

C.A.R.

“Who’s driving?”

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C.A.R. Child - Adult - Recovery

The following exercise is an easy to use method for transforming self-limiting beliefs and obstacles and navigating beyond difficulties.

This method is an adaption of the model created by Eric Berne called Transactional Analysis (TA), which identifies three main internal ego states that we move between in relationship to our external worlds; **Parent**, **Adult** and **Child**.

In this exercise the **car** is you, the **road** is your life and the **destination** is anything going on in your life such as having a conversation or completing tasks. Your child and parent states are both reactive whilst the adult is neutral. Your inner-child is accessed through the reactions in your body and all three are active within the central nervous system.

Most of us unknowingly have our inner-child in the driving seat whilst trying to negotiate an adult world. As a result we often feel overwhelmed and lost. The task here is to get the child safely into the back seat, being driven rather than driving.

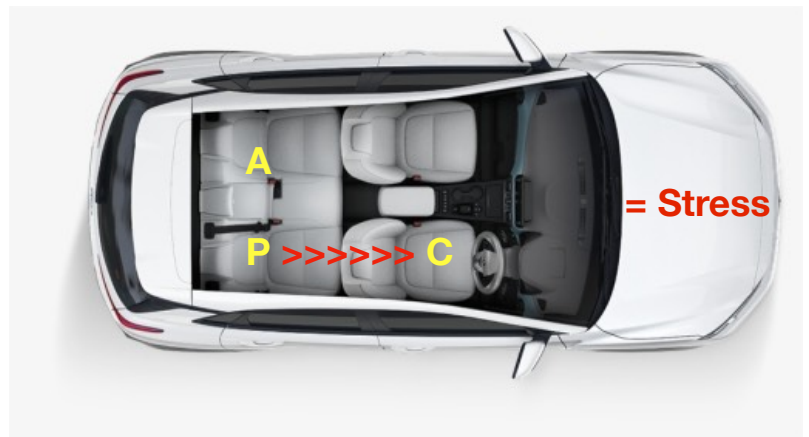


Child = Reactive / attached to past and future. Says, “I want what I want when I want it.” Drives our creativity, desire, playfulness. **Seeks safety.**

Adult = Active / present moment. Task orientated. Gets the job done. Takes charge. Is passive when child is driving. **Always Neutral.**

Parent = Reactive / attached to past and future. Role is to nurture. Always positioned behind the driver. Becomes the back seat driver when child is driving. **Seeks safety.**

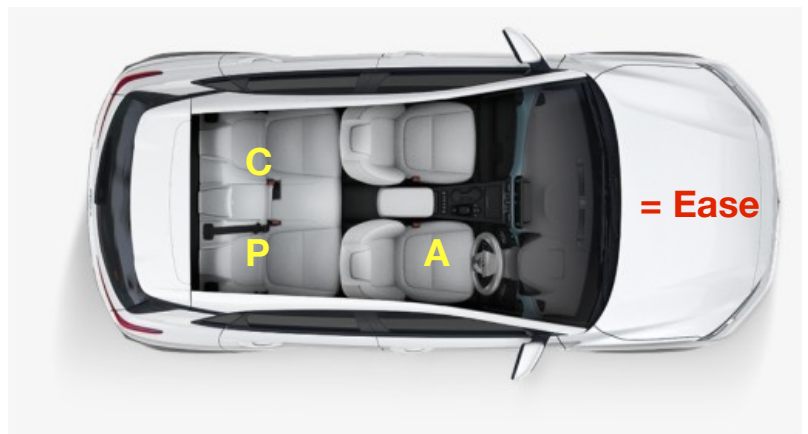
1. When the Child is driving - C (Child) P (Parent) A (Adult)



Imagine being a child and having to steer this very grown up vehicle. Naturally this soon becomes dangerous and frightening. Quite literally children aren't meant to drive cars. It's just too much responsibility. With this burden we feel vulnerable, unsafe, overwhelmed and lost. The child within us is always plugged into worrying about the past or fearing the future. When the child is driving the parent is also unsafe and so becomes our **back seat driver** due to the perceived danger. We experience this as our **inner critic**. The first thing to do is recognise when this is happening. Next is to get the neutral adult to take the wheel and in doing so the child shifts to the safety of the back seat and the parent is calmed.



