

The Free Child Ego State

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Here is a picture of the Free Child ego state. There is certainly freedom in this group of people. (Interesting to note that the males have their hands clenched and the females do not).



Of course there is a lot more to the Free Child than just this. It is also sad and angry and despairing and so forth. But it is this part of the Free Child - free, uninhibited, joyful and exuberant - that tends to get the most 'press' and the one that suffers most cross culturally. It does not cross over cultural boundaries at all well.

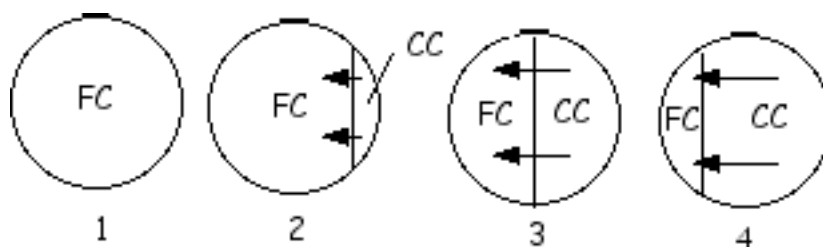
That maybe because the concept is a culturally biased one. It of course originated in California, USA in the 1960s. At that time and place this type of freedom was highly valued. I know people in other countries, have difficulty translating it into their culture. In one sense the Free Child ego state is seen as the goal of human relating. Once achieved then one has achieved self actualisation. In one sense this is true. So it is an important psychological concept particularly for Transactional Analysis.

So when I have taught in other cultures, I usually make this point. This part of the Free Child ego state in some cultures is seen as highly valued but that does

not mean that it has to be in other cultures.

Freedom to conformity

As we know when a child is born it is all Free Child. It has spent its first 9 months getting all its needs met when and how it wants. As soon as it is born that starts changing and it must begin to conform to the world around it. Figure 1 below is at birth when the Child ego state is all Free Child (FC). Slowly but surely that begins to decrease and the youngster must begin to conform and then the Conforming Child ego state (CC) begins to increase as diagrams 2, 3 & 4 show. Over the first 6 years of life the CC gets bigger and bigger and the FC gets smaller and smaller. For most people the CC gets a bit too big, but there are others where the CC does not get big enough.



When the CC gets too big you get the neuroses and people start to feel anxiety, depression, chronic anger and so forth. It is much easier to treat someone who has an FC that is too small rather than one who has an FC that is too big. As I heard it stated one day, "It is easier to treat a tightwad than a spendthrift". The tightwad has too little FC and the spendthrift has too much FC. Spending money is fun and thus it is the Free Child part of us that is involved with that. The tightwad needs to lighten up and become more free which feels good. The spendthrift needs to tighten up and become less free and that feels not good.



Conforming Child

This is why problems such as drug use and pedophilia are so resistant to change. Drugs feel good, which is FC. So to stop means one will have less FC and more CC.

For a pedophile to change means they have to suppress their sex drive and obviously that means more CC and less FC.

What would a world be like if everyone had too much FC. Well that question is not all that hard to answer. Personalities like the antisocial and the narcissistic personality types can have an excessive amount of FC and not enough CC. Again this is why these personalities are difficult to counsel. Where are you going to find a large number of antisocial personalities, why in a prison of course.

So how do prisoners organise themselves whilst being incarcerated. Well firstly, and not all that surprisingly, it is a survival of the fittest environment. The strong survive and the weak go under. The weak get picked on, bullied, their possessions get stolen and so forth. The Free Child has only a very rudimentary sense of right or wrong. The Free Child wants its needs satisfied as soon as possible. So if a weaker person has cigarettes and a stronger person wants a smoke, then he will take them. That is the thinking of the FC and the antisocial personality.

It is also an environment where physical strength reigns supreme. A prison is ruled by the sword not by the pen, at least amongst the inmates. As Chopper Read once said, "Any criminal organisation that does not have extreme terror to back itself up is a paper tiger". Unless you can terrify people with physical harm then you cannot run a successful criminal organisation. Again one could say that this is very much Free Child thinking and operating. Its basic and down to earth. Nothing fancy about it such as with something like the law and courts.

Finally we have the interesting situation in prisons where the "Tamps" or pedophiles have to be kept in protective custody. That is so mainstream inmates cannot get to them. Why is this? Because in a very short space of time they would be bashed and sooner or later probably murdered. There are two possible explanations for this.

1) Even when the Free Child is highly charged there is still an innate drive to protect the young of a species. This could be seen as almost honourable. That these group of narcissistic, selfish people still have the urge to protect the young. This is a possibility and would show just how strong the drive in the human species is to make itself survive.

2) To hate the pedophiles is convenient. There are plenty of angry people in a prison and being able to bash this certain group and feel justified in doing it, is convenient for venting ones rage. Also, as a group, pedophiles are not the physically strong members of a prison. They tend to be passive and meek individuals. So there is little chance of getting bashed back later on.



The raw energy of prison life.

So a prison is high in Free Child. It is primitive and brutal. It is also high energy, constant change and never dull. This is the quality that Free Child possesses that all other ego states don't that makes it central to the personality. In a prison there is manipulation, lies and deceit. But because of the high energy and Free Child it creates relationships that have a truth about them that is not usually found. There is in a sense an intimacy that is not found often in the outside world. The high energy puts the relationships on a different level, in one sense more true and with more realness. The social etiquette (bullshit) is non-existent. They see no reason to bother with it, and it is there where the realness comes out.