

Emotional vs Rational Brain

In general terms the way a person behaves or responds to a situation is controlled by either the rational or emotional part of the brain.

For the vast majority of their waking hours a person will be controlled by their rational brain. At other times our responses may be more emotional and this is much more likely when we are under stress.

Reactions to situations will not necessarily be reasoned and controlled. The responses given to commands, directions or replies to questions will also be affected.

In practice this means that as the body responds to the stress stimulus the brain gives priority to those areas that control simple movements of fighting and running. Therefore parts of the brain concerned with concentration, judgement and analytical skills

suffer. The brain will also prioritise the information it receives, filtering or excluding that which it can do without for the immediate time. This is referred to as 'peripheral shutdown'. Commonly the sense of hearing will diminish, as this is not needed; this is termed 'auditory exclusion'.

As the stress increases the responses will become even more emotional and the person will find their ability to think rationally and therefore communicate, diminishes until they will not be 'thinking' cognitively at all.

These physical and mental changes affect the communication process and take place both in officers and those who may be in conflict with them. It is not possible to prevent these responses from happening, but officers can learn to recognise them and deal with the consequences.

Further information on Emotional vs Rational Brain is available in:



Left-Brain Functions

Right-Brain Functions

- Analytic Thought
- Logic
- Language

- Thought
- Intuition
- Creativity

Rational

Emotional

Objective

Impetuous

Reality-based

Fantasy-based

"Thinking"

"Reacting"



Attitude and Behaviour

The Oxford English Dictionary defines:

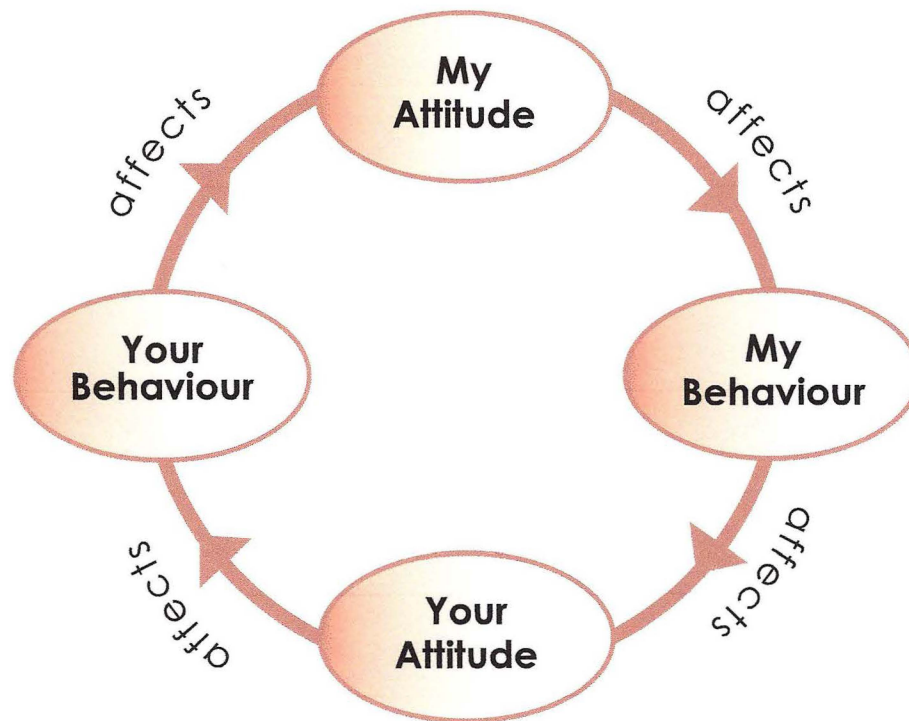
- Attitude "as a settled way of thinking or feeling about someone or something, typically one that is reflected in a person's behaviours"
- Behaviour "as the way in which one acts or conducts oneself, especially towards others".

Attitudes are considered to be an internal thought process. Behaviour can be how this thought process is exhibited externally both verbally and non-verbally.

A simple model used in police training and by others who deal in people management and conflict resolution is known as **Betari's Box**.

Betari's Box

This illustration shows the way in which officers and individuals can get locked into a cycle of behaviour which, if it remains unchecked, can escalate out of control.



GOOD PRACTICE

The role of an officer is to deal effectively with a situation, and because officers are the very people in society who have authority, it is their role to attempt to break any negative cycle of attitude and behaviour that may exist.



