

Games People Play

“Transactional Analysis (TA) is a powerful tool in management and communications training and in organisational analysis. TA can be used in any field where there is a need for understanding of individuals, relationships and communication” (Stewart, I. & Joines, V., 1989, p. 3).

Here, we'll explore one aspect of TA, the ego states. Understanding these patterns of feeling, thinking and behaving will enhance your ability to communicate with others. TA maintains that we all have three ego states, each a separate and distinct source of behaviour. Below is a simplified explanation.



P

Parent ego state is the behaviour, thoughts, feelings copied from parents or parent figures. The parent ego state can be divided into two, the critical parent and the nurturing parent. Critical parent can be moralistic or judgmental (aggressive), or assertive and factual. Nurturing parent can be helpful, caring and supportive, or taking over.

In this state we copy how our parents or authority figures behaved or told us what we should do, and in so doing, we are replaying behaviours from our past. Many of the negative perceptions of some officials is the view that the official often slips into parent mode when communicating with players which even for adults can result in them adopting a child ego state in response.



A

Adult ego state is the behaviour, thoughts, feelings which are direct responses to the here and now. The adult state is open, honest and assertive. It's based on creating equal relationships through clear communication without hidden agendas. In this state, we are behaving in a rationale and a reasonable manner in the here and now.

As an official this is the state in which you want to operate. If you are in the adult ego state and demonstrate its behaviours, the players you are dealing with are most likely to adopt the same state in response.



C

Child ego state is behaviour, thoughts, feelings replayed from childhood. The child state can be either an adapted child or a free child. Adapted child can be compliant and uncritical (passive), or rebellious and destructive (as in the “two year old tantrums”!). Free child reacts spontaneously, is changeable, fun, creative and naïve. It can also behave in ways that may be life threatening.

In this state we are replaying behaviours from the past learned when adapting to our parents, e.g., being polite, using manners. They can also include sulking when we don't get our own way, hitting back and refusing to do things we don't like. A frustrated player can easily slip into this state when they perceive they aren't getting their own way and feel that the official may be showing bias. As mentioned before, if an official adopts the adult ego state when officiating then examples of child-like behaviour in response is more likely.

“For a healthy and balanced personality, we need all three of our ego states. We need Adult for the here-and-now problem solving that enables us to tackle life in a competent, effective way. To fit comfortably into society, we need the sets of rules we carry in our Parent. In our Child ego state, we have access to the spontaneity, creativity and intuitive power we enjoyed in our childhood.” (Stewart & Joines, 1987, p.14).

Breaking “Games”

Be Aware

Sometimes it is difficult to know if you are in a game because of the subtle nature of games. However, if you feel discounted or believe you are not getting anywhere in your communications with players, coaches and spectators, you are probably in a “game”.

Cultivate Openness

You and the players are in this together. If you both do not work together in a straightforward manner, you will be pulling apart. As a result, non-playing time in the game will be prolonged and, this will result in frustrations for all those involved.

Be Rationale and Reasonable

If you remain in the adult state when officiating, and avoid slipping into the critical parent state, the players are most likely to respond in the adult state as well. How do you keep someone in the adult state? Ask questions – that’s a great place to start.

Stop Exaggerating

Games involve one-upmanship. *I am better or stronger, or in the case of an official - smarter than you* is their implied meaning. Games can be terminated or avoided by getting down to the facts and by resisting the temptation to impress or depress the players. Egotists and masochists are often on the receiving end of most negative strokes. If an official turns up to prove something about themselves, rather than for the purpose of just officiating a good game, that’s game playing.