Comparing Widely-Used Emotional Models to TEG-Blue™

TEG-Blue connects existing models, frameworks and theories.

Each one of them — from Plutchik's Wheel, to NVC, CBT, Polyvagal Theory, and the Zones of Regulation — has given us valuable ways to understand emotions. But each one also leaves spaces.

TEG-Blue weaves these models together into a single visual map. It **connects what happens** *inside each model* with what happens *between them*, and adds the missing layers that **trauma and abuse survivors** know are real — like the role of distorted emotions under survival, and the reality of malicious intent.

TEG-Blue acts as connective tissue — bridging across psychology, education, and **trauma-informed practice** to give us one integrative, neurodivergent-friendly system for understanding emotions, harm, and repair.

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1. Wheel of Emotions — developed by Robert Plutchik

Consists on:

- The model describes **8 primary emotions** (joy, trust, fear, surprise, sadness, disgust, anger, anticipation).
- These emotions can **combine** to form more complex feelings (e.g., anticipation + joy = optimism).
- It's often used visually, like a flower or color wheel, to show how emotions relate and intensify.

Strengths:

- Clear **visual map** of primary emotions.
- Shows **intensity and blending** (complex feelings built from simple ones).
- Useful for teaching emotional vocabulary.

What it misses:

- Doesn't explain **why an emotion "shows up" distorted** (e.g., anger as boundary vs anger as control)
- Ignores **context** — the same emotion can mean very different things depending on whether you're in Belonging or Defense mode.

- No pathway for **healing** or relational repair.

- Treats emotions as **fixed, narrow buckets** (joy, fear, sadness...), without showing the **gradients inside each one**.

What TEG-Blue adds:

- Explains the **systemic role** of emotions (Connect vs Protect vs Control vs Oppression).

- Maps how emotions are **interpreted differently** inside the emotional gradient between Connect vs Protect.

- Includes **trauma-informed gradients** (hurt, neglect, abuse, malicious intent).

- Offers **tools for repair**, not just classification.

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2. NVC — **Nonviolent Communication**, developed by **Marshall Rosenberg**.

Consists on:

- It's both a **communication method** and a way of relating based on empathy.

- The core steps are:

  1. **Observation** (what happened, without judgment)

  2. **Feeling** (how you feel about it)

  3. **Need** (what need of yours is connected)

  4. **Request** (a clear, doable action you ask for)

- Example: Instead of "You never listen to me!", NVC encourages: "When I see you looking at your phone while I talk (observation), I feel sad (feeling), because I need connection (need). Would you be willing to put it down for a minute? (request)."

Strengths:

- Provides a **language structure** (observation, feeling, need, request).

- Promotes **empathy** and reduces blame.

- Can transform conflict when used with goodwill.

What it misses:

- Assumes people are **emotionally safe enough** to use it (not always true in abuse).

- Can be **weaponized** by manipulators (e.g., fake empathy to control).

- Doesn't explain **why emotions distort** under survival mode.

- Lacks a **map of patterns** — it gives tools, but not the bigger system.

What TEG-Blue adds:

- Shows **why NVC fails** in unsafe dynamics (e.g., manipulation, control. oppression).

- Adds **emotional gradients** to measure harm and distinguish discomfort vs real damage.

- Places NVC inside a **wider framework** of survival/belonging — explaining when it works and when it breaks.

- Provides **visual tools** that make feelings and patterns visible (helpful for neurodivergent users).

3. CBT — Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Consists on:

- A widely used form of psychotherapy.

- Focuses on how **thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are connected**.

- The idea: if you change distorted thinking patterns, you can reduce painful emotions and change unhelpful behaviors.

- Often very **structured and practical** (worksheets, exercises, homework).

- Example: If you think "I always fail," CBT would help you examine evidence, challenge the thought, and replace it with something more accurate like "Sometimes I struggle, but I've succeeded before."

Strengths:

- Practical, structured, **evidence-based**.

- Helps challenge **distorted thoughts**.

- Good for anxiety, depression, phobias.