INFO POINT

You can only control your own attitude and behaviour. Break the unconscious loop by noticing how the behaviour of others makes you feel and refuse to let it affect your attitude.

Warning Signs and Danger Cues

By focusing on gesture clusters it is possible to gain clues as to the attitudes and feelings of the individual who is exhibiting them.

Gesture clusters may indicate how someone is thinking or feeling.

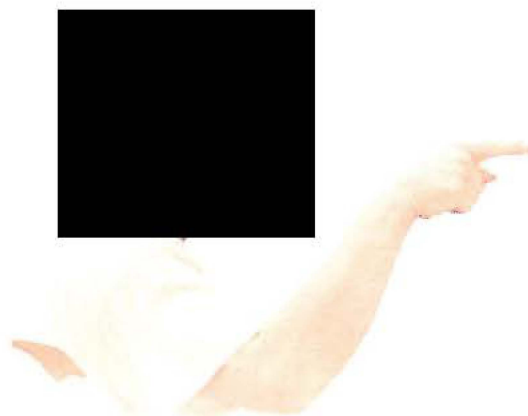
Officers can observe such gesture clusters when 'people watching' or when socialising with friends/family.

For example, observing consistency between verbal and non-verbal communication.

- Open hands with palms up plus arms and legs in an unfolded position may signal openness
- Arms crossed on the chest or the hands closed in fists may signal defensiveness
- Silence or very few comments may be an indicator of boredom
- Tapping of the feet, drumming of the table and looking away may be signs that the receiver is disinterested.

However, in confrontational matters an individual, or indeed an officer, who is ready to be aggressive may display three levels of behaviours before committing a physical act.

These are anxiety, loss of verbal control and loss of physical control.



Anxiety

General behaviours associated with anxiety are:

- sweating and pacing about
- refusing to co-operate with an immediate authority and/or supervision
- blaming others
- belligerent towards others
- constantly swearing at others
- making unwarranted sexual remarks
- arguing increasingly with others
- refusing to obey policy and procedures
- verbally issuing a desire to hurt others
- seeing self as victimised by authority and/or management.

This is not an exhaustive list.

Loss of verbal control

Loss of verbal control can be characterised by:

- the ability to communicate becomes unintelligible and disjointed
- the use of vulgarity in an incoherent way
- baring/gritting the teeth or speaking through pursed lips.

This is not an exhaustive list.

Loss of physical control - warning signs

Generally, individuals who are going to attack or offer violence may engage in actions known as 'ritualised combat' (see Fright, Flight, Fight, Posture, Submission - [Personal Management](#)).

Identifying these non-verbal cues may give officers a significant advantage.

Several of these behaviours may be exhibited by a subject.

It is important that the officer considers these as a cluster rather than viewing each one individually.

For example, if someone tilts their head back it does not necessarily mean that an attack is imminent.

Warning signs of a loss of physical control are:

- direct prolonged eye contact
- bobbing up and down or rocking back and forth
- expanded veins in the arms, face and neck
- a change in facial colour
- the head is tilted looking upwards or down at the ground
- standing tall to maximise their height
- kicking the ground
- exaggerated movements, especially with the hands
- acceleration and deepening of breathing rate
- abrupt stopping and starting of nervous behaviour.

This is not an exhaustive list.

Loss of physical control - danger cues

As the word 'danger' implies, the cues listed here may have a higher impact potential than warning signs.

When these danger cues occur an attack may be imminent.

Neglecting or ignoring these cues may place officers at a disadvantage or in a position of danger.

- Fists clenching/unclenching
- A change in facial colour
- Lips tightening over the teeth
- Head dropping forward to protect the throat
- Eyebrows dropping forward to protect the eyes
- Hands rising above the waist
- Shoulders tensing
- Stance changing from square on to side on (fighting stance)
- Glancing at intended target areas
- Lowering of the entire body before launching an attack.

This is not an exhaustive list.

i INFO POINT

Warning - Officers should be aware that some individuals are fully comfortable with confrontation and may be able to disguise their intentions. This may be because of their military or martial arts training, or their own natural fighting skill which may have been honed.

Ego State Communication

Transactional analysis, commonly known as TA, was developed by Canadian-born US psychiatrist Eric Byrne during the late 1950s.

