

## **Conflict Resolution Video Tutorial (transcript)**

Hi. I'm Rachel Mackay and I started The Recovery Room website earlier this year to share research and resources and support museum and heritage site operators as the sector recovers from the Covid-19 shutdown.

I've already created lots of free resources around supporting FOH staff back to work and crisis planning for the future, so if you haven't checked those out yet, head to [therecoveryroomblog.com/resources](http://therecoveryroomblog.com/resources) and tell me what you think.

In this video, I'm going to talk about something that's been a hot topic since our sites began to reopen – conflict resolution.

Now, the first thing to say is that broadly speaking, our visitors are delighted to be back on our sites, and the response has been overwhelmingly, a positive one. But we are hearing about some examples of visitors pushing back against some of the restrictions we've put in place against the spread of Covid-19, and sometimes not in a very polite way.

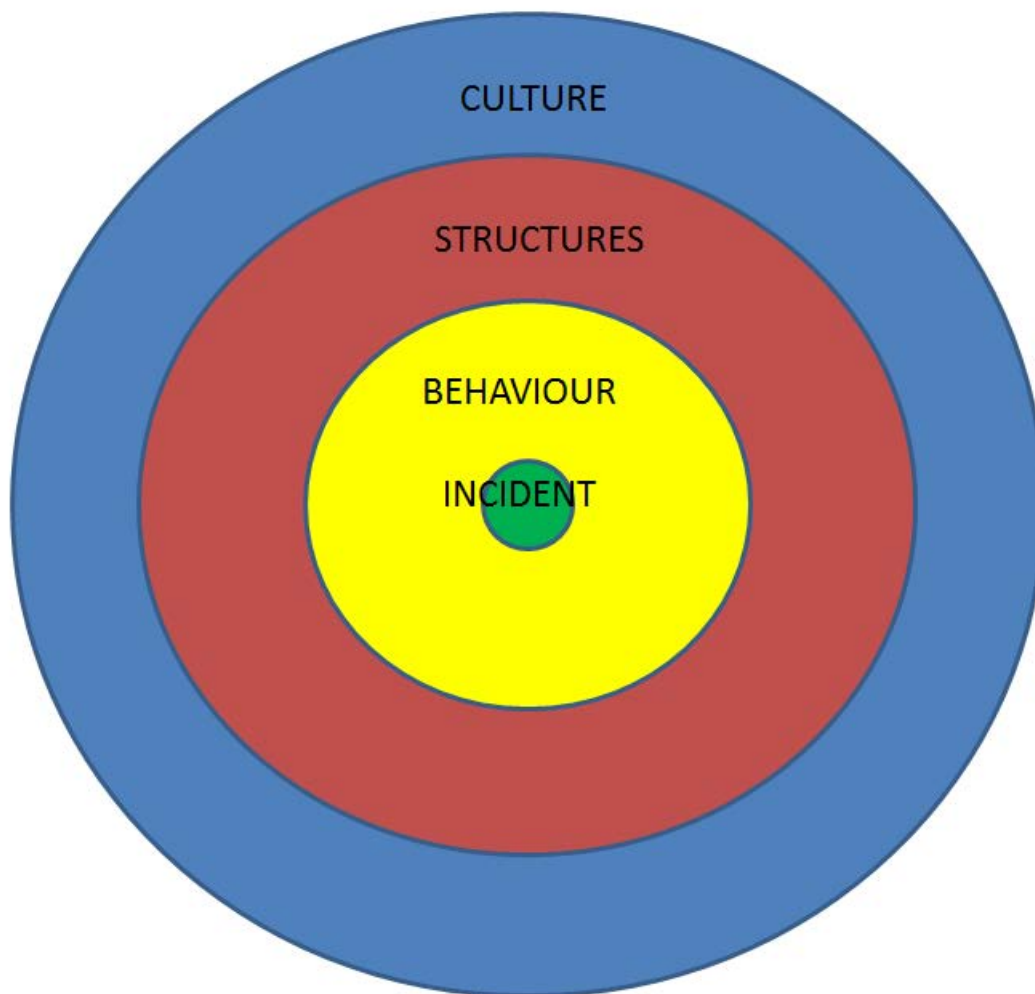
So, although I wouldn't necessarily say this behaviour is widespread, there is a clear need in the sector for more support and training around conflict resolution, especially for FOH staff and for roles that support FOH staff. So, over the next few minutes I'm going to talk through some approaches to thinking about conflict resolution at your museum or heritage site.