2. When the Adult is driving - C (Child) P (Parent) A (Adult)



The **adult** is the neutral, non-reactive part of us that is the doer. Like the chauffeur, their role is to manoeuvre the vehicle, navigate and transport the passengers safely and effectively to the desired destination. The adult says, "Whatever obstacles or difficulties I may encounter on the road I'll handle them". It's the natural abilities we employ day to day, which get forgotten when the child takes the wheel. When the child takes over the adult becomes passive and inactive. However, when the adult takes the wheel and the child is safely in the backseat the parent is now able to perform it's primary role, which is to take care. This is the part of you that pays attention to your needs and is your inner self-care system. Your inner-child is responsible for your sense of aliveness, but is often stuck in past wounds and feels abandoned, neglected and lacking.



Symbolic background



The CAR / Chariot

The Tarot card on the left illustrates the active Adult taking charge and its important connection with the other two reactive forces of parent and child as symbolised by the Sphinxes. Life is always a forward movement even if at times it appears to have stopped, feels stuck or as if it is going in reverse. The Chariot symbolises this constant forward motion of our life.

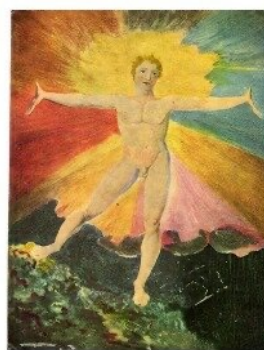
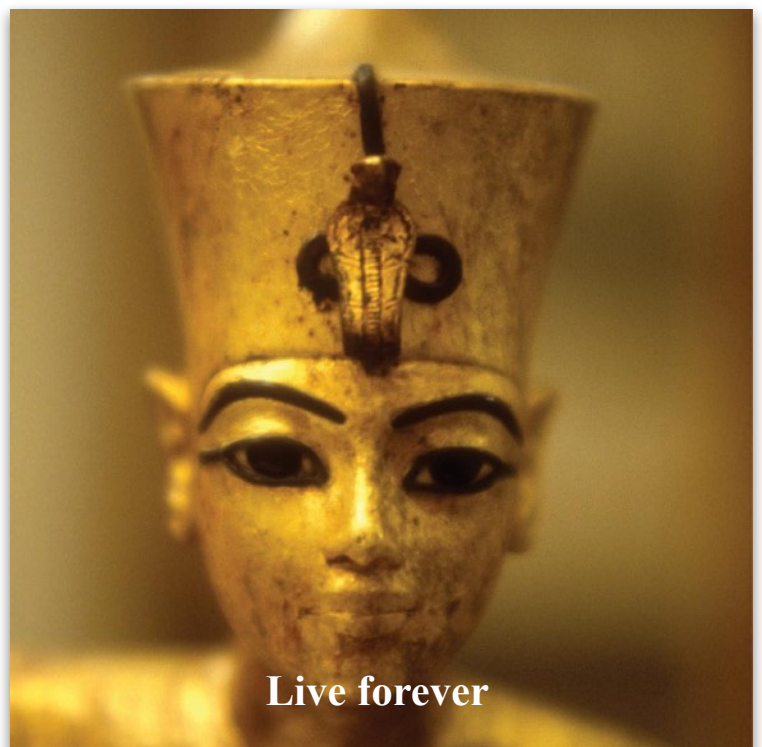
The Inner Child / Golden Child

