

Part Three: Who's Running The Show

The next time you feel vulnerable, rejected or angry, ask yourself: 'How old do I feel right now?'
You'll probably find it's 'very young'.

Chapter 10

Your Rich and Complex Inner World

So we've seen that finding courage to be you starts with the greatest relationship of all – the one you have with yourself. Knowing yourself very well and loving yourself deeply. This is the absolute key to letting go of people-pleasing and being truer to yourself.

I've shared that you can build this strong relationship with yourself through five practices – checking in, accepting yourself, acknowledging what's true for you, choosing to live from intention, and seeing yourself as ever evolving.

What these practices have in common is that they highlight just how much is going on within us. You have a rich and complex inner world, with a constant internal dialogue between different parts of yourself. Which part of you is most active at any given moment influences what you do and how you respond to others.

It's a good idea, then, to become very familiar with these parts – recognising which part of you is running the show – to know when it's your worried child who's needing to please, or the judgmental inner critic sabotaging you, or when it's time to shift to the more confident grown-up and self-loving part of you. As you get more skilled at this, you can adjust your thoughts and behaviours to help you respond to situations in more empowered, helpful ways, rather than slipping back into old people-pleasing patterns.

Sometimes it's easy to recognise where we're coming from – it's clear when we're feeling vulnerable and worried, or more grown-up, calm and self-assured. But sometimes it's not so obvious. By the time we become aware of ourselves, we've already reacted to a situation by slipping back into those old people-pleasing ways.

Wouldn't it be great if we had some sort of model – a frame of reference – that could help us become better at recognising these different parts of ourselves? Well, we do. It's a model I teach many of my clients. It's called Transactional Analysis (TA), and I'm going to share it with you here.

Transactional Analysis was first developed by the psychiatrist Eric Berne as a way to help people improve their relationships. It's used by therapists, counsellors, coaches and organisations to help people improve their communication and relationships. Over the years I've shared TA with many clients. They've told me how easy they find it to follow, yet what a profound impact it has had in helping

them know themselves better and, therefore, improve how they interact with others.

One of the most well-known models in TA is the 'Ego States', which describes us as being in Parent, Adult and Child state. In the Parent ego state, we can be critical or nurturing. In the Child ego state, we can be free or adapted. In the Adult ego state, we are simply adult. These make up five parts within us which influence how we think, feel and behave. They are called:

- Critical Parent
- Nurturing Parent
- Adapted Child
- Free Child
- Adult

We're constantly moving between these parts of ourselves. By understanding them in more depth we have a better understanding of the relationship we have with ourselves and, therefore, the way we relate with others. For example, we can more easily identify when we're being self-critical or self-loving, or when it's our worried child self who's in control versus the more empowered grown-up self.

As we continue through the book, we'll be focusing on how some of these parts influence our tendency to people-please, while other parts can help us feel more

empowered. So let's begin by getting a clear picture of each of them.

Chapter 11

Critical Parent

Critical Parent is the part of you that can be bossy and judgmental towards yourself and others. When you're in Critical Parent, your thoughts, feelings and behaviours are being influenced by the disapproval and judgments you received from your caregivers, as well as what you observed when they criticised themselves and each other. Over time, you absorbed all of this, and it became your own internal Critical Parent.

You can tell when you're in Critical Parent when you hear yourself using words like: 'You should, you must, you ought to, that's wrong!'

People often talk about their inner critic, who nags and berates them, which we can see as the Critical Parent. If you relate, I'm sure you're aware that this part of yourself can be really quite harsh. In general, it's a good idea to keep an eye on this inner voice, because when you criticise yourself you're putting down your inner child. This lack of acceptance means you won't feel confident enough to be your true self

around others, and it will reinforce your inner child's need to seek acceptance from others through people-pleasing.

As I often tell my clients, if there was a small child standing next to you, struggling with something, would you tell them they were stupid, no good, and judge them? Of course, you wouldn't! So, try not to do that to yourself.

And how we treat ourselves often shows up in how we treat others. The more you judge and berate yourself, the more likely you'll treat others the same. If we spend too much time in Critical Parent, life becomes about making comparisons, judgments and not feeling worthy – it's not helpful for our relationships.

It's normal to go into Critical Parent at times, we all do it. When you notice yourself in this mode, don't try to push it away – that only gives it more of a hold on you. Instead ask yourself, 'Whose voice is this, really? Is it someone from my past? Have I integrated that voice and made it my own? Is it time to let it go now?'

It may seem hard to consider that there's anything helpful or positive about being in Critical Parent. Could there be? Occasionally, dipping into Critical Parent can help hold us accountable and encourage us to take responsibility when we're feeling demotivated. When combined with compassion, it can gently steer us in the right direction. But it needs to be balanced with a huge dollop of Nurturing Parent!

Chapter 12

Nurturing Parent

Nurturing Parent is the part of you that is caring, empathic and supportive towards yourself and others. When you're in Nurturing Parent, your thoughts, feelings and behaviours are being influenced by the love and care you received in childhood from your caregivers, as well as what you observed when they nurtured themselves and each other. Over time, you absorbed all of this, and it became your own internal Nurturing Parent.