The first thing I would say is that there are two ways to understand conflict resolution in visitor attractions, and that's externally and internally.

If you've worked FOH, somebody has probably at some point said to you that if visitors come in to your museum and kick off, you need to understand that you don't know what external pressures have been heaped on them that day, they could have been running late, or the car broke down, kids are acting up etc. etc. it's not about you, it's about them. And whilst that's useful for understanding, it's not actually that much practical help in managing the situation. As a FOH member of staff, you don't necessarily want to write this guys autobiography, you just want to deal with the incident.

That doesn't mean to say that your organisation doesn't have control over some of the pressures on visitors. Obviously, there is some stuff about their experience that day that you do have control over in terms of the visitor journey, the ticket booking, the website, the wayfinding – that's all stuff that we know can absolutely trigger someone if it's not done right, and if that's the case it does need to be looked at, but that's not conflict resolution, that's customer service. That's your bread and butter. And that's actually probably a whole different video about visitor journey mapping and audience profiles. Maybe I'll do that video one day. But for now, let's assume that's all perfect, and an incident has occurred because this visitor is just in a bad mood, nothing to do with you or your museum.

So, in that scenario, it's tempting to look at the incident as an isolated object that needs to be reacted to and doesn't have an organisational context, because it's all about the visitor, right? But actually, this isn't the case, there is an organisational context that wraps around this incident. So, starting from the middle, you have the behaviour of the people involved in the incident. That's not just visitors, that's the staff dealing with it as well. Then, you have the structures that govern how and why the people in the organisation behave and how they act and then, finally you have the organisational culture. And the way to look at it is really from the outside in.



So first of all, let's look at culture. Is your organisational culture one that supports effective conflict resolution? So, at a very basic level, are staff treated fairly or is there a culture of blame? That sounds quite blunt, but your staff will know the answer. Is there a culture of allowing FOH staff a certain amount of leeway in how they manage conflict, or are rules and restrictions actually too strict? Does it all get a bit 'Computer says no'? Most importantly, will FOH staff be supported through conflict? Will there be aftercare? Are people reflective? These are the sort of questions you might ask to discover whether your organisation is culturally able to cope with conflict.

Next is structures. Do you have structures that support conflict resolution? And I'll give you one example of this – I used to work in an organisation that experienced quite a bit of queue rage, so unfortunately there were a few conflict resolution incidents. We had - and I think this was quite a good idea - a rapid response system in place where a code word was used on the radio, and a selected team of people would attend as quick as they could. A selected team is important, because often the one thing that might escalate a conflict is having 20 security officers suddenly arrive on scene. That's not always a helpful thing. You will need to think about what model is best for your organisation. And then baked into that model was also a reflection stage where everyone's side of the story was sought, and aftercare offered if necessary. So, that's just one example, but if conflict is a new and increasing problem at your site, a rapid response model might be something you want to consider adopting.

Now, that's just one example of structural support for conflict resolution, but there are plenty of others. So, risk assessments, staff forums, standard operating procedures, incident reporting, wash-up sessions – these are all tools that can be used to support, and if you would like to talk about those tools in more detail, I would encourage you to get in touch, and let's have a conversation about what tools could help your organisation.

Finally, you have the behaviour. So here we're talking conflict resolution up close and personal. This is a massive topic and something that you can bring in external trainers to look at, so if this area is where you need most help, I'd really consider investing in some good training. But, for now, if I had to encourage everyone to look at one idea around personal conflict resolution it would be Transactional Analysis or TA. Some of you may not have heard of TA before, so I'll give you a quick overview.

