

## Who is Driving the Christmas Bus?



Those of you who are doing Schema Therapy with me will know about the three main groups of modes: **child modes**, **critic modes**, and **coping modes**.

Our modes are like passengers on a bus. But this is no ordinary bus! The driver of the bus changes depending on which stop we have just pulled out of. Sometimes our bus has pulled out of **Lonely Town Central Station**, and our Vulnerable Child has wrestled the wheel. At other times, the bus has pulled out of **Shitsville Stop**, and the Helpless Surrenderer has limply dragged themselves into the driver's seat.

The bus might be cutting across lanes at the hands of a delusional driver — a driver who thinks they can catch up from running late by having Lewis Hamilton-level diving skills, aka the **Self-Aggrandiser** driver.

At the back of the bus, we have the usual suspects. These dodgy characters don't take the wheel themselves, but they **backseat drive**! Nobody on the bus likes these scaly characters. They are a gang called the **Critic Modes**.

One of them means well — they just want to keep the Vulnerable Child safe. Unfortunately, they are downright demanding ("do this, do that, don't do it like this"). Another is a real pain in the rear end: the one that induces guilt ("you don't deserve the luxury of travelling on a bus"). The third of this gang of three is the nastiest. They make it their business to cause humiliation and shame.

Sometimes different modes fight with one another for control of the bus, or they might make deals with one another about who will drive, when, and under what conditions.

The gang of three critics who sit at the back hate to be silent. When boundaries are imposed on them, they fight back to have their say.

**BUT**, amongst all of these, every one of you also has a **Wise Healthy Adult mode**.

Our Wise Healthy Adult mode is the part of us that can oversee the various passengers on the bus. It can listen to the other passengers and respond in a balanced and measured manner. It can listen to the Vulnerable Child mode and tend to their needs. It can diminish the power of the Critic Modes by imposing limits on them, or having them leave the bus altogether (if they can't be trusted to behave).

Our Wise Healthy Adult mode can also formulate avenues for coping that are helpful, optimise our circumstances, and benefit (in a healthy way) the situations of those around us.

Over the Christmas period, it is helpful for us to tune into who is driving our **Christmas Bus** at any point in time. If the bus has been hijacked by one of our child modes — Enraged, Impulsive, Angry, Vulnerable, or Undisciplined Child — we ask, from the place of our Wise Healthy Adult mode: *What is it that my child mode needs?*

We listen for the response, and we consider helpful ways of meeting the needs of the child mode.

The Christmas period is a ripe time for activating our child modes. It can be tricky tuning into them and getting a sense of what they need. I have uploaded an experiential exercise to my website that can help you tune into your child modes and listen for what they are needing.

Another suggestion is doing a writing exercise with your **least preferred writing hand**. From the perspective of your child mode, write how your child experiences Christmas and what they need during this festive season. **REMEMBER:** write in the *first person* of your child mode.

For example, if your Vulnerable Child mode is your four-year-old self, you write as if your four-year-old self is doing the writing. This allows you to better listen to and understand what your child mode is trying to communicate, and what their needs are.

A third suggestion is to tune into how your body feels and what your emotional inner world is like when you engage in Christmas activities that you enjoyed as a child. Examples include singing particular carols, eating particular Christmas foods, decorating the Christmas tree, or visiting particular places or people. Give your Happy Child space to fully be in these activities.

Remember, as I mentioned above, you all have Wise Healthy Adult modes. You are all capable of touching into your child modes and responding from the place of your Wise Healthy Adult mode.