

TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS Parent, Child, & Adult Messages

Every human being has three ego states: a parent, an adult, and a child. In any given day you will probably spend some time in each ego state, and each will affect how you behave. Your communication style will vary markedly depending on whether you are functioning from the parent, adult, or child position.

The Parent - Orders

A huge collection of rules, moral dictums, how-to-do-it instructions - full of *commands* and *value judgments* - "Don't... Never... Always... All..." The punitive parent will use judgmental words like disgusting, stupid, ridiculous, and idiotic. The supportive parent uses perfect, wonderful, or excellent. You tend to discuss problems in terms of what "*ought to*" and "*should be*" done. *Ought* and *Should* statement are a real tip-off that you're in your parent state.

The Child - Reacts

This is where you discover a great deal of energy: tears, pouting, temper tantrums, and whining - "I hate, I wish, why do I have to." Feelings of disapproval, punishment, and negative feelings. Feeling not OK. Retreats into hurt and anger when it senses rejection. An acting out stage. Where emotions rule the roost!

The Adult - Responds, Chooses

You juggle the intense feelings and needs of the child and the rules and mandates of the parent. The adult makes decisions. The adult examines the conditions of the outside world and makes predictions about likely outcomes. On the inside, the adult listens to the advice of the parent and hears out the needs and reactions of the child. The goal is to strengthen the adult.

Sometimes the adult is overwhelmed or contaminated by the child or parent. You can tell when your adult has succumbed to your child because you tend to act on intense feelings and impulses without examining them. Your feelings overwhelm you. You may express them by whining, complaining, having crying jags or tantrums.

When your adult is contaminated by your parent, the result is usually a large supply of unquestioned prejudices. You have strict, unexamined beliefs. You are strait-jacketed in rules that you have no permission to evaluate. Often you communicate with an attacking, blaming style.

The healthy adult knows the needs of the child and is aware of the rules of the parent. But it can function independently. It communicates and makes decisions without blocking out or giving up control to either of them.

Communications that come from your adult position are direct and straight. Your adult listens, reflects, describes, it asks questions, it assesses probabilities, seeks clarity; it evaluates the known and the unknown, the true and the false. It has opinions rather than dogmatic judgments or beliefs. It is aware, but the awareness is less and less overwhelmed and controlled by the emotions.

1. Learn to recognize your child, its vulnerabilities, its fears, and its primary ways of expressing these feelings.
2. Learn to recognize your parent, its rules, injunctions, fixed ideas, and primary ways of expressing these commands.