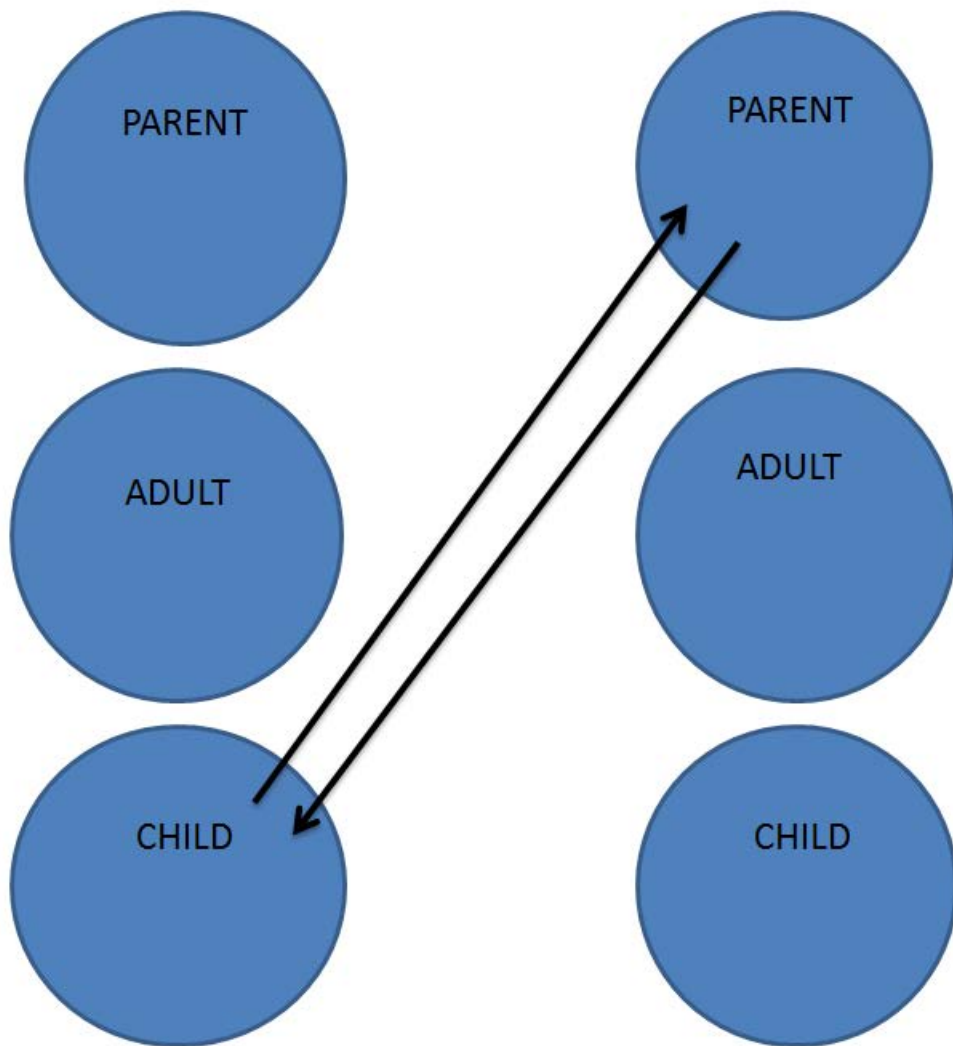
TA is a psychological theory of human personality founded by American psychiatrist Eric Berne in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and has been developed ever since. Put simply, it says that we all have different ego states we can be in which are Parent, Adult and Child. Actually, you can break these down even further with categories like Critical Parent and Nurturing Parent, but for now let's just stick with Parent, Adult and Child.

As humans, we don't occupy just one of the ego states, we can be in different states at different times. And, no state is inherently better or worse than another – they all have strengths and weaknesses and they can all be useful states at different times. We call communications between the ego states "transactions."

Here's an example of a complimentary transaction.

