

CASE STUDIES (all names and some case details have been changed to preserve confidentiality).

### **Work Related Stress**

**Pam** came to me after she had a nervous breakdown at work. She said that it was due to continuous bullying by her boss (who was not just bullying Pam, but made everyone else's life in the office a misery). In a course of few sessions we gradually discovered that Pam was always a very strong person, that other people could rely on. She could never say "no" to her colleagues asking for help, to her bullying sister or to her demanding teenage sons. But one day at work she realised she could not take any more and just got up and walked out. Pam was experiencing panic attacks and could not even talk about going back to work without feeling extreme anxiety.

After realising during the course of counselling her tendency to always be "strong" and never ask for help, Pam began to change her behaviour. She started setting boundaries with her children, asked a friend to accompany her to work meeting that she dreaded and slowly came to accept her needs and vulnerabilities.

She now understood how she had always pushed down her own feelings in order to be "on top of things". When Pam went back to work after two months, she had learned to take care of herself: she never worked late because somebody else couldn't, she was less affected by her boss' critical comments, as she felt confident about her work and she started thinking about looking for a new job in a less stressful environment, whereas before she did not feel it possible.

At the end of therapy she said, that she was grateful for her "breakdown", as it has made her realise what she was missing in her life and made her value herself as a person, rather than a "helper".

**Ali** came to see me, as her extremely low self-esteem affected her performance at work. She felt she was "never good enough", feared that people were talking behind her back and she was very fearful of her boss.

Exploring Ali's history revealed that she had grown up with a very critical father, who would never praise Ali and maintained that "everything was her fault". He was also very fearful of people talking behind his back and never trusted anyone. Ali's boss reminded her of her father and every time she talked to him, she felt like a 5 year old.

Learning about Ego-states, Ali started practising being in her Adult ego-state when talking to her boss – to stay within “here-and-now reality” and to stop “putting her father’s face” on him.

To Ali’s amazement it worked – she felt more confident every day. She stopped looking at herself with her father’s eyes and realised she was a competent, experienced, practitioner. “I feel that now I am really me”, said Ali, about her experience.