

Using Transactional Analysis to Enhance Doctoral Supervision

David Coomber – Team Leader
Student Life – Health and Counselling

Content taken from:

McKimm, J., & Forrest, K. (2010). Using transactional analysis to improve clinical and educational supervision: The Drama and Winner's triangles. *Postgrad Med J*, 86, 261-265

[https://doi: 10.1136/pgmj.2009.093310](https://doi.org/10.1136/pgmj.2009.093310)



Relationship dynamics - TA

Controlling or nurturing

Parent

Internalised messages from carers

Adult

Uses resources from the here and now

Adapted or natural

Child

Thinking, behaving, or feeling as we did when we were a child



Functional Ego States



Critical Parent

- moralistic
- judgemental
- authoritarian



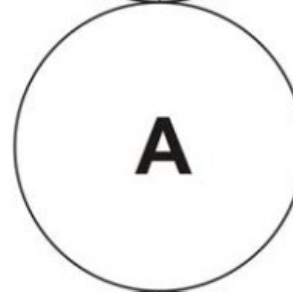
Nurturing Parent

- reassuring
- caring
- encouraging
- supportive
- understanding



Adult

- non-judgemental
- open-minded
- interested
- confident
- reality based

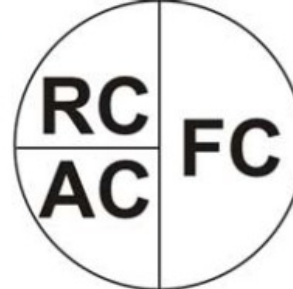


Rebellious Child

- defiant
- complaining

Adapted Child

- compliant
- passive



Free Child

- curious
- energetic
- fun-loving
- spontaneous



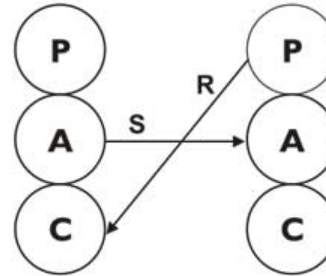
Ref: Woollams and Brown (1978)



Transactions - Crossed

The response to the stimulus is unexpected.
Communication breaks down or changes.

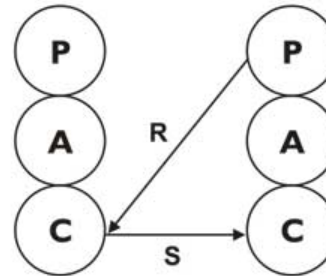
“What’s for dinner?”



“Stop bothering me!”

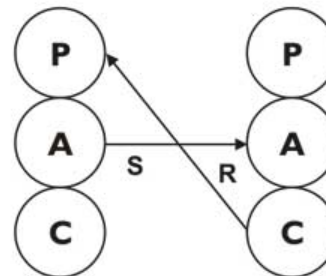


“Let’s have some fun!”



“Can’t you ever be serious?”

“Good morning. How are you?”



“I’m not feeling very well.”



Ref: Eric Berne (1975)



Key concepts in transactional analysis (TA)

- Essentially everyone is OK, however people learn maladaptive behaviours in childhood which can play out later in life.
- In TA being OK means ‘I accept myself as I am and I accept you as you are.’
- The basic unit of interaction and communication is a transaction.
- People need ‘strokes,’ social stimuli, attention or recognition. Positive strokes are vital for psychological well-being, but a negative stroke is preferable to no stroke at all (neutral stroke).
- People resist interventions that challenge their world view or reinforcing beliefs even if these are not based on facts.
- Learning to recognise games helps avoid being drawn into them.
- Sometimes it is necessary to play games, especially at the social level.



		You are Okay with me			
I am Not Okay with me	<p>I am not OK You are OK</p> <p><i>one down position</i></p> <p>Get away from Helpless</p>	<p>I am OK You are OK</p> <p><i>healthy position</i></p> <p>Get on with Happy</p>	I am Okay with me		
	<p>I am not OK You are not OK</p> <p><i>hopeless position</i></p> <p>Get nowhere with Hopeless</p>	<p>I am OK You are not OK</p> <p><i>one-up position</i></p> <p>Get rid of Angry</p>			
		You are Not Okay with me			

