To simplify, an ego state is a way in which we think, feel and behave making up our personality at a given time.

There are two basic models of ego states, the structural model and the functional model (referred to as the behavioural model in the latest version of the ‘TA 101’ syllabus).

**The Structural Model of Ego States**

![Diagram of the Structural Model of Ego States](image1)

Berne, 1961

**The Functional Model of Ego States**

![Diagram of the Functional Model of Ego States](image2)

TA Today, Stewart and Joines, 1987, 2012
The theory suggests that our personality is divided, but not necessarily in equal proportions, into the Parent, the Adult and the Child ego states. The functional model diagrams how we use what is in the structural model, and reflects the descriptions of the component parts of the ego states. Subdividing the states and giving them behavioural descriptions enables a more explicit way of observing behaviour.

The Structural Model of Ego States

The Parent ego state refers to the behaviours, thoughts and feelings that are copied, learned or even borrowed from our parents, parental figures, or significant others. Parental figures/significant others are not necessarily biological, but maybe someone with power, authority or influence that have had an impact on us during our childhood. These may be teachers, priests, or even movie heroes.

The Adult ego state operates in the here and now and rationally processes what we are thinking and feeling, which is based on facts without interference of unconscious contamination. We are thinking and responding appropriately displaying logical and consistent behaviour. Put simply, this is us, being us, without those external influences of my Parent and Child ego states.

The Child ego state is not when we are acting childish, or what others perceive as childish behaviour. It is how we behaved, thought and felt, replayed out as we did as a child. These adaptive behaviours can be immediate and act as a survival instinct within me putting obstacles in the way of our own growth. These are archaic memories that we are unable to remember on a conscious level, but lies within our unconscious.

The theory suggests that our personality is divided, but not necessarily in equal proportions, into the Parent, the Adult and the Child ego states.

Berne, E. (1961)
The Functional Model of Ego States

The functional model diagrams how we use what is in the structural model, and reflects the descriptions of the component parts of the ego states. Subdividing the states and giving them behavioural descriptions enables a more explicit way of observing behaviour.

The Parent is divided into Controlling Parent (sometimes still described as Critical Parent) and Nurturing Parent.

The Child is divided into Adapted Child and Free Child. Controlling and Adapted being on the left of the diagram, with Nurturing and Free being on the right.

References