What it misses:

- Over-focuses on **thoughts**, sometimes minimizing the **body and nervous system**.

- Can feel **mechanical** or invalidating if deeper trauma is present.

- Doesn't address **power, relational abuse, or systemic harm**.

- Healing is treated as an **individual task**, not relational or generational.

What TEG-Blue adds:

- Integrates **body, nervous system, and somatic patterns** (not just thoughts).

- Places emotions in a **relational + systemic context**, not just inside the individual.

- Brings in **trauma-informed gradients** that show the difference between hurt, survival responses, and deliberate abuse.

- Connects **personal healing** with **social repair** (families, institutions, culture).

4. Polyvagal Theory — developed by Stephen Porges

Consists on:

- A model of the **autonomic nervous system** (ANS).
- Describes how our body shifts between:
  - **Ventral vagal (safety/social connection)**
  - **Sympathetic (fight/flight)**
  - **Dorsal vagal (shutdown/freeze)**
- Shows how our sense of **safety vs threat** drives emotional and behavioral states.

Strengths:

- Brings the **body and nervous system** into the emotional conversation.
- Trauma-informed — explains why people react with shutdown or hyperarousal.
- Very influential in therapy, somatics, and trauma research.

What it misses:

- Focuses on **physiology**, not on the **emotional meaning-patterns** themselves.
- Doesn't map **relational dynamics** (e.g., manipulation, power, abuse).
- No clear **tools for communication or repair** — it explains states but doesn't guide action.
- Can feel technical for non-specialists.

What TEG-Blue adds:

- Integrates **nervous system states** with **emotional logic and meaning**.
- Explains how these states translate into **patterns of connection, defense, manipulation, and oppression**.
- Provides **visual, relational tools** that make survival patterns understandable for everyday people.
- Bridges **somatic awareness** with **relational repair**.

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5. Zones of Regulation — developed by Leah Kuypers

Consists on:

- A color-coded tool widely used in schools.
- Groups emotional states into 4 "zones":
  - **Blue Zone**: low energy, sadness, tiredness.
  - **Green Zone**: calm, ready to learn.
  - **Yellow Zone**: heightened, anxious, silly, excited.
  - **Red Zone**: anger, terror, out of control.
- Taught as a way for children to **recognize and manage emotions**.

Strengths:

- Extremely **simple and accessible**.
- Popular in **education worldwide**.
- Gives children a **shared language** for feelings.

What it misses:

- Oversimplifies — puts **huge ranges of emotions into one "zone."**
- Often used as a **behavior management tool** rather than true emotional literacy.
- Not trauma-informed — can **shame children** for being in "red" instead of showing why.
- No gradients or systemic understanding.

What TEG-Blue adds:

- Provides **gradients within each emotion**, not just colors.
- Trauma-aware: explains **why emotions distort**, not just how to label them.
- Moves from **behavior control** to **emotional understanding and repair**.
- Designed to be **neurodivergent-friendly**, avoiding shaming or simplification.

6. Freud's Ego Model — developed by Sigmund Freud (1923)

Consists on:

Divides the psyche into three structures: **id** (instinctual drives), **ego** (rational mediator), and **superego** (moral authority). Emotions and behaviors are seen as the outcome of conflicts between these three forces.

Strengths:

- Groundbreaking attempt to describe inner psychological conflict.
- Recognized that part of the self works unconsciously.
- Set the foundation for later theories of self and defense.

What it misses:

- Frames conflict as mainly internal, without relational/systemic context.
- Lacks trauma-informed understanding of survival states.
- Rigid categories that don't account for gradients or social dynamics.

What TEG-Blue adds:

- Expands beyond three parts into **a spectrum of modes: Connect–Belonging, Protect–Defense, Manipulation, Tyranny.**
- Shows how survival states distort emotions, not just within the individual but in relationships and systems.
- Provides visual maps and harm-measurement scales for repair.

7. Winnicott's True/False Self — developed by Donald Winnicott

Consists on:

Explains how children develop a **True Self** when caregivers attune, but a **False Self** when they must comply with others' needs for survival.