Social and psychological games

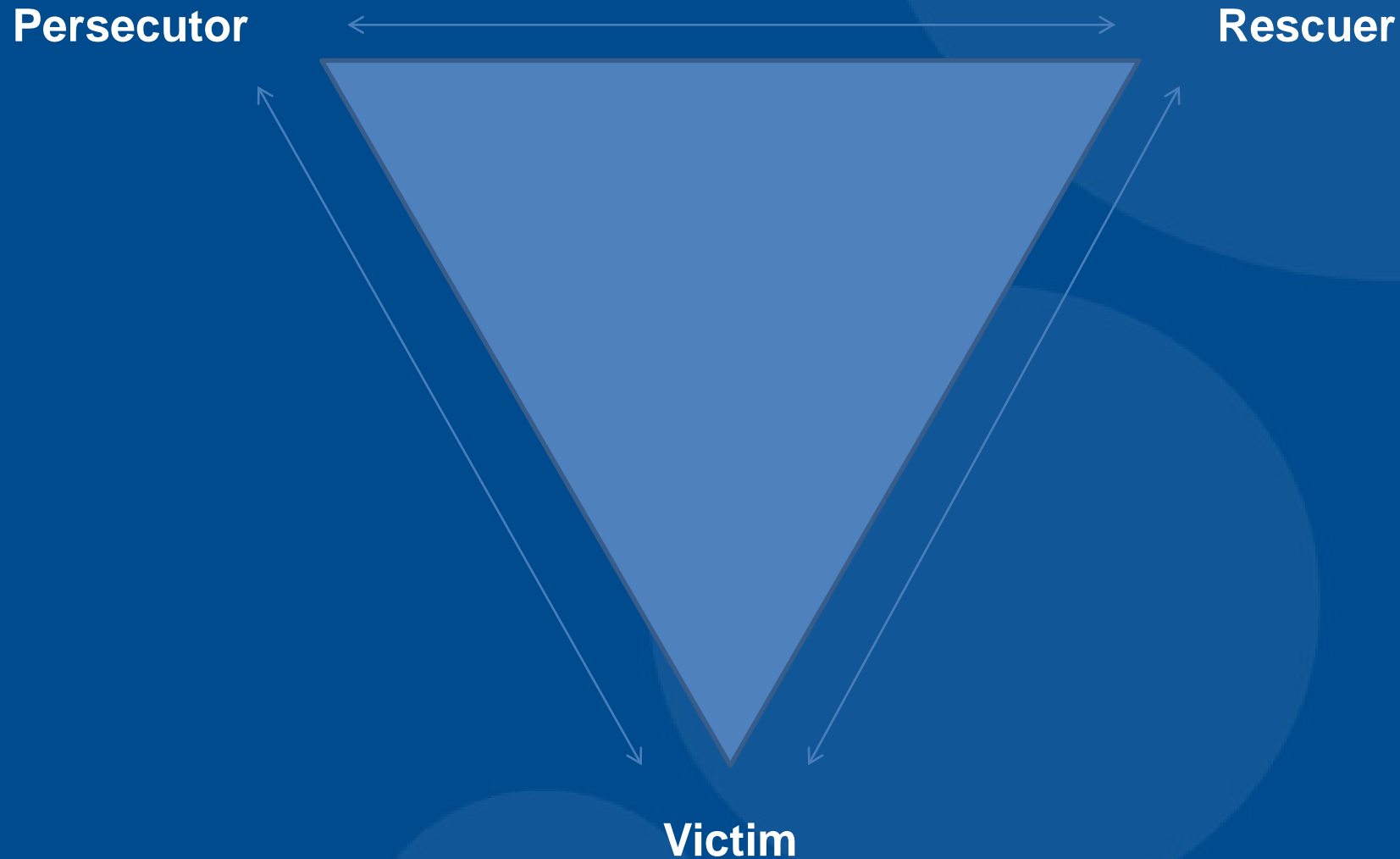
- Games can happen at social level when everyone knows what's going on and can step in or out at will (eg. rituals, pastimes, social banter).
- Social games can give positive strokes and recognition – primarily in Adult Ego state.
- Games can also happen at psychological level and be out of conscious awareness, can be enjoyable at times but key feature is a negative payoff reinforcing negative beliefs or scripts.



Psychological 'games'

- A psychological game is the process of doing something with an ulterior motive.
- Is outside Adult awareness.
- Does not become explicit until the participants switch the way they are behaving and,
- Results in everyone feeling confused, misunderstood and wanting to blame the other person.
- Can end up in the courtroom, hospital, mortuary.
- Becoming aware of game playing behaviours can be helpful.

Using the Drama and Winner's triangles



Using the Drama and Winner's triangles

	Victim	Persecutor	Rescuer
Reality	Suffering or potentially suffering.	Act in own interests.	Concern for the victim.
Characteristics	Act as if do not have resources to solve their problem and their need is so acute that it prevents them from solving problems.	Others suffer from their behaviour. Part of goal is to punish	Take over the thinking and problem solving. Do more than their share. Do things they don't want to
Discount	I can't solve this.	Victim doesn't matter. I can't be okay unless you are punished.	The victim cannot solve his/her problem.

Using the Drama and Winner's triangles

Important observations:

- Victims see themselves as not OK, often seeking a perpetrator to put them down to confirm belief they cannot cope on their own.
- Rescuers sees others as not being OK, responding from the one-up position.
- Victim is the 'pole' position – someone who draws others into the game.
- All positions require a 'discount.'
- We can all find ourselves moving around the triangle in the workplace, at home, and in social situations.
- Game happens only when there is a 'switch': as the first person switches to another position in the triangle – other person left confused and frustrated.

Ways not to engage in the Drama triangle

- Spot your own and others' potential for game playing.
- Remain in Adult, don't get drawn into rescuing..
- Stay 'in the moment' – focus on what is happening right now between you and others.
- When you have a heart sinking moment when looking at a name in your diary, or that 'here we go again' thought you have likely spotted a game player or a game.
- Step out of the game: "I don't feel this discussion . . ." or "I appreciate how you feel, and . . ."
- As a supervisor keep out of the Rescuer as much as possible – encourage independence and autonomy.
- Use the Winner's triangle . . .



Winner's triangle



Positions in the Winner's triangle

	Vulnerable	Assertive	Caring
Reality	Suffering or potentially suffering.	Act in own interests.	Concern for the vulnerable person.
Characteristics	Use Adult ego state for thinking and problem solving. Awareness – use their feelings as data for problem solving	Ask for what they want. Say no to what they don't want. Give feedback and initiate negotiation. Make changes in order to get their needs met. Do punish.	Do not do the thinking and problem solving. Do not take over, unless asked (and they want to). Do not do more than their share. Do not do things they do not want to.
Skill	I can't solve this.	Assertion skills.	Listening skills, and self-awareness.

Two real life examples of the Winner's triangle

1. You are the educational supervisor . . .
2. You over hear two trainees . . .



Main messages

- Effective supervision requires clear, open communication from both supervisors and supervisees.
- Ideas from Transactional Analysis (TA) can help improve communication.
- Enhancing awareness of how psychological games might affect the supervision process can help supervisors be more effective.
- The Drama and Winner's triangles offer ideas and solutions for address difficult conversations and improving communications.





