

Interview with  
**Dr Humphrey Armstrong**  
Psychologist  
by Megan Hills



### “Not all power games are bad.”

This advice comes from psychologist, Dr Humphrey Armstrong. He says you can use power games positively and collaboratively to create win-win outcomes.

#### The 3 ‘roles’ people play during power games:

Psychiatrist, Dr Eric Berne explored the roles we adopt in order to gain power - often unconsciously. Humphrey Armstrong describes the three “roles” often used in workplace power games. Recognising these roles helps you respond resourcefully to power plays.

##### The persecutor:

This role involves putting another person down. It can draw out a victim response in the other person.

##### The victim:

The person playing this role feels put down by a persecutor. If the Victim later says “I’ve had enough of this ...and by the way you are...,” role reversal can occur and the Victim can become a Persecutor.

##### The rescuer

This role involves taking power by trying to help the victim. The Rescuer often says “I was just trying to help.”

#### For example

The police often need to enter dangerous domestic violence situations. A family member may be shouting at a relative, possibly creating a ‘victim’ reaction. As the police arrive, the two protagonists might turn on them and start blaming the officers for interfering in a private family matter. The police handle this situation by refusing to play a part in this ‘persecutor/victim’ game. Instead they play a professional role. They start with the non-committal statement such as “We have received a complaint...” This breaks the power game cycle.

#### How can you stop power games?

If you change your role during the power game, everyone else has to shift their positions. This puts you in control of the situation.

#### Example

Your supervisor (office persecutor) says, “I’m really interested in your ideas”. When you offer your ideas each one is met with “Yes, but...” Everything you suggest is rejected, so the supervisor feels powerful. To change the situation: Don’t offer any suggestions. Instead break the pattern by asking the supervisor to suggest something and work from there. This stops the game and you don’t play the victim.

**Find out more about how to handle power games - contact us now.**

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