

THE DISEASE TO PLEASE

Do you say “yes” when you really want to say “no”? Do you put the needs of others first, even at the expense of your own wants and needs? When you give 100 percent to others, and get nothing in return, do you feel resentment? If so, you may have the Disease to Please!

WHEN PLEASING OTHERS IS HURTING YOU

by Annie Kaszina Ph.D.



Imagine a common condition that affects millions of people -- one that causes raised blood pressure, low self worth, stress, anxiety, worry, depression, headaches, digestive disorders, muscle tension and more -- a condition that even undermines and destroy relationships. This condition is chronic people pleasing, and the toll it takes on your physical health, mental health and relationships is anything but nice!

PORTRAIT OF A PEOPLE PLEASER

People pleasers often go to great lengths to get love and approval from others. Do you recognize many of these traits within yourself or a loved one?

- ✓ Worry about what other people think, want, and need, and spend a lot of their time doing for others. They place other people's needs before their own.
- ✓ Have an over-developed sense of duty and responsibility, and expect themselves to have almost superhuman abilities to care for and fix the problems of others.
- ✓ Rarely do good things for themselves, and usually feel guilty when they do. Their focus is mostly on others and away from themselves.
- ✓ Very sensitive to other people's feelings, and often take things personally. They tend to take any criticism from

others as “the truth” and will instantly feel bad about themselves.

- ✓ Have a debilitating fear of not being liked or accepted.
- ✓ Are “nice”, easy to get along with, willing and quite capable to help. This makes them vulnerable to being taken advantage of.
- ✓ Believe and live by the old saying, “if you really want to help, you won't wait to be asked”.
- ✓ Don't ask for help, or for what they want or need, because they feel they shouldn't have to ask! They think “if they really wanted to help me, they would have offered without my asking”.
- ✓ Hold back from saying what they really think or from asking for what they really want, for fear of others getting upset with them.
- ✓ When faced with conflict, their unconscious behavior tends to be “peace at any price.”

If you can relate to any of these, then read on. You may know, or yourself be, a people pleaser.

THE AFTER EFFECTS

Do you ever get the feeling that there's one law for you, and another for everyone else? You give, they take. They have a need, and they get. You have a need – and you *don't* get.

Actually, everyone lives by the same law; it's called the Law of Diminishing Returns, and it works like this: the more you do, the more other people will expect of you, and the less you'll get in return. The outcome: You end up spending a lot of your life feeling as though you are between a rock and hard place, and they end up totally disregarding your feelings and your occasional attempts to say "no". What is the end result of this "can't say no", "peace at any price" behavior? It's actually the opposite of what is hoped for. Instead of getting the love and approval they seek, people pleasers often feel angry, worthless, disrespected and rejected.

WHY WE BECOME PEOPLE PLEASERS

There are several reasons why we become people pleasers, but in general, people pleasers tend to have been raised in homes where, for a variety of reasons, their needs and feelings were not considered important or respected. As children, they may have been expected to take care of other family members needs. In our culture, girls are often raised to be people pleasers. They are often asked to help care for the basic needs of the family, and often being taught to put those needs first, and to neglect their own. From this, they may have developed the belief that their level of self worth is directly in proportion to how much they do for others. For some, it may have started with genuine and generous attempts to make others happy. But through the years, this seemingly harmless behavior grew into a compulsion to please and put others first. Finally, for others, people pleasing and niceness gradually became their self-defence, a way to avoid anger and conflict.

BREAKING FREE

The good news is that, although as yet insufficiently documented, the "Disease to Please" is curable, and once you break free, the damage to your health is reversible. There are many ways to reduce your tendency to please others. You can start today by taking these steps:

SET BOUNDARIES

Having a boundary means that you are clear about where you and your obligations end, and another persons begin. When you lack clear boundaries, you feel obliged to assume responsibility for the people around you.

PRACTICE SAYING "NO"

Start really, really small. Say "no" as often as you can, just to hear the word come out of your mouth. Say it out loud when you are alone. Deliberately slip one or two tiny "no's" past someone you would normally say "yes" to and notice how good it feels on your tongue. Once you've said "no" a few times, you'll begin to feel strangely relieved and liberated. Notice also how much better you start to feel about yourself.

BUY TIME

Science has shown there is generally a lapse of two-tenths of a second between the person making their request and your response. You can use those two-tenths of a second to tune into the small movement of refusal you feel, and act on it, before your habitual sense of obligation kicks in. Instead of answering with an automatic "yes", pause or take a breath before responding. You could respond with "what?" or "why?" as both responses will oblige the other person to repeat their request, and will buy you time to organize your thoughts. You can also answer with, "I need to think about it first" or "I'll get back to you".

ASK FOR HELP

This is a tough one for you, but ask someone to help you with something – anything. Allow yourself to feel "taken care of".

NURTURE YOURSELF

Find ways to nurture yourself. Schedule time away from your job and your family when possible and discover your own wants and needs. Discover what you enjoy, for example, reading magazines, music, yoga, and then go do those things. Be kind, gentle and patient with yourself and slow down. Don't feel that you're being selfish; you have a responsibility to yourself to take care of your own needs.

EXPRESS YOURSELF

Practice saying what you truly feel, need and want with someone safe, who understands the changes you are trying to make. Don't hold back.

FIND THE GOOD WITHIN

Make a list of all the wonderful things about you and then remind yourself of these things daily. This is crucial, because you need to seek approval from yourself first, so that you won't revert to your old people pleasing habits, and try to seek the approval that you need from others.

EXPECT RESISTANCE

You'll likely get resistance from those who have come to rely on your people pleasing behavior. You may hear the adult equivalent of that old playground standard: "If you don't do what I want, you're not my friend..." Let them whine, and move forward with what is best for your mental and physical health.

Once you recognize that you are a people pleaser and begin to make small changes, all sorts of good things will happen. Your feelings of self-worth will start to rise. You'll also discover that because you've changed, others behavior towards you will change. You'll attract new people into your life who like you for who you are, not what you do for them. Your stress levels will start to drop. You'll have more energy for the things you want to do. You can expect improvements in your general well being. And you'll finally be able to say, "I used to suffer from the Disease to Please, but I'm over it now and it feels great!" 

Annie Kaszina Ph.D. is the author of *'How To Say "No" And Still Feel Good About Yourself'* – *The People Pleaser's Guide To Building Strong Boundaries* available through www.saynowithconfidence.com. She is a relationship expert who specializes in helping people break out of the pattern of bad relationships, overcome the 'disease to please' and build strong self-worth. Her website is: www.SayNoWithConfidence.net

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