The outcome of Byrne's research concluded that it is not just the words that we use, but the value of the words that we use that is important. All the feeling and experiences people are exposed to during infancy and childhood are unconsciously recorded in the brain. These recorded messages greatly influence our behaviour for the rest of our lives. These are observable and may be used to describe an individual's communication and demeanour (see the Use of Force, part two: Accountability and Justification). These may considerably affect our style of communication and its effectiveness. Byrne's theory of transactional analysis states that each person is made up of three ego states. These are the parent, adult and child.

Parent

The parent ego state is our ingrained voice of authority based on learning and attitudes conditioned when we were young. We were conditioned by our parents, teachers, older people, next door neighbours, aunts and uncles, and authority figures. Typical parent ego state expressions are to:

- give advice
- criticise
- moralise
- nurture and protect
- make rules and regulations
- teach
- judge
- direct or control others.

Adult

The adult ego state is our ability to think and determine action for ourselves, based on received data. It is the means by which we keep our Parent and Child under control. Typical adult ego state behaviours are to:

- store information
- plan
- check alternatives
- make decisions
- reason
- recall information
- evaluate
- estimate probabilities
- set limits.

Child

Our internal reaction and feelings to external events form the Child. This is the seeing, hearing, feeling, and emotional body of data within each of us.

The child ego state contains the memory of impulses and responses felt and made when we were young as being the source of feelings, wants and needs. When anger or despair dominates reason, the Child is in control. The child ego state is expressed as:

- anger
- fear
- rebelliousness
- curiosity
- creativity
- trust
- love
- excitement
- self-indulgence
- aggression
- co-operation.

A useful way of summarising the ego states is:

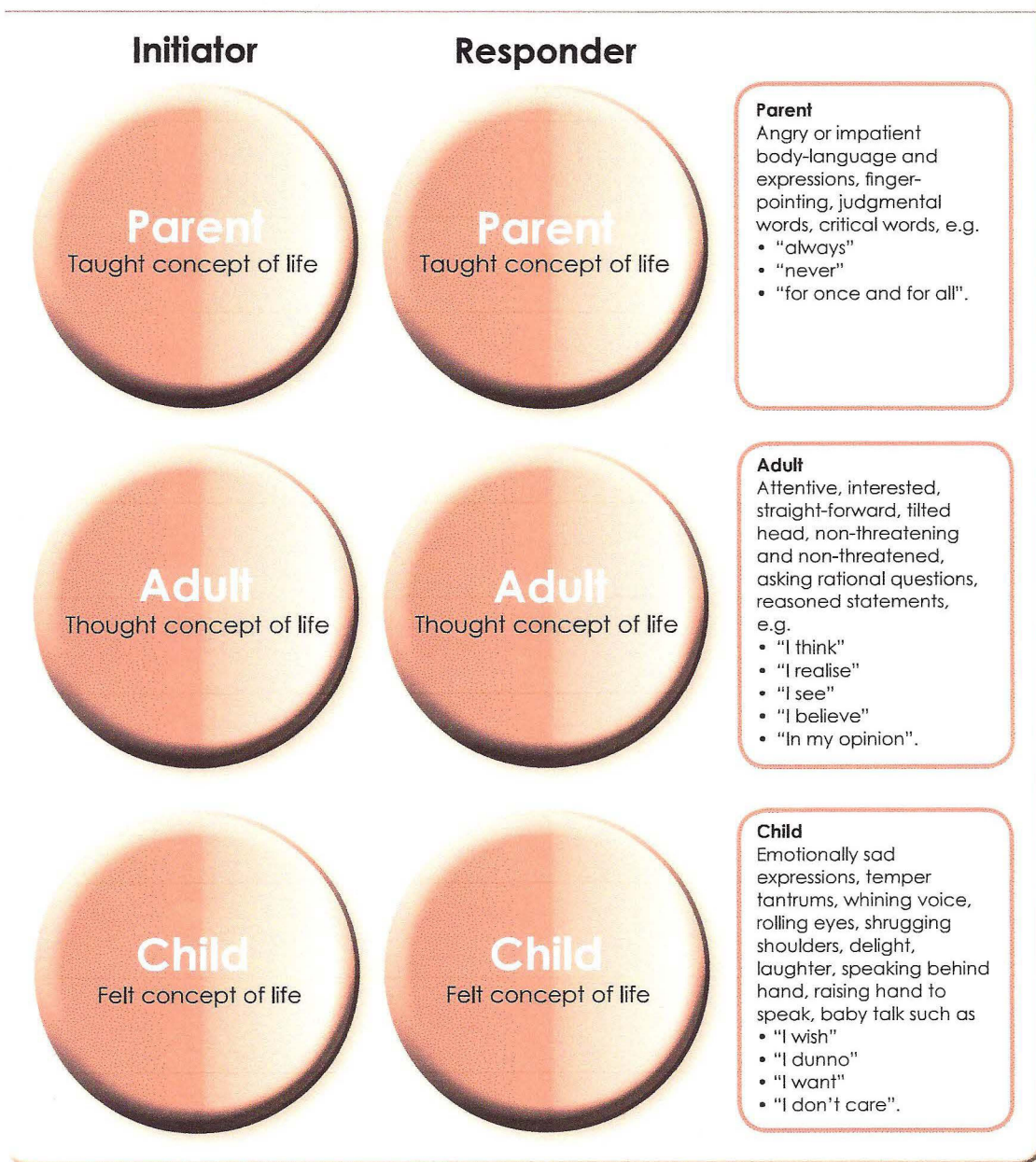
- Parent is our 'Taught' concept of life
- Adult is our 'Thought' concept of life
- Child is our 'Felt' concept of life.