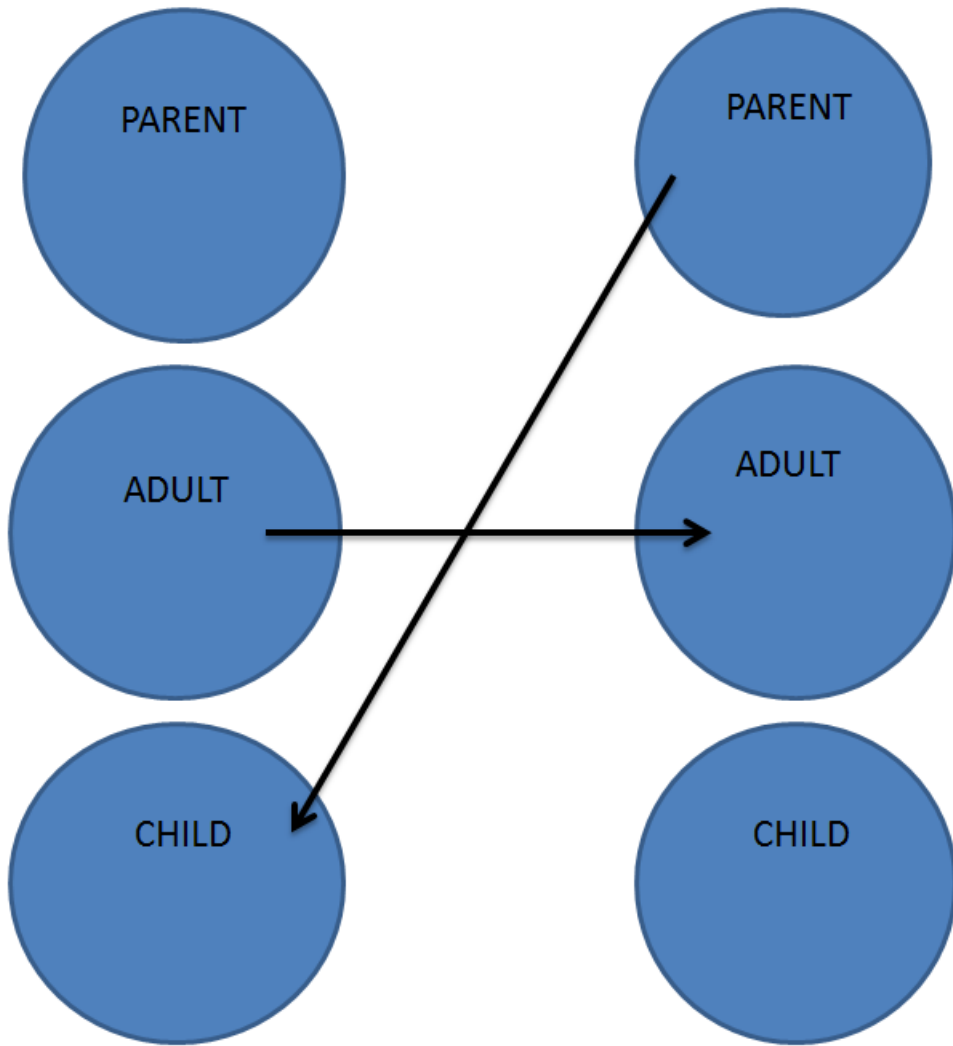
One person complains to a friend. "I feel terrible. I need help." They are in the child ego state, echoing behaviours and actions from childhood.

The other person replies "That's awful! How can I help you make everything ok?" They are taking charge, mummying the other person, echoing behaviours copied from their parents or other authority figures. So, that's an example where two people are in different states, but the transaction is complimentary and works well.