Strengths:

- Validates the pain of losing authenticity in early relationships.

- Describes the survival value of a False Self.

- Highly influential in developmental and trauma theory.

What it misses:

- Doesn't show how masks escalate into manipulation or oppression.

- Focuses mainly on childhood, less on lifelong systemic contexts.

- Less visual/systemic for practical use.

What TEG-Blue adds:

- Integrates the concept of False Self into the **Ego Persona Construct Framework.**

- Maps how masks form, shift, and distort across the gradient.

- Offers tools to **rebuild authenticity** and restore belonging.

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8. Rogers' Organismic Valuing — developed by Carl Rogers

Consists on:

Posits that humans have an **innate drive toward growth, healing, and authenticity** if conditions of empathy, acceptance, and congruence are present.

Strengths:

- Optimistic and empowering; highlights inner compass toward well-being.

- Strong basis for person-centered therapy.

- Emphasizes empathy and unconditional positive regard.

What it misses:

- Doesn't map how trauma distorts or blocks the compass.

- Assumes conditions of safety that may not exist.

- Less explicit about systemic or relational harm.

What TEG-Blue adds:

- Shows how survival modes **override or distort** the organismic compass.

- Explains how repair reopens the path to belonging and growth.

- Places authenticity inside a visual gradient, making distortions visible.

9. Jung's Persona — developed by Carl Jung

Consists on:

The **Persona** is the "mask" we present to society — a social role that allows us to adapt and be accepted, but can hide our deeper self.

Strengths:

- Recognizes the adaptive function of masks.

- Highlights the tension between public identity and inner reality.

- Influenced modern understandings of role-play and identity.

What it misses:

- Stays symbolic and less practical for trauma survivors.

- Doesn't map gradients of protective vs manipulative masks.

- Offers little guidance for repair or authenticity.

What TEG-Blue adds:

- Places Persona inside the **Role Mask Gradient.**

- Maps how masks shift from protection → manipulation → tyranny.

- Provides concrete tools for reclaiming authenticity and belonging.

10. Internal Family Systems (IFS) — developed by Richard Schwartz

Consists on:

A therapeutic model that views the mind as made of **parts**: protectors, managers, exiles, and the Self. Healing involves building trust and balance among parts.

Strengths:

- Trauma-informed and compassionate.

- Normalizes protective strategies instead of pathologizing them.

- Gives people a language for inner dialogue.

What it misses:

- Focuses inward, less on systemic oppression and malicious intent.

- Parts are sometimes treated in isolation from social context.

What TEG-Blue adds:

- Integrates parts into a **relational/systemic gradient.**

- Explains how inner protectors mirror relational patterns (e.g., defense, control, tyranny).

- Adds harm-measurement scales to situate personal healing inside collective repair.

11. Ego Development Theory — developed by Jane Loevinger & others

Consists on:

Maps stages of identity development, from **pre-conventional** to **post-autonomous**, showing how self-concept and meaning-making evolve.

Strengths:

- Provides a structured roadmap of self-growth.

- Useful for developmental psychology and leadership studies.

- Recognizes higher levels of self-awareness and integration.

What it misses:

- Largely cognitive; underplays trauma and emotional survival.

- Assumes linear progression, not accounting for regression or trauma freeze.

- Limited attention to relational abuse and systemic oppression.

What TEG-Blue adds:

- Shows how trauma can **stall or distort** development.

- Integrates identity growth with survival/belonging gradients.

- Frames development as **dynamic and relational**, not only cognitive.

12. Goffman's Dramaturgical Self — Erving Goffman

Consists on:

Proposes that social life is like a **stage**, where people play roles depending on audience, context, and setting.

Strengths:

- Brilliant metaphor of performance.

- Shows adaptability of the self in different contexts.

- Groundwork for Role Theory and social psychology.

What it misses:

- Doesn't distinguish authentic roles from survival-driven ones.

- Overlooks how trauma and power distort role-play.

- Provides no path for repair or authenticity.