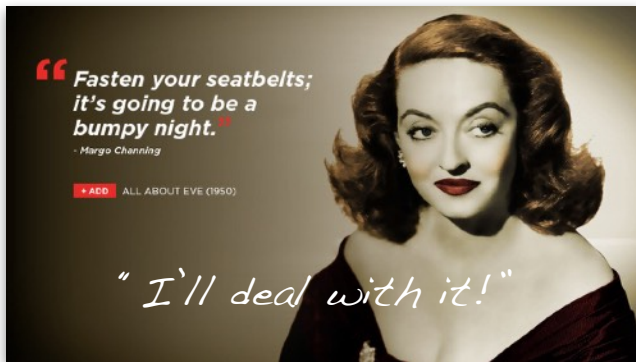
Our inner-child is a vital part of being human. This internal system governs our desires, creativity and joy. In order for this to function well it needs to feel safe and secure. When it is unconsciously left in the driving seat it can lead us into difficulties, including fear and addiction. The Golden Child (symbolised by Tutankhamen) is the ideal position where we feel safe enough to play and freely express ourselves. The child archetype longs for eternal joy and comfort.

Myth of the Puer Aeternus

This refers to the myth of the eternal child. In the CAR exercise we bring this archetype into consciousness so that it functions in a way that serves our lives. The inner child is an energy system governed by; **“I want what I want when I want it”** and seeks eternal bliss and safety. This longing has often not been met resulting in a wounded inner-child. The opposite of the Puer Aeternus is that of the Crone or Tithonus (the eternal old man). This occurs when only the adult is driving our life with no connection to the child and so disconnected from our joy and aliveness.

The child archetype can be seen within the world at large with the realities of Amazon shopping as well as entertainment streaming where we can access whatever we want whenever we want it. When the child remains unconsciously in the driving seat we strengthen its eternal hunger with the familiar feeling that something is always missing soon returning. Similarly our inner child can often feel inconsolable where nothing soothes or calms us.





