

Key concepts of transactional analysis

Below is an exploration of some of the key concepts of transactional analysis that a therapist will use in their work.

Ego-states

Ego-states refer to the three major parts of an individual's personality, and they each reflect an entire system of thought, feeling and behaviour.

These ego-states are:

- Parent- Rooted in the past; a set of thoughts, feelings and behaviours learnt from our parents and other important people. This part of our personality can be supportive or critical.
- Adult- Rooted in the present; relates to direct responses in the 'here and now' that are not influenced by our past. This tends to be the most rational part of our personality.
- Child- Rooted in the past; a set of thoughts, feelings and behaviours learnt from our childhood. These can be free and natural or strongly adapted to parental influences.

Our ego-states determine how we express ourselves as individuals, interact with each other and form relationships. The simplicity of the terminology used in TA makes the model very accessible.

Unconscious scripts

TA therapists recognise that we all have the potential to live the life we want, rather than the life we are programmed to live. Sometimes, however, this potential is hindered by repetitive patterns or 'unconscious scripts' that stem from childhood decisions and teachings.

TA therapists use script theory to identify these unconscious scripts. These will be analysed using the ego-state model, and their identification is crucial to helping clients realise how certain permissions and prohibitions they received as a child are impacting their lives and how they communicate.

These unconscious scripts often exist as repetitive patterns of behaviour, thoughts and feelings- characteristics that suggest the child ego-state is overbearing and tainting other parts of an individual's personality.

Transactions

When individuals communicate, their ego-states interact to create transactions. If the ego-states interact and blend in a healthy way, transactions tend to be healthier. But, sometimes ego-states can contaminate each other to create a distorted view of the world. Transactions may be classified as straightforward, crossed-up, or ulterior, and understanding these is key to conflict resolution.

Strokes

Strokes refer to compliments, acceptance and recognition, which are influential in how people lead their lives. TA therapy recognises that we are greatly motivated by the reinforcement we get as children, and if this was dysfunctional, we are likely to adopt dysfunctional patterns of living as we get older.

Intimacy

Another motivation recognised in transactional analysis is intimacy. Similarly to strokes, if the intimacy a child experiences is dysfunctional, it can lead to problems. Children may learn that this type of intimacy is the best that he or she can do to meet basic needs and communicate with others. This can lead to the development of repetitive patterns of behaviour that can hinder a person's potential.

Redecision

This refers to an individual's capacity to 'redecide' and make changes to certain decisions that were made as a child- those stemming from unconscious scripts. Redecision reflects the assumption of TA therapy that individuals have the potential to lead their lives as they choose. This power is released after a rededecision is made while a client is in their child-ego state.

Ultimately, therapists will encourage clients to challenge their current beliefs and the way he or she uses their life script. This will help them to better understand the direction and patterns of their life for themselves, and this awareness can help them to make the decision to change their behaviour.