What TEG-Blue adds:

- Expands into the **Role Mask Gradient.**
- Distinguishes masks rooted in belonging vs defense vs manipulation.
- Shows pathways for reclaiming authenticity and healing from role entrapment.

13. Defense Mechanisms — Freud & Anna Freud

Consists on:

Explains unconscious strategies like **denial, repression, projection, rationalization** that the ego uses to avoid pain or conflict.

Strengths:

- Early recognition of protective psychological strategies.
- Still widely referenced in clinical psychology.
- Shows how the mind adapts under stress.

What it misses:

- Often pathologizes defenses without showing survival purpose.
- Focused mainly on intrapsychic rather than relational dynamics.
- Doesn't differentiate protective from harmful uses.

What TEG-Blue adds:

- Reframes defenses as **adaptive survival responses.**
- Places defenses on a gradient: protection → manipulation → tyranny.
- Connects defenses to systemic harm and relational repair.

14. Cognitive Dissonance Theory — Leon Festinger

Consists on:

Explains the discomfort when beliefs, emotions, or actions conflict. People resolve dissonance by changing beliefs, justifying actions, or denying contradictions.

Strengths:

- Shows how humans strive for consistency.
- Applies across decision-making, morality, and identity.
- Influential in psychology and behavioral economics.

What it misses:

- Focuses on cognition, not somatic/emotional experience.
- Underexplains how trauma shapes dissonance resolution.

- Doesn't address manipulation or denial in abusive contexts.

What TEG-Blue adds:

- Shows dissonance as **felt somatically and emotionally.**

- Explains how unresolved dissonance pushes people into denial, defense, or manipulation.

- Provides repair tools to face contradictions without harm.

15. Disorganized Attachment & Complex PTSD Models

Consists on:

Attachment theory expanded: **Disorganized Attachment** explains paradoxical push–pull dynamics of fear and desire for closeness. **Complex PTSD** describes long-term effects of chronic trauma, including emotional dysregulation and identity disturbance.

Strengths:

- Trauma-informed and relationally focused.

- Explains paradoxes survivors live with (closeness = danger).

- Connects childhood experiences to adult patterns.

What it misses:

- Often focused narrowly on childhood or clinical trauma.

- Doesn't fully map how patterns scale into systems.

- Limited tools for visualizing harm and repair.

What TEG-Blue adds:

- Integrates attachment and CPTSD into the **Emotional Gradient Framework.**

- Shows how disorganized patterns map onto defense/manipulation cycles.

- Offers gradients and tools for relational repair and nervous system healing.

Emotional Models Comparison Table

	Model	Strengths	What it misses	What TEG-Blue adds
1	**Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions**	Clear visual map of 8 primary emotions; shows intensity and blending; useful for vocabulary.	Treats emotions as fixed buckets; ignores context (Belonging vs Defense); no repair pathway.	Maps gradients inside each emotion; explains distortions (boundary anger vs control anger); adds trauma-informed harm scales; offers tools for repair.

	Model	Strengths	What it misses	What TEG-Blue adds
2	**NVC — Nonviolent Communication**	Simple 4-step structure (observation, feeling, need, request); encourages empathy; reduces blame.	Assumes safety; can be weaponized; no map of distortions; doesn't explain survival shifts.	Shows when NVC fails (manipulation, tyranny); adds harm vs discomfort gradients; embeds in Connect/Protect framework; visual, neurodivergent-friendly tools.
3	**CBT — Cognitive Behavioral Therapy**	Practical, structured, evidence-based; effective for anxiety, depression; challenges distorted thoughts.	Over-focus on thoughts; minimizes body/nervous system; misses relational abuse/systemic harm.	Integrates body + somatic patterns; situates emotions in relational/systemic context; trauma gradients distinguish survival vs malicious intent; connects personal healing with social repair.
4	**Polyvagal Theory — Stephen Porges**	Explains nervous system states (safety, fight/flight, shutdown); trauma-informed; widely influential.	Focuses on physiology, not meaning; lacks relational/power dynamics; no repair tools; technical for non-specialists.	Links nervous states to emotional logic (Connect, Protect, Manipulation, Tyranny); makes survival patterns visible; provides accessible visual tools; bridges somatics with repair.
5	**Zones of Regulation — Leah Kuypers**	Simple, accessible; widely used in schools; gives children a shared emotional language.	Oversimplifies (broad zones, little nuance); often behavior-control focused; not trauma-informed; can shame children.	Provides gradients inside emotions; explains why emotions distort; shifts from behavior control to literacy/repair; neurodivergent-friendly.
6	**Freud's Ego Model (1923)**	Early map of inner conflict (id, ego, superego); recognized unconscious forces; foundational to psychoanalysis.	Intrapsychic focus, little systemic/relational context; rigid categories; not trauma-aware.	Expands into **modes gradient** (Belonging, Defense, Manipulation, Tyranny); shows how survival distorts emotions in relationships; visual repair maps.
7	**Winnicott's True/False Self**	Explains survival cost of False Self; validates	Narrowly child-focused; doesn't show escalation to	Integrated into **Ego Persona Construct Framework**; maps

