Ego States is the concept that each person has the potential for three fully functioning ego states that separates Transactional Analysis from other approaches. There are two basic models of ego states, the structural and the functional model. In order to differentiate between the two, remember the following:

- **STRUCTURE** refers to the building blocks/content of the ego states, answering questions — what are they; how are they made up?
- **FUNCTION** refers to a description and process of the ego states and their respective ways of behaving.

It is important to understand the differences between these ego states so that we are able to choose which we activate.

**Parent Ego State** – Functionally, the Parent ego state is subdivided into the Critical Parent and the Nurturing Parent. Nurturing Parent represents more affirming and more pleasant qualities of what parents and society do for a person, it wants to encourage and comfort others. Critical Parent behaviors generally represent the corrective behaviors of real parents and can be very negative and judge others harshly.

Both Controlling and Nurturing Parent are acceptable, but could be overdone. Positive aspects of CP and NP are visible in people’s ability to extract right from wrong. Negative aspects of CP and NP could damage psychological health where people replay messages from childhood, negative or overly protective.

**Adult Ego State** - This ego state is not related to the person’s age, more to a developmental state. Adult approaches life rationally so as to make the best choices.

**Child Ego State** – Child is about expressing feelings and being intuitive. Child is typified by “I” statements, “I want”, “I need” etc. Child ego state is a function of impulses and desires to find pleasure and be happy. Functionally, the Child ego-state is comprised of 2 aspects: The Natural (Free) Child and the Adapted Child.

The **Natural Child** ego state represents an emotional, creative, playful and spontaneous part of human behavior, from infancy to an old age enjoys being alive.

The **Adapted Child** ego state represents human response, which often over-reacts from fear of being judged, humiliated or punished. It has some negativity in it, some resistance, some reaction and some deeper hostility.