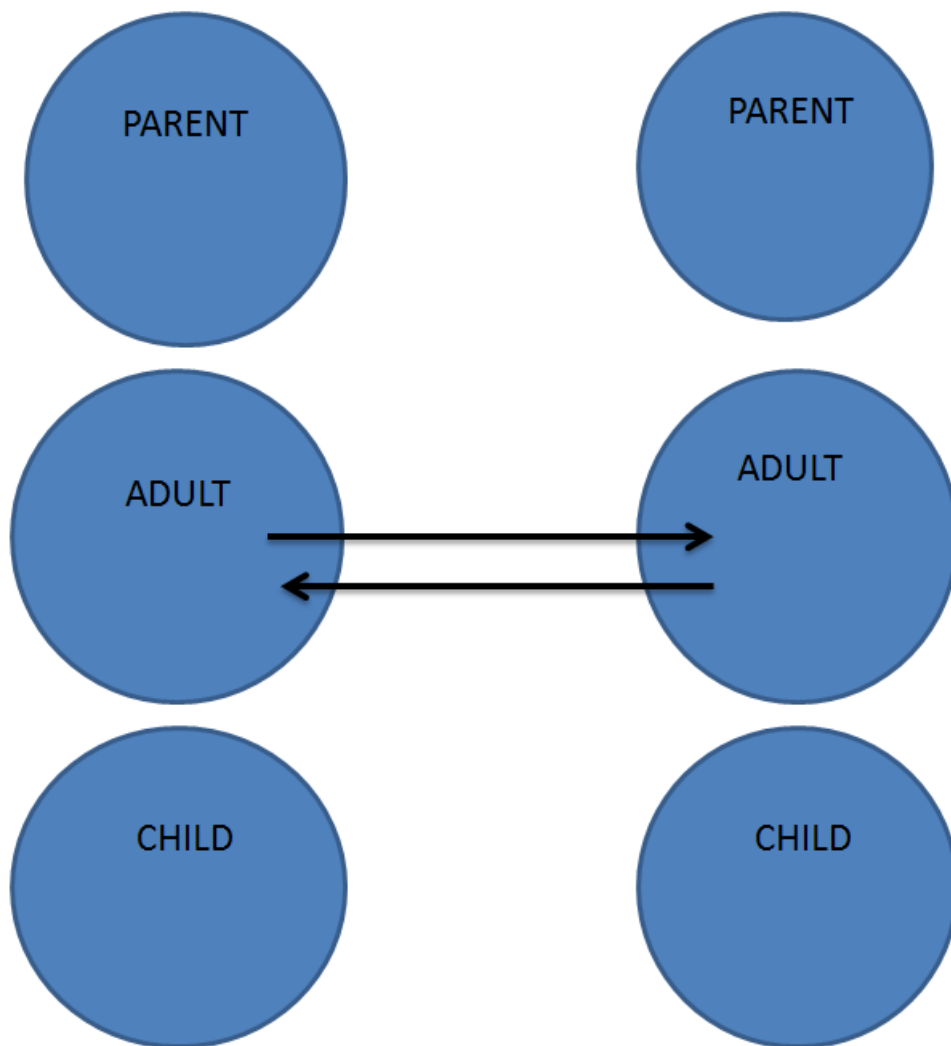


If people communicate from different stages but their transaction is crossed instead of complimentary, that's where we start to get problems.

So if person one were to reply and say "well, don't patronise me! I don't need help!" They have moved into the adult ego state, and the lines are now crossed. They've been offended by being communicated to like someone in the child ego state. Even though, they kind of were.



In the workplace, so in our museum and heritage sites, with colleagues and visitors, we always want to keep the communication complimentary, and we pretty much always want to keep it adult to adult. These transactions are rational and are less likely to descend into emotional outbursts, because there's nothing to react to.



So for example, say you're working FOH in your museum and you see someone sitting on a staircase.

You could go up to them and say "You're not allowed to sit on the stairs!" very sternly. This is a parent ego state response, and is more like to encourage a child ego state response where they don't listen to you, or an adult ego state response where they're offended by being spoken to like a child.

Instead, if you approach the situation from an adult ego state, where you're acting as a rational adult with no judgement on their behaviour and say something like "Would you mind not sitting on the stairs, because sometimes people find it hard to use the handrail" or whatever the reason is, the visitor is more likely to respond as a rational adult.

That's a small example, but you can see how TA could be applied to all sorts of situations within the visitor attraction.

It can also be used to de-escalate conflict. This is useful for FOH, or supervisors and managers who might get called to deal with an issue. You might notice that someone talking to you – or maybe shouting at you – is coming from either a parent or a child ego state. Always try to bring them back to adult state by engaging as rationally as you can. Think about Jeremy Kyle, shouting and bullying all

the unfortunate people fighting on his TV show. Classic parent ego state response. I would hazard a guess that in those situations, Jeremy is certainly not trying to de-escalate the conflict. And I don't think those burly security guards do much to de-escalate it either.

So, if you want to resolve conflict, my one piece of advice would be: keep it adult. Not that kind of adult.

Transactional Analysis is a huge topic, and if you want to read more I would go to [www.ericberne.com](http://www.ericberne.com) to find out how it all began.

We've covered a huge amount very quickly, so if you want to read a transcript of this video, head to The Recovery Room to find a transcript and some helpful diagrams about the internal context of conflict and of course, TA.

I hope you've found this video useful. You might have seen that I have produced this video for free but with a donation ask. We all know that mental health is an incredibly important topic right now and so I've chosen to raise money for CALM, a fantastic charity who do incredibly important work in suicide prevention. I hope you can tell from this video that I am really passionate about supporting FOH and so I've made this fundraising video in memory of an amazing member of my FOH team that I was proud to work with a long time ago. So, if you can afford to, please do consider making a donation. Otherwise, please give me a thumbs up, share this video and let me know what you think!

Thanks!