	Model	Strengths	What it misses	What TEG-Blue adds
		loss of authenticity; trauma-aware.	manipulation/tyranny; not visual/systemic.	mask formation/distortion; tools for rebuilding authenticity and belonging.
8	Rogers — Organismic Valuing	Optimistic: humans have innate drive toward growth and authenticity; basis for person-centered therapy.	Doesn't show how trauma distorts/blocks the compass; assumes safe conditions; little systemic focus.	Shows how survival overrides/distorts compass; explains repair as re-opening belonging; situates compass in a visible gradient.
9	Jung — The Persona	Highlights adaptive social masks; explains tension between inner and outer identity.	Symbolic, less practical for trauma repair; doesn't map protective vs manipulative roles.	Expanded in **Role Mask Gradient**; maps masks shifting from protection → manipulation → tyranny; pathways to authenticity.
10	Internal Family Systems (IFS)	Compassionate, trauma-informed; normalizes parts; strong healing model.	Focuses inward; less systemic/malicious intent focus; parts sometimes isolated from social context.	Integrates parts into systemic gradient; maps protectors/managers to survival modes; harm scales link personal healing with collective repair.
11	Ego Development Theory — Jane Loevinger	Structured roadmap of identity growth; useful for psychology/leadership; recognizes higher integration stages.	Cognitive bias; assumes linearity; underplays trauma freezes/regressions; little on systemic abuse.	Shows trauma can stall/distort growth; ties identity to survival/belonging gradients; frames development as dynamic and relational.
12	Goffman's Dramaturgical Self / Role Theory	Brilliant metaphor of social performance; explains adaptability across contexts.	Doesn't distinguish authentic vs survival-driven roles; ignores trauma/power distortions.	Extended as **Role Mask Gradient**; distinguishes roles rooted in belonging vs defense vs manipulation; repair pathways for authenticity.
13	Defense Mechanisms — Freud & Anna Freud	Early recognition of unconscious protective strategies; widely cited in clinical psychology.	Pathologizes defenses; focused intrapsychically; doesn't differentiate protective vs harmful.	Reframed as **adaptive survival responses**; mapped as protection → manipulation → tyranny; linked to

	Model	Strengths	What it misses	What TEG-Blue adds
				systemic harm/repair.
14	**Cognitive Dissonance Theory — Leon Festinger**	Explains discomfort when beliefs/actions conflict; broad applications in decision-making.	Overly cognitive; underplays trauma/emotion; little attention to abuse/manipulation contexts.	Shows dissonance as **somatic/emotional**; maps how unresolved dissonance leads to denial, defense, manipulation; repair tools for contradictions.
15	**Disorganized Attachment & Complex PTSD Models**	Trauma-informed; explains paradoxical push–pull dynamics; links chronic trauma to identity/emotional dysregulation.	Often narrow child/clinical focus; weak on systemic mapping; lacks visual repair tools.	Integrated into **Emotional Gradient Framework**; maps disorganized patterns to defense/manipulation cycles; offers gradients and tools for relational repair and nervous healing.
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