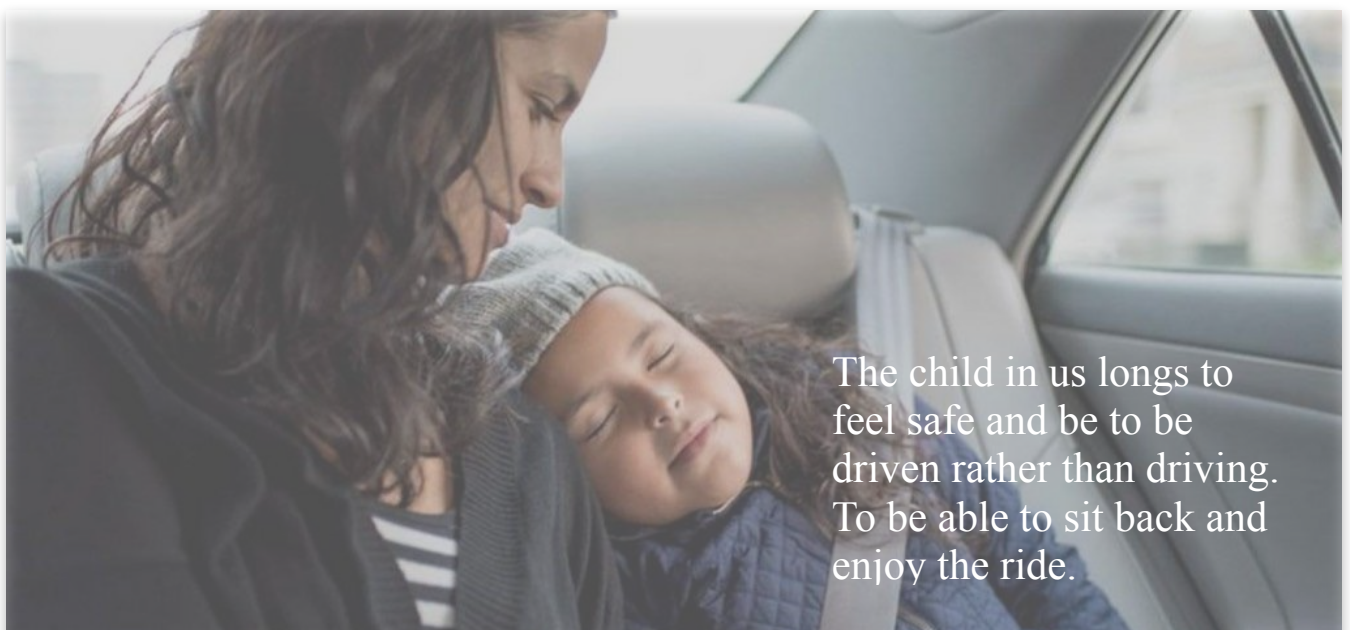
The Adult

This is the part of us that decides what to wear, what to eat, it pays the bills, gets us to work, brushes our teeth etc. The identifying qualities are neutrality and non-reactivity. When the adult encounters problems it just deals with it. If things don't work out the adult simply tries again or changes direction. It keeps going and keeps showing up to whatever is happening. For the neutral adult nothing in life is personal whilst life will always feel personal from the child or the parent's point of view. The adult is the unconditional and non-reactive steady state firmly in the present moment, here and now. The child and the parent are the conditional and reactive states constantly moving between the past and the imagined future.

The Parent

The ideal parenting is one of nurturing, guiding, teaching and providing. This represents our inner self-care system, which can quickly turn into our inner critic when the child is at the wheel. This is because, with the child driving, the parent is also unsafe and tries to regain control from the backseat. However, as soon as the child shifts to the back seat the parent is now in its functioning role.

The parent remains fixed in the seat behind the driver and will switch from fearful to relaxed depending on where the child is. When unsafe this internal state judges ourselves, our actions, our relationships and the world. Nothing is ever good enough. When safe it is our self-care system and is our natural ability to love and care for others and our worlds.



C.A.R. exercise

Instructions

1. Recovery (Destination / Goal)

Describe how you would like to feel or what you would like to be different in your life situation. What do you really want? Be as complaining or demanding as you like. "To feel good, to feel respected, to have more money, to succeed etc..."

2. Child

Using the pronoun "I", write here as the voice of the reactive Child and allow the wounded and anxious parts of you to speak freely. Let the fear, anger, disappointment, self-doubt or stress out. Don't hold back. Allow the vulnerability to rant, whine, complain or blame. Remember a child is meant to be vulnerable.

Let whatever is really bothering you off your chest. The more you can put into words about whatever the matter is the better. It's good to be as "childish" as possible.

Keep going and write as much as you can until you feel that you've said enough.

Notice how you feel in your body. Be aware of any feelings of tension, sadness or pressure. The inner child resides within our nervous system.

3. Main fears

What are you really afraid of, what is the most terrible thing that could happen and what deep down do you want to avoid?

4. Adult

Using the pronoun "I", write here as the voice of the neutral non-reactive Adult. The part of you that gets on with life and handles situations every day. This is the doer. The Parent is included here as in doing this exercise you are naturally activating your self-care mechanism.

Keeping the destination in mind, write about all the things that have helped you before or continue to that may now be forgotten - obscured by the anxiety and stress.

Be practical and logical. Draw on your common sense. By doing this you are immediately helping the child into the back seat. Keep going until you feel you've said enough.

Notice how you feel in your body. If you notice a feeling of ease and calm this is informing you that the Child is in the back seat.

5. Next steps

What are some very simple and practical things you could do right now that would take you closer to your initial goal?

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Example 1 - *Going to a company event*

1. Recovery (Destination / Goal)

To be less stressed and to enjoy myself. To feel comfortable and at ease. To stop worrying about these events. To communicate better.

2. Child

I'm scared.

I don't want to go.

Everyone else is happy and confident.

They will be judging me.

I don't like the way I look and talk.

I've got nothing to say.

I'm boring.

I hate these kind of things.

I feel overwhelmed.

I can't stop thinking about it.

I don't know what to do.

This is terrible.

It keeps happening.

Nothing is working.

I'm failing.

I've got nothing to wear.

3. Main fears

Being seen as nervous.

Being talked about.

4. Adult

I'll deal with it in the moment.

I've been through this many times before and survived to tell the tale.

Will this matter tomorrow, in a week or a year from now?

What is the worst that could happen?

I don't have to stay that long.

I can leave if I want to.

Others don't care as much as I think they do.

Everyone is worried about themselves.

I'm the one in charge of my life and I can decide what to do.

