fun in life. The energy of the Child Ego gives color and depth to our experiences.



## Learning to Recognize Your Current Ego State

A good indication that we have become hooked by one of the ego states is in the way we feel. It is likely we have been hooked by the Parent Ego state when we're feeling especially irritable, judgmental, and are using lots of should statements. Other indications are feelings of guilt and shame. "I should be more motivated. I shouldn't be so lazy!" When we get hooked by the Child Ego state we might have an emotional uproar and want to shut down. Our inner dialogue may sound like, "I can't believe this! Why does this always happen to me? It's not fair." When we are operating from the Adult Ego state we feel more stable and our thoughts are focused on problem-solving and practical matters.

When do you get hooked? List an example for each ego state and use the questions to clarify some of your habitual patterns.

When were you in your Parent Ego state?

What were the circumstances?

What were your feeling indicators?

Did you notice any should statements? If so, what are some examples?

When were you in your Child Ego state?

What were the circumstances?

What were your feeling indicators?

Did you notice any blaming or defensiveness? If so, what are some examples?

When were you in your Adult Ego state?

What were the circumstances?

What were your feeling indicators?

What were your practical or problem-solving thoughts?

## Operating From the Adult Ego

Understanding the three ego states and becoming familiar with our patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting within these states enables us to shift into and operate from the Adult Ego with increasing ease. Listed below are a number of beneficial activities to use if we become emotionally triggered and want to return to a feeling of balance and calm.

- Physically remove our self from the proximity of the triggering situation if possible.
- Assume ownership for our feelings and our present life circumstances.
- Check the facts and weigh the evidence to counter emotional reasoning.
- Avoid mindreading or making negative assumptions about the motives of others.
- Use calming techniques such as slow breathing, meditation, or prayer.
- Pivot our attention to things we are grateful for and appreciation.
- Look for solutions instead of problems.
- Give ourselves permission to take care of our emotional needs. Another term for this is being self-full.
- Consider which of the "Five Choices" (Chapter One) we can use to address the situation.

It's important to our self-worth that we recognize and appreciate the skills that we are already using. You may, in fact, be using some of these activities naturally. If so, list one or two.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

Now choose three of the sample activities that you would like to add to your skill set. Begin to use them with more and more consistency until they become a beneficial habit.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

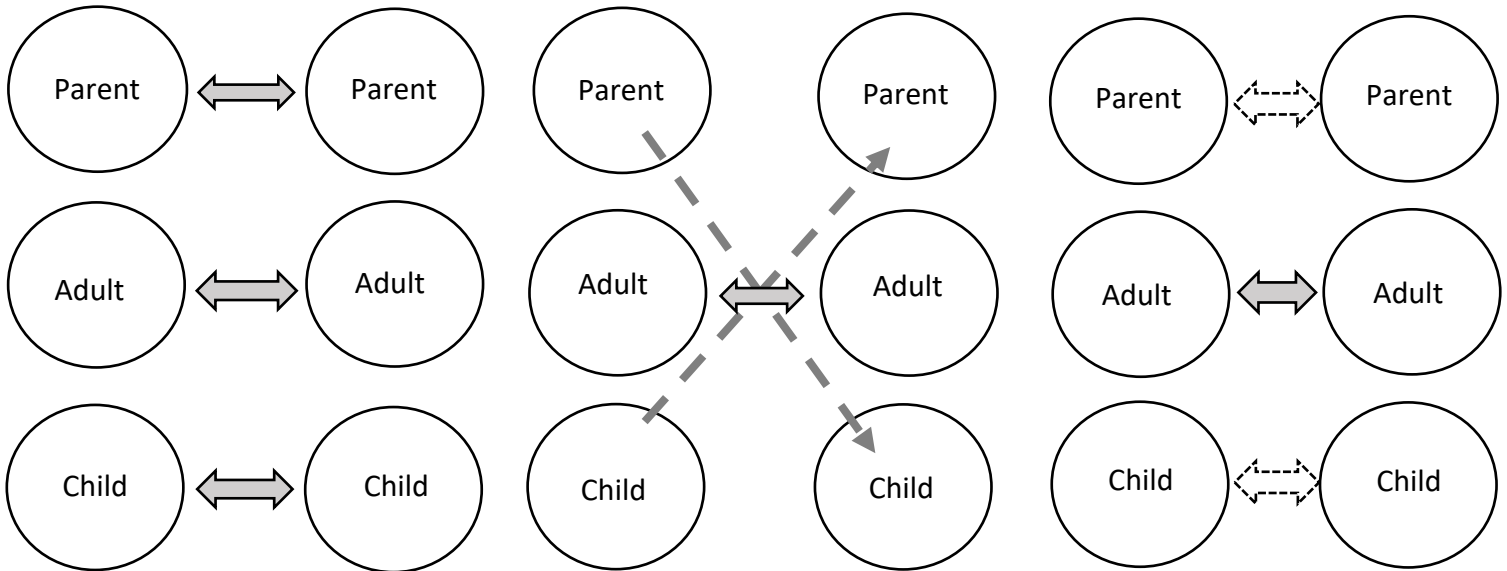
2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_