When you speak to yourself and others with words such as: 'You could, it's okay, you're good enough, be kind to yourself', that's your Nurturing Parent.

It's helpful to be in Nurturing Parent mode because when you speak to yourself with kindness you're offering love and acceptance to the child within – the one who learnt to adapt in order to be accepted. The more you give yourself acceptance, the more confident you'll feel to be your true self around others, without the need to seek approval by pleasing them.

And the more you live in Nurturing Parent, the more likely you are to approach other people from the perspective of love and acceptance too. Life becomes about mutual care and consideration, and people feeling worthy – it's very good for your relationships.

Chapter 13

Adapted Child

As the name Adapted Child suggests, it's the part of you that first came up with clever ideas about how to adapt yourself in order to make people think highly of you – to keep them happy so that you could be okay and safe from rejection and abandonment.

When you find yourself trying to avoid confrontation, fitting in with people, or sacrificing your own needs it's always the Adapted Child who's driving that behaviour.

While your Adapted Child is very good at keeping people happy, they're not sophisticated enough, or brave enough, to help you step forward as the real you. Why would they be? They've already decided that people-pleasing is what keeps you safe, so they'll dig in their little heels and resist when you try to think and behave in ways that may potentially put you at risk of rejection.

Yet it's often from this anxious part of ourselves that we try to show up fully, to set our boundaries and communicate our needs. It's no wonder we struggle.

So, we need to find ways to help them let go of their fear and responsibility for protecting us.

Chapter 14

Calling on Your Nurturing Parent

By clearly identifying these different parts ourselves, TA helps us to become much more aware of what's going on within us and in our interactions with others. We can get into the habit of noticing when it's the Adapted Child worrying, and consider how we can help them let go of their fears.

As we've seen, Nurturing Parent is a powerful way to do that. I can't say enough how powerful it is to tune into your Nurturing Parent and speak to your Adapted Child with soothing, reassuring words. A daily practice of this will have a truly remarkable impact on your courage, your confidence and your ability to step forward and be the real you in your relationships. Your Nurturing Parent can give your Adapted Child the love, the validation and the reassurance they need. After all, they're only people-pleasing as a way of getting that love and validation from others – so why not give it to them yourself?

I often find that once my clients begin this practice, they experience a profound sense of relief. It's not unusual for clients to cry tears of relief as their little child within has been waiting a very long time for them to hear, acknowledge and accept them.

Chapter 15

What if I Can't Connect With My Nurturing Parent?

Have you noticed, though, that sometimes people say, 'Oh, just love yourself and all will be well!?' But what if you find this hard to do? What if you can't feel any sense of the Nurturing Parent within you?

Sometimes people tell me that, as they look back on their childhood, they just can't think of any times when they received nurturing from a parent figure. They haven't integrated any nurturing experiences, so they have no frame of reference to calm their own inner child now. So what can we do if this is the case?

I want to share a profound experience I had during a guided meditation.

In the meditation, I saw a glowing being full of beautiful light. I asked, 'Who are you?' The being answered, 'Don't you know me? I am Love. I'm your parent.'

The parents that you had in this lifetime were your caretakers. They took care of you as best they could with the tools that they had – but I am your true parent.'

It felt like a profound insight. I found it comforting – and when I've shared this experience with others, they've said it brought them great comfort too.

It's helpful to remember that the nurturing children receive from their caregivers is a form of love. If you find it hard to connect with your inner Nurturing Parent, because you didn't have direct experiences of being parented in this way, remember that you can go straight to the source. Think of love itself as being your true cosmic parent! It's always here for you, expressed in the form of kindness, compassion, forgiveness, acceptance and more. All you need to do is tune into love through these channels.

We can appreciate the parents who did their best for us. But our lives don't have to be defined by how much nurturing they were – or not – able to give us. They were the channels through which we came into this world and they were our caretakers. Each of us is a child of our universe, and love is the greatest nurturing parent of all.

So if you didn't have much direct nurturing from your caregivers, you can do this by treating yourself in these loving ways and, most importantly, by speaking to yourself in these ways. In doing so, you'll begin to quite naturally integrate an inner Nurturing Parent of your own, to call on whenever you

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want to reassure your inner Adapted Child so they can let go of the pressure to please.

As your Adapted Child begins to let go of the reins of responsibility, you make way for your Free Child.

Chapter 16

Free Child

When you were very small, toddling around full of joy and curiosity, everything felt like an adventure. The world was your creative playground. Life was about having fun, exploring and expressing yourself freely. You said what you felt. You showed what you needed. You didn't worry about being judged or having to fit into someone else's idea of who you should be. You were a Free Child.

In time life became more complicated and you began to notice that it was necessary to adapt your behaviour, to filter your responses, to push down your Free Child in order to be approved of and avoid the risk of rejection.