Nothing is as bad as I imagine it to be.

5. Next steps

Do this exercise before I go to the event and again whilst there.

Summary

PLEASE NOTE! We all shift between these states. We are not aiming for a permanent and fixed arrangement. Instead the point of this exercise is to cultivate awareness and consciousness so that whenever you know the child is driving you have the choice to shift states.

This is a practice and like any other exercises it takes time to strengthen and get better at. The adult part of you is always available no matter what. It is the knowing and trusting of this that takes time because often we have an inconsolable Child driving. Therefore be patient and just keep going.

How do I know when the Child is driving?

- If you have any feelings of anxiety, worry and stress (The child resides in the reactive sensations within the body).
- When life feels difficult and frightening.
- Whenever you are worrying about the past and the future.
- When your inner critic / saboteur / bully is active indicating the back seat driver (Parent).
- When you feel overwhelmed with too much pressure and responsibility as avoidance strategies kick in such as - over-eating, shopping, complaining, withdrawal.
- When you feel out of control, lost, addicted or acting out.

How do I know when the Adult is driving?

- When you feel neutral - “Whatever comes up I’ll deal with it.”
- Life feels much easier.
- You are being active rather than reactive, rational and logical.
- When you recognise that whatever happens you’ll survive.
- When you feel connected to the here and now rather than past and future.
- When you know and trust that you are a grown-up.

Doing the Exercise

- Setting the goal/destination (Recovery) is about identifying what you really want.
- As soon as you give voice to the Adult you are immediately placing the Child safely in the back seat next to the Parent.
- Keep practising. This is an ongoing exercise where you are training yourself to know that you have access to the Adult at all times.
- If you find the Child in the driving seat again and again, this is normal just keep practising.

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Example 2 - Relationship conflict

1. Recovery (Destination / Goal)

To be respected and understood by my partner. For them to apologise. For them to communicate and empathise with me.

2. Child

I'm really hurt.

They have let me down.

I'm angry.

I feel disrespected and betrayed.

I don't know what to do.

What if they do this again?

Why does this keep happening?

I'm fed up.

I don't want this anymore.

They don't appreciate me.

I feel used.

I'm worried about the future.

I can't trust them.

I hate conflict.

I can't handle this.

They don't care about me.

I'm afraid of being abandoned.

3. Main fears

Being rejected

Unresolved conflict

4. Adult

We are both adults here.

Give myself some space and time.

I can take action rather than reacting.

What are the clear facts here?

It is ok to leave if this is too much.

Saying no does not have to be a drama.

What is it I love about them?

Conflict is part of a normal relationship.

We've been here before and recovered.

What is it I'm really afraid of?

What is it I'm really wanting?

- to be listen to.

5. Next steps

Tonight, try asking for one thing I would like without being angry or critical.

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Example 3 - Addictive behaviours

1. Recovery (Destination / Goal)

To feel good. To be clear and not feel so bad about myself. To not let myself down. To feel in control and be able to trust myself.

2. Child

I want to feel good.

I want to enjoy myself.

I can't handle feeling lonely, bored, annoyed, afraid, left out, rejected etc...

This bad feeling will last forever.

I don't know what else to do.

I've done a bad thing.

There is something wrong with me.

What can't I do better.

What's wrong with treating myself.

I want to escape.

I want that good feeling to come back.

I'm not enough.

I've never going to get better.

3. Primary fear

Failing

Disappointing myself and others

4. Adult

I know from experience that this will feel bad afterwards.

I could focus on how I want to feel tomorrow.

Nothing lasts forever including thoughts and feelings.

What is it I'm really longing for here? - Connection? Joy?

Peace? Are there other options towards feeling good?

Who is it I want to be? What kind of person do I want to be and what kind of feelings about life and myself do I really want?

5. Next steps

Do this exercise again tonight.

Challenge beliefs about not feeling not good enough.

Frequently asked questions

Why does the inner child keep coming back despite me doing the exercise?