When we communicate we are doing so from one of our own alter ego states.

Our feelings at the time determine which one we use, and at any time something can trigger a shift from one state to another.

When we respond we are also doing this from one of the three states.

Byrne's theory of transactional analysis



At the core of Berne's theory is the rule that effective transactions (i.e. successful communications) must be complementary or parallel. That is, they must go back from the receiving ego state to the sending ego state. For example, if the stimulus is Parent to Child, the response must be Child to Parent.

For crossed transactions, for example where the stimulus is Parent to Child and the response is Parent to Child the communication will be ineffective. Worse still either or both parties will be upset. In order for the relationship to continue smoothly the respondent must rescue the situation with a complementary transaction.

There is no general rule as to the effectiveness of any ego state in any given situation (some people get results by being dictatorial (Parent to Child), or by having temper tantrums, (Child to Parent), but for a balanced approach to life Adult to Adult is generally recommended.

It is therefore important for officers and individuals to express themselves clearly and firmly as adults so that others understand, and thereby resist the temptation to play games, argue or get upset, be angry, critical or sarcastic, especially when involved in problem-solving or trying to make oneself understood.

Sometimes we operate on more than one level at the same time. It may look as if we are having an adult-to-adult conversation, but it may be obvious that the other person is holding back criticism, annoyance, upset or hurt feelings. This is known as 'two level communication'.

If an officer or individual is communicating on two levels (the fact level and the feeling or opinion level) the feeling level will determine the outcome of the relationship. If this is so, it makes sense to find out what the feelings are or what the criticism is about. Meta talk can help to explain this.



Ancillary Communication Skills

The following skills support the bulk of this section and provide officers with additional points for consideration.

Commentary Work

During police driver training, when officers get behind the wheel of a police vehicle under instruction they are required to give a running commentary about everything that is happening around them. This systematically takes into account 360° awareness, both outside and inside the vehicle. With practice, this forces the driver to look well ahead instead of looking just in front of the bonnet thereby seeing hazards early and dealing with them effectively.

In personal safety terms, it is also important to read the situation early in order to make appropriate decisions. The greatest benefit of a talking commentary is that officers are not distracted from the task in hand. Maintaining this focus prevents the officer from thinking about issues that are not relevant to the matter in hand. Without commentary, officers may give the impression of being focused but their mind might be elsewhere. All ancillary, superfluous thoughts are excluded in favour of talking commentary.

With practice, talking commentary becomes habit-forming and can be a key to permanent awareness at a subliminal, subconscious level. That is, officers are able to carry out their role whilst unconsciously maintaining awareness of what is going on around them.

To find out more:



GO TO: **MODULE 05:**
PERSONAL MANAGEMENT

For example, an officer conducts a conversation but at the same time is operating the colour code system.

This principle can be applied in a training environment to a scenario or video footage to enhance the benefit of commentary work.

Multi-Officer Communication

When attempting to control individuals, the process of communication can be unprofessionally destroyed when officers talk over each other. It is very easy to ruin an individual officer's rapport with a subject by another officer interrupting at a crucial time.

