

# Life Positions explained: the ‘OK’ Corral

## Origins

Transactional Analysis (TA) is a form of humanistic psychotherapy that was intentionally developed to enable people to improve themselves without the need for a psychotherapist. A key concept is Life Positions.

The four life positions were developed by Frank Ernst into the well-known OK Corral below:

		<b>You are okay with me</b>			
<b>I am not okay with me</b>	<b>I am not OK You are OK</b>	<b>I am OK You are OK</b>			<b>I am okay with me</b>
	<i>The One-down position</i> <i>“I wish I could do that as well as you do.”</i>	<i>The Healthy position</i> <i>“Hey, we’re making good progress now.”</i>			
<b>I am not okay with me</b>	<b>I am not OK You are not OK</b>	<b>I am OK You are not OK</b>			<b>I am okay with me</b>
	<i>The Hopeless position</i> <i>“Oh this is terrible – we’ll never make it.”</i>	<i>The One-up position</i> <i>“You’re not doing that right – let me show you.”</i>			
		<b>You are not okay with me</b>			

## What are Life Positions?

Life Positions are stances or attitudes, and fundamental beliefs that we live our life by, often unconsciously.

These Life Positions often prevail through our personal life, work, relationships and over time – but we can change them. Sometimes we change our Life Position in response to some major life event that makes us reconsider our ‘stance’ or we can choose to change it consciously.

There are four Life Positions:

<b>1. I’m OK—You’re OK</b>	<b>2. I’m OK—You’re not OK</b>
<b>3. I’m not OK—You’re OK</b>	<b>4. I’m not OK—You’re not OK</b>

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## I'm OK – You're OK

1. The **I'm OK—You're OK** position is known as the healthy position. It is the belief that people have basic value, worth, and dignity as human beings. That people are OK is a statement of themselves as a person, not necessarily their behaviour. This position is characterised by an attitude of trust and openness, a willingness to give and take, and an acceptance of others as they are. People are close to themselves and to others. There are no losers, only winners.

## I'm OK – You're not OK

2. The **I'm OK—You're not OK** is the position of people who project their problems onto others and blame them, put them down, and criticise them. Often psychological 'games' are played that try to reinforce this position e.g., self-styled superior or one-up (the "I'm OK") who projects anger, disgust, and scorn onto a designated inferior, or scapegoat (the "You're not OK"). This position is that of the person who needs an underdog to maintain his or her sense of "OKness." For them to be 'up' they need to put others 'down'.

## I'm not Ok – You're OK

3. The **I'm not OK—You're OK** is known as the depressive or one-down position and is characterised by feeling powerless in comparison with others. Typically, such people serve others' needs instead of their own and generally feel victimised. Psychological 'games' played that support the power of others and deny one's own. For them to feel 'one down' they need someone else to be 'one up' on them.

## I'm not Ok – You're not OK

4. The **I'm not OK—You're not OK** is known as the position of hopelessness, futility and frustration. Operating from this place, people have lost interest in life and may see life as totally without promise. This self-destructive stance is characteristic of people who are unable to cope in the real world, and it may lead to extreme withdrawal, a return to infantile behaviour, or violent behaviour resulting in injury or death of themselves or others.

Each of us has a favourite position we operate from under stress. The challenge is to become aware of how we are attempting to make life real through our basic life position and if necessary, create a healthy alternative.

### **Note:**

The **I'm OK –You're OK** life position is probably the best-known expression of Transactional Analysis. That is, to establish and reinforce the position that recognises the value and worth of every person. Transactional analysts

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regard people as basically "OK" and thus capable of change, growth and healthy interactions.