This is normal. Our inner child is a very powerful internal reactive system, built into our nervous system and hyper-vigilant to safety. The child in the driving seat is something we have been practicing for much of our lives and so is very familiar. With patience and a new type of practice the child will shift more and more into being driven rather than driving. When this happens we are much more free to have fun, play, create and enjoy - free of shame, self-consciousness, fear and doubt.

To be a fully functioning adult shouldn't the child in me just grow up?

No. We need the child as it's the part of us that drives desire, creativity, humour and play as well as our very human experiences of vulnerability and innocence. What we do want is this part of us to feel safe and secure (The Golden Child - being driven) rather than overwhelmed and afraid (The Wounded Child - driving). The truth is that we are already the adult. We can't not be this - just as we can't not have an inner child. The main point of this exercise is to be able to discern the differences and therefore make conscious decisions in order to shift position.

What if I really dislike my inner child and just want it to go away?

Having an inner child is an unavoidable reality as part of being human. What is really being expressed here is self-rejection, the wounded child rejecting itself. This part of you that is fed up with itself, fed up with the repeating patterns of fear and vulnerability. However, the more you do this exercise the more you will be able to recognise the differences between your reactive child and your non-active and neutral adult and as a result cultivate more happiness and security for yourself. Rejecting the child is abandon yourself.

How often should I do it?

As often as possible. Once or twice a day is a good start. You will get faster the more you practice. Don't worry about repeating the same things again and again. If you find the same words coming up this helps show what your primary wounds really are, which can then be addressed.

What else can I read about this?

The basic model of Transactional Analysis, which you can do a google image search, is all you really need to know to get the most out of this exercise. Similarly any literature on the inner-child such as; 'Inner Bonding - The power to heal yourself' by Margaret Paul or 'Home Coming - reclaiming and championing your inner child' by John Bradshaw. However, the best learning is in the practicing of this exercise and getting to know and discover for yourself. In this way you strengthen yourself from the inside out.

Are there any times when the child should be driving?

Not really as this is always stressful due to it naturally being dangerous and too much responsibility. Instead the adult always need to be listening to the child and acting accordingly. If there is no connection or listening to the child and it's just the adult driving then life can feel dull, repudiative and boring.

Can this exercise work for relationships?

Yes, the fundamentals of Transactional Analysis are all about relationships with the question - what will it take for me to shift into the adult position? As a couple you can do the exercise separately by focusing the destination (Recovery) on the relationship. Then read each others. Being mindful of each other's wounded child is vital and to approach each other's scripts with compassion. You are aiming to help each other.

Can this exercise be used with children and teenagers?

No. The CAR exercise is strictly for grown-ups only (20+). There may be another tools available elsewhere specifically designed for children.

C.A.R.

Give it a go yourself

1. Recovery (Destination / Goal)

2. Child

4. Adult

4. Main fears

4. Next steps

C.A.R.

Notebook example

To get this project finished.
To not feel so stressed. To
know I'm making the right choices.