## Transactions

A transaction is a unit of social interaction between people.<sup>ii</sup> It's like giving someone a dollar bill and the other person gives you one in return. For instance, if someone says "hi, how are you?" and you say, "I'm good, how are you?" This is a basic one-to-one transaction. Below are diagrams of how we transact between our three ego-states (Parent, Adult, Child) represented as complementary, cross, duplexed, and covert interactions.



### Complementary Transactions

Parent-to-Parent:

Mr. Green and Mrs. Blue are having a discussion about the fair division of responsibility for the daily cleaning of the company breakroom.

Adult-to-Adult:

Mr. Green and Mrs. Blue are organizing the schedule of a company event.

Child-to-Child:

Mr. Green and Mrs. Blue are having fun together with co-workers at a new restaurant that opened down the street.

### Cross Transactions

**Child-to-Parent and Parent-to-Child**

Parent-to-Child:

Mr. Green and Mrs. Blue are having what appears to be an Adult-to-Adult discussion about the fair division of labor regarding the daily cleaning of the breakroom.

However, Mr. Green has actually assumed the Parent role by lecturing Mrs. Blue for not following his rule that cleaning is women's work.

Mrs. Blue has shifted into the Child state feeling hurt and angry. She goes into defensive mode by playing Courtroom and enlisting her co-workers to side with her against Mr. Green.

### Duplexed Transactions

**Adult-to-Adult, Covert Child-to-Child, and Parent-to-Parent.**

Adult-to-Adult:

Allison has sought out a tutor to help her with her statistics class. Tom volunteers to tutor Allison.

Covert Child-to-Child

Allison and Tom spend half of their study time flirting.

Covert Parent-to-Parent

Allison and Tom spend half of their study time complaining that Mr. Red's approach to grading is unfair.



## Transactions Continued

Adult-to-Adult ego transactions are less prone to go sideways than Parent-to-Parent or Child-to-Child transactions. When we are operating in the Adult Ego state we sometimes forget to enjoy the fun side of life. However, it is more likely that people will get into harmful interactions if overtaken by the Parent or Child Ego states. Let's look at two examples. . .

**Child to Child:** In this example the participants have become emotionally flooded and regressed to name calling and blaming. They may also resort to stonewalling to punish the other party.

**Player one** – “You never listen. *You make me* so mad. All you ever think about is yourself!”

(Blaming, attacking).

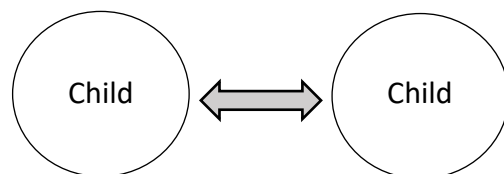
**Player two** – “If you weren't such a nag all the time I *wouldn't have to* ignore you. You're *never* happy. I'm done talking to you!” (Blaming, generalizing, stonewalling).

**Parent to Parent:** This happens when each participant is convinced that they have the moral high ground. They engage in a fight to be right by attempting to force their moral sensibilities onto the other person.

