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What is transactional analysis therapy?

Talking therapy might be a catch-all term, but there are a huge number of different types. Transactional analysis is a form of modern psychology and therapy that explores a person's relationships and how they communicate with and interact with others. But what exactly does it entail - and who might benefit from it?

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Transactional analysis was developed by Eric Berne, a Canadian psychiatrist, in the 1950s. "He originally trained as a psychoanalyst, but whereas [Sigmund Freud](#) focused on the client's inner conflicts, Berne focused on the client's social transactions," says Yuko Nippoda, psychotherapist and spokesperson for the [UK Council for Psychotherapy \(UKCP\)](#).

"The main feature of transactional analysis is that people are OK and people are striving for positive growth," she explains. "People can change through positive affirmation and they have the capacity to think for themselves. These concepts are more in line with [humanistic therapy](#)."

What are ego states?

Transactional analysis [therapy](#) is based on the theory that each person has three ego states: the parent, adult and child. It also states that we all have transactions with other people or internally with ourselves. Finally, transactional analysis theory suggests that we activate certain ego states when we communicate, which can lead to negative emotions, [anxiety](#) and conflict.

"The parent ego state represents how the client was treated by their parents. The adult ego state is more grounded – and learning to be in this state is the aim of transactional analysis. Finally, the child state is how they acted when they were a child," says Nippoda.

"Everybody has these elements and how they interact with each other is significant, as it affects relationships in their current life. Another important concept is that people play games without awareness, and this creates strain in their relationships with others."

Transactional analysis therapy aims to help clients become more aware of how they are acting in a relationship. In turn, this will benefit their feelings, thoughts and behaviours.

Parent ego state: this state refers to a set of thoughts, feelings and behaviours learned from our parents and other important people in the past. This part of our personality can be supportive or critical.

Adult ego state: this state relates to direct responses in the present.

Child ego state: again, this state links to our past and refers to thoughts, feelings and behaviours learned from our early childhood.

What does a transactional analysis therapist do?

In the same way to [person-centred therapists](#), transactional analysis therapists believe that people have the freedom and responsibility to choose to become what they want to be.

"The therapist helps clients to empower themselves through listening and empathising," says Nippoda. "In doing so, the client becomes more [confident](#) and finds the strength to improve whatever situation they are struggling with."

Open conversation is encouraged between the [therapist](#) and client, too. During sessions, the therapist will examine the therapist-client relationship and identify how the client is relating to the therapist and which ego state they are operating from.

"They can then give feedback to the client so that they become aware of patterns in how they behave in their daily life, as there is a parallel between what happens between therapist and client and what manifests in the client's everyday life," Nippoda explains.

Together, the client and therapist will identify potential problems in the client's communication and provide opportunities for them to change repetitive patterns that impact them negatively.

Who might benefit from transactional analysis therapy?

As with other forms of therapy, transactional analysis is beneficial for people who have difficulties in life. These might include [anxiety](#), [depression](#), [anger](#), fear, a lack of confidence or having low [self-esteem](#).

"The main concept of this approach is how people relate to each other in social transactions," says Nippoda. "Therefore, people who have relationship difficulties and who would like to improve them may benefit."

Is transactional analysis therapy available on the NHS?

The NHS has mainly provided [cognitive behavioural therapy](#) for psychological and mental health issues and it is possible to [self-refer](#) for that kind of treatment.

However, it may be possible to access transactional analysis on the NHS in the near future. "Now the NHS is planning to expand available treatments to other approaches, including transactional analysis," Nippoda adds.

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