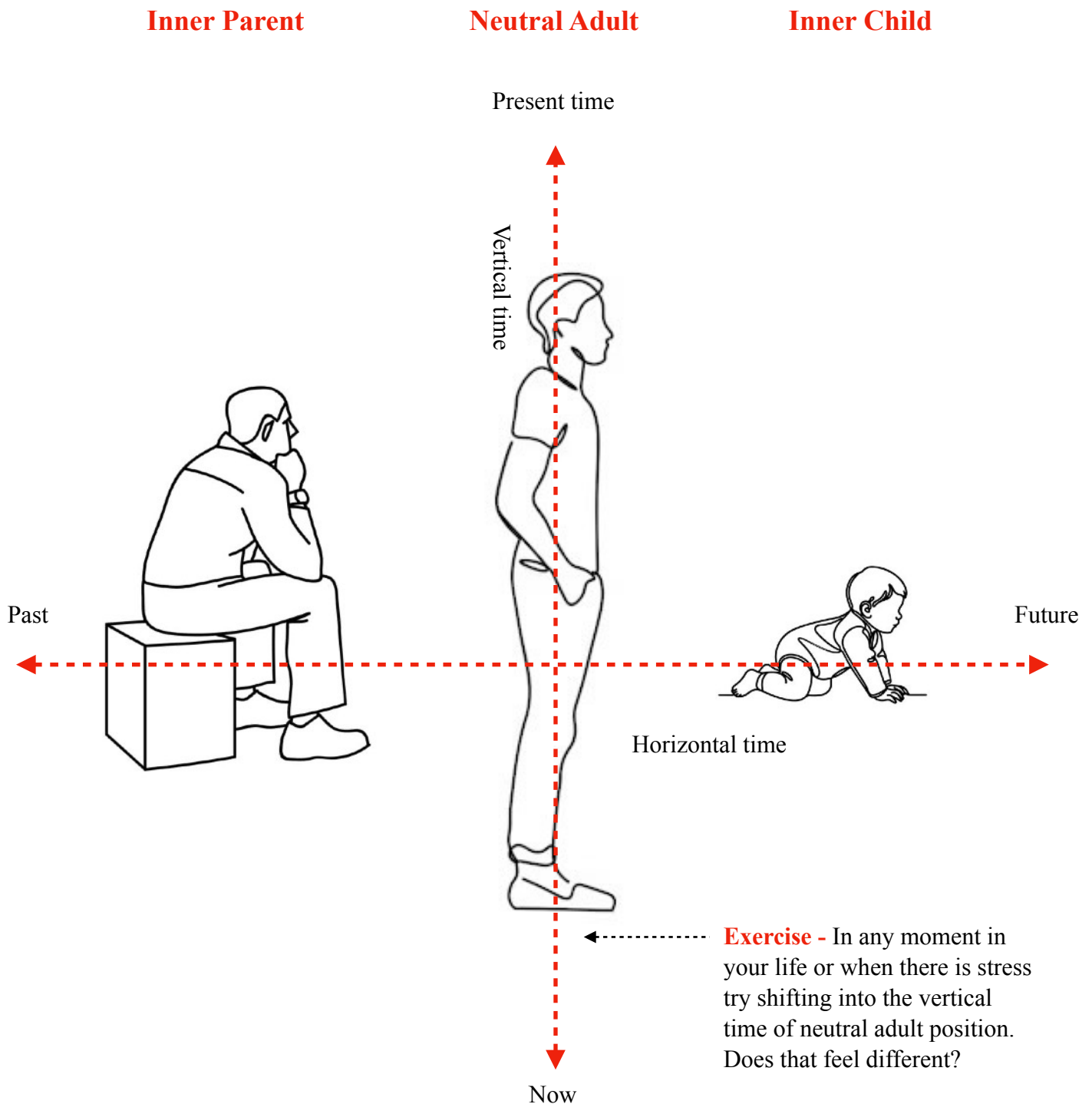
I'm really stressed
I don't know
what I'm doing.
I feel overwhelmed
and out of control.
I'm afraid of
making a mistake
It needs to be
perfect.
I can't handle
other people's
judgements.
What if I fail?
I wish I didn't
have to do this.
I don't feel
good enough.
I can't sleep.
I'm worried.

I'll just keep
going and do
what I can.
I've been here
many times
before and survived.
There is nothing
personal in this.
What is the worst
that could happen?
Others don't care
as much as I think.
I'll figure it out.
It's ok to take a
break from this.

Action

↓
Draw up a to-do
list + plan of
action - I'll do 1
hour on this tomorrow

Axis of time and connection



The Parent is connected to the horizontal time of past and future and is reactive as a result. This part of us is constantly remembering the past and both imagining and preparing for the future. Fear and care are the driving forces. Life is conditional through seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. Life is personal.

The Adult is connected to the horizontal time of the now and the present moment and is neutral and active as a result. This part of us is in the here and now dealing with life as it happens. It is our link into our higher consciousness as it is our connection to the unconditional. Life is neutral and impersonal.

The Child is attached to the past, future and present time and shifts naturally between all three. The child is reactive and driven by - I want what I want when I want it. Life is conditional based on needs being met and is easily overwhelmed with too many grown-up responsibilities. Life is personal.

