

The Problem with Being a “People Pleaser”

Objective

To overcome your tendency to please others at the expense of your own needs and desires.

You Should Know

Are you a people pleaser? Do you sacrifice your own needs and desires to win the approval of others? Do you say ‘yes,’ even when you want to say ‘no,’ to be liked and accepted?

When you try to please others rather than looking out for your own needs and desires you may diminish your self-worth. You might even be susceptible to exploitation or abuse.

Check off the following statements that describe you:

- It is hard for me to say “no.”
- I pretend to agree with people even when I really don’t agree.
- I get angry, but it is hard for me to express it.
- I feel burdened by all the things I agree to do.
- Stress and tension are negatively affecting me.
- It is hard for me to relax and just be myself.
- I avoid disagreeing with others.
- I always try to accommodate others.
- I dislike and generally avoid conflict.
- I take on most of the responsibilities in my relationships.
- I have been told I am “passive aggressive.”
- I frequently agree with people to avoid getting into an argument.
- I rarely ask for help because I don’t like to inconvenience people.
- I prefer to listen rather than talk about myself.

_____ I prefer being the caregiver in any relationship.

_____ I usually allow others to make decisions rather than offering my personal preferences.

_____ I find myself apologizing constantly.

_____ I feel really uncomfortable when someone is angry with me.

Total checkmarks: _____

If you checked off more than 5 statements, you may be more concerned about pleasing others than looking after your own needs and desires, and this can contribute to many different kinds of problems.

Review the statements you checked off. Which one concerns you most?

Here are some suggestions for overcoming people pleasing.

1. **Practice saying no.** It is acceptable to say no if what is asked of you does not fit your own needs and desires.
2. **Learn your value.** Spend some time thinking about who you are and what you want from your life.
3. **Accept who you are.** This might take time and some outside support.
4. **Stop apologizing for everything.** If it is your fault, admit it, apologize, and move on. Remember, you are not responsible for others' reactions or feelings.
5. **Stick up for your beliefs and values.** If something is important to you, stand up for what you believe in.
6. **Communicate your feelings.** Practice telling other people how you feel.
7. **Give up perfectionism.** It is okay to make mistakes.
8. **Allow yourself space to change and grow.** Overcoming people-pleasing is one of the best gifts you can give yourself. Take time each day think about your own goals and what you need to do to achieve them.

What to Do

Over the next month, use the chart on the next page to track when you find yourself people-pleasing. Note the date and describe the situation. Describe what you said or did and how the other person reacted. Finally, describe how it made you feel.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you reduce your people-pleasing tendencies? Explain.

Did this exercise change the way you will communicate with others, moving forward? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?