Alternatively, it may assist an officer who is failing to verbally persuade an individual and needs rescuing.

Be aware that in attempting to rescue an officer (the victim) from the individual (the persecutor) the rescuing officer may become the focus of attention as highlighted earlier in the module and perhaps be perceived as the persecutor themselves.

In an effort to prevent this happening, the use of the clock system of positioning may be helpful. The contact (communicating officer) generally stands at the 12 o'clock position and may communicate with the individual. If another officer intervenes or if the individual decides to talk to another officer, then that officer will assume the 12 o'clock position.

Additionally, multi officer communication can be used to gain tactical advantage when attempting to misdirect the attention of an individual.

Crisis Communication

Occasionally officers may need to use loud, repetitive, verbal commands as a means of controlling the individual.



It is important to realise that simple language with short phrases should be used as a determined individual or non-English speaking individual may fail to understand complicated messages. Similarly, the officer may not be able to physiologically mouth complicated words due to the stress of the situation.

Whilst crisis communication will be naturally heard by subjects it also assists in:

- alerting colleagues
- enabling witnesses to corroborate with what an officer was saying/shouting
- breaking through any auditory barriers that the subject(s) may have
- increasing the justification for use of force by the officer(s)
- gaining control if commands are not complied with.

Before physical engagement

- “Stop”
- “Get back”
- “Stay back”

There may be similar derivatives that officers personally use.

During the encounter

Physical actions take priority, therefore it may be impossible to shout while the officer is physically exerted. However, if possible, clear messages should be given, such as:

- **“Stop fighting”**
- **“Stop resisting”**
- **“Stop kicking”**

Following the encounter when control has been achieved

At this stage it is important for the officers to de-escalate their level of response. This may be achieved by paralinguistic's such as lowering the volume of speech and reassuring the individuals. In this regard, officers may use phrases similar to:

- **“Stop struggling”**
- **“Relax, it's all over”**

Officers should also give the individuals information and, where necessary, instructions as to their next steps, such as:

- **“ I'm now going to handcuff you”**
- **“ I'm going to stand you up”**

Such information gives the individual the chance to comply with the officer's requests.

Occasionally, officers who are confronted by individuals who verbally shout and scream at them may momentarily freeze, simply because they cannot believe the ferocity of the barrage of verbal abuse that they are encountering. For Further information see [Fright, Flight, Fight, Posturing, Submission - Personal Management Module.](#)

If this is the case, officers may decide to use aggressive counter-verbal and non-verbal communication skills.

Every officer has a certain degree of aggressive potential, however the real skill is learning how to guide and manage that aggression.

The use of assertion skills gained from quality personal safety training may guide officers, not only through potentially hostile situations but also through minor irritations. In turn, assertiveness may lift an officer's spirits and preserve their self-esteem.

Establishing self-esteem is an important by-product of personal safety and nowhere is that more important than in the operational arena.

Although some officers may be pacifist by nature, there may be some situations when they must change that nature very quickly.

If officers present themselves assertively then some individuals may not want to persist with the confrontation, however that does not mean that all individuals will comply.

Aggressive verbal and non-verbal communication often precedes loss of physical control by the individual(s). For the untrained officer who may be emotionally 'disarmed' this can be dangerous, however for the assertively trained officer this can present an opportunity.

During this period of verbal/nonverbal attack, the officer may use this window of opportunity and be pre-emptive or possibly escape from the situation.

Alternatively, officers may reply verbally with submissive or aggressive counter-verbal.


This may turn the situation around

in favour of the officer both in time, and ultimately control, so that it is the individual who experiences the denial stage and is disarmed.

However, officers should similarly be aware of the individual who has mentally rehearsed what to say and what to do, in a pre-meditated and cold, clinical fashion.

Note:


For additional information on the subjects covered in this Module follow the links below:


 [GO TO: MODULE 03:
USE OF FORCE](#)

 [GO TO: MODULE 09:
INCAPACITANTS](#)

 [GO TO: MODULE 05:
PERSONAL MANAGEMENT](#)

 [GO TO: MODULE 10:
BATONS](#)

 [GO TO: MODULE 07:
UNARMED SKILLS](#)

 [GO TO: MODULE 13:
EDGED WEAPONS](#)