**Player one** – “*Everyone says that you should* spend more time helping with the housework. You're just like every other man in the world, lazy!” (Attacking, generalizing).

**Player two** – “If it wasn't for me working so hard we'd be on the street. Is that what you want?”

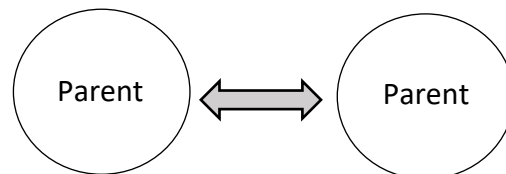
(The 'see how hard I'm trying' defense mechanism).



Counter blaming by taking responsibility for your part in things.

Counter attacking by being respectful.

Counter stonewalling by talking about wanting to stonewall.



Counter attacking by being respectful.

Counter generalizing by identifying specific instances.

Counter the 'see how hard I'm trying' defense mechanism by taking ownership for your choices in life.

Counter should statements by turning them into preference statements and taking ownership for your moral perspective.

## Understanding Transactions

To better understand your transactions you will need to take time for attention, reflection, and introspection. Starting with attention; highlight your interactions and record them in shorthand. Shorthand means to jot down only the pertinent information with regard to your transactions. The more you practice, the more insights you will gain and the better you will get with shorthand.

Now it's time for reflection. In these interactions describe what was happening, which ego state were you relating from, and the time and place it happened. Try to identify what ego state the other players were relating from and describe how the interaction unfolded.

### **Attention and Reflection:**

*Use the following questions as a guide. Be sure to invite your own inspiration.*

When you related to someone from the Parent Ego what were your should statements? What was their reaction in the situation? How did you feel at the end of the interaction?

When you related to someone from the Child Ego how would you describe your emotional state? How would you describe their emotional state? How did you feel at the end of the interaction?

When you related to someone from the Adult Ego how did the interaction play out and how did you feel at the end?



## Understanding Transactions Continued

**Introspection.** Through introspection we examine our mental and emotional processes. During the stage of attention and reflection we noticed patterns in our interactions and transactions. By raising those patterns into awareness we access the power of change. If I want to have a happier experience with my co-worker, I can look at my transaction patterns with them and make a change. Some ideas of how to change patterns are offered here:

**Parent Ego:** I can take ownership for my moral perspective instead of fighting to be right. I can assume that other people have good intentions just like me. I can recognize that most people are doing the best they can with what they know.

**Child Ego:** I can practice self-soothing when I feel emotionally flooded. I can remember that I am responsible for my emotions. I can express my feelings without hurting others.

**Adult Ego:** I can remember to make time for fun in life. I can practice connecting to my feelings in an accepting way absent of judgment or suppressing them. I can pace myself to avoid burnout.

## Summary

As we begin to separate our core sense of self from our ego-as-an-operating-system we increase our ability to act intentionally from the three ego states. We understand that each of the ego states serves an important function and has positive aspects that we can draw from. Within the Child Ego we discover a wellspring of feelings and excitement for life's many possibilities. In the Parent Ego we find our Cardinal Values and sense of morality and ethics. And in the Adult Ego we come into our potential for acting and relating to our Child and Parent Ego information in a mature and insightful way.

### Points to consider:

- There are three ego-states that a person can operate from. These are the Parent Ego, the Adult Ego, and the Child Ego.
- Each of the ego-states serves an important function in the overall processing of information, feelings, and our ability to relate effectively with other people and circumstances.
- A good indication that we have become taken over or “hooked” by one of our ego states is by the way we feel.
- Once we understand the Three Ego States, the goal is to align intentionally with the role of the Adult Ego. A good way to do this is by being mindful of what we are thinking and feeling.
- A transaction is a unit of social interaction between people. Transactions can be complementary, crossed, duplexed, and covert. Adult-to-Adult ego transactions are less prone to go sideways than Parent-to-Parent or Child-to-Child transactions.

## References:

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- <sup>i</sup> Harris, T. A. (1955) *I'm Okay, You're Okay*. New York, NY. Harper Books
- <sup>ii</sup> Berne, E. (1964) *Games People Play: the basic handbook of transactional analysis*. New York, NY. Ballantine Books