When I'm sharing TA with clients and they consider how much time they spend in each of these states, Free Child is always the one that gets the least attention. It's the same for so many of us. Adapted Child has taken centre stage in our lives and Free Child has faded into the background. Maybe you'll relate.

How often do you get the giggles, feel utterly happy and inspired by some simple thing, feel your creativity flowing through you, inspiring you? How often do you revel in *simply being* for the sake of it in the present moment?

I'm sure you'll agree, we could all do with spending more time in Free Child and less in Adapted Child. But if we're busy worrying about what others think and constantly adjusting ourselves to fit in or keep the peace, there's not much space for Free Child to come out to play.

As we've seen, by calling on Nurturing Parent to soothe Adapted Child, we create space for Free Child to come out to play. And that also makes space for another important part of us to step forward – our Adult.

Chapter 17

Moving Into Adult

We've looked at Critical Parent and Nurturing Parent, and we've also looked at Adapted Child and Free Child. The other part is Adult. When you're in Adult, your thoughts, feelings and behaviours are not being influenced by emotions, but more by logic.

Adult is a helpful mode to be in when managing challenging situations in our relationships. In Adult you're not so concerned with defending or proving yourself. It's the calmer and more logical part of yourself that helps you speak up clearly and with courage. And when we communicate from our Adult self (it's that part of you that may suggest to someone, 'Shall we sit down and talk this problem through?'), we tend to invite others into their Adult self too – it makes for much more harmonious conversations.

It's from your Adult that you get to know yourself well. It's the part of you that steps back and observes yourself, the part that checks in and notices what you're thinking and feeling. It's the part of you that asks: 'What part of me is present right now? Could there be another way to look at

this? Am I being honest with myself here? What's the best way to communicate my needs? Is this my Critical Parent? Is this my fearful Adapted Child trying to save me from the pain of rejection? How might I treat myself in a more nurturing way?'

It's from your Adult self that you can be more intentional, planning for how you want your life to be rather than being reactive to what others want. Because you're not feeling defensive or in need of earning approval you can decide what works best for you and take steps to make that happen.

In general, then, it's a good idea to notice when it would be helpful to shift into Adult. However it's also useful to remember that we can sometimes spend too much time in Adult. If you find yourself being serious and practical too much of the time, it's a good idea to relax and let your Free Child come out to play!

Knowing yourself well means being able to recognise what you're thinking and feeling, and getting clear on why those thoughts and feelings are showing up. It's about noticing familiar patterns in how you respond to people and situations, and making sense of it all.

But we're complex beings; our thoughts and feelings are always shifting and our moods change all the time. And we're in a constant dance between the present and the past – reacting to what's happening in the moment, but also influenced by beliefs and ideas formed through past

experiences. So it can be hard to make sense of all this and have a clearly defined sense of who we are.

By breaking it down into the Parent, Adult and Child parts of ourselves, each with its own role, patterns and responses, Transactional Analysis helps us organise our thoughts and feelings into categories. Once we have this language to describe and understand our internal world, we can start to understand it better – we can get to know ourselves well.

By identifying the different parts of yourself and how you interact between them, you can better understand the relationship you have with yourself and where you're coming from in your interactions with people.

As we look at these five parts within us, it would be tempting to think that we should strive to remain in three of them and stay out of the other two. Wouldn't it be better to avoid Adapted Child and Critical Parent? To instead spend time in our calm, logical Adult so that we can be more grounded and solution focused? To often tap into our Nurturing Parent, so that we can be more self-loving? And into Free Child so that we can be playful and joyful? It would seem so. However, it's important to know that each of these parts of us has its role to play in our lives.

For example, when Critical Parent is used thoughtfully it can help you stay focused on your goals. It can motivate you and gently hold you accountable to your own standards.

And your Adapted Child highlights areas where you can grow. It shows you where you're stuck in old patterns, giving you a reference point for what you can change in your life. It gives you a wonderful opportunity to fulfil your life's true purpose by growing wiser and evolving.

It's not about trying to live from some parts of yourself and not others – rather it's about being aware of all of them at play within you. In this way you can draw on the parts of yourself that are most appropriate for each situation. Over time you'll develop a wiser mindset, a wiser heart, and have wiser relationships.

Now you have a foundation to begin living a life that belongs to you.

Earlier I introduced how finding courage to be you works best when we take a two-level approach (moving towards what we want while also letting go of what's been holding us back):

- **Moving towards finding courage to be you:** learning specific strategies to help you build a strong relationship with yourself – so that you can be more confident in being true to yourself.
- **Letting go of people-pleasing:** learning to let go of the people-pleasing tendencies that have been holding you back.

We've already explored the first part: moving towards finding courage to be you. I've shared the specific

strategies that help you: checking in with yourself, practicing self-acceptance, acknowledging what's true for you, choosing to live from intention and seeing yourself as ever evolving. We've also seen how Transactional Analysis is a powerful framework that we can use as a practical tool to understand ourselves better and put these strategies into action.

Now, let's focus on the final step in this process: letting go of what's been holding us back. Let's dig deep into how to stop people-pleasing.