# Understanding People-Pleasing:

**Introduction**

***People-pleasing*** may seem harmless, but it can become an exhausting cycle that chips away at your self-worth. If you're constantly striving to gain approval, afraid of disappointing others, or basing your happiness on external validation, you might be stuck in the people-pleasing trap. While pleasing others isn't inherently bad, it becomes problematic when it leads to neglecting your own needs, boundaries, and identity. In this article, we'll explore the roots of people-pleasing, why some become addicted to approval, and how to cultivate assertiveness and self-acceptance to break free from this habit.

**What is People Pleasing?**

A people pleaser is someone who goes out of their way to accommodate others, often at the expense of their own well-being. People-pleasers are typically driven by the need for validation, approval, and acceptance from those around them. They often struggle with assertiveness, have difficulty setting boundaries, and are highly sensitive to rejection or disapproval.

While the desire to make others happy is normal, people-pleasers feel an overwhelming compulsion to do so—often neglecting their own needs in the process. This can lead to chronic stress, burnout, and a diminished sense of self.

## Reasons for Being Addicted to Approval

**1. Low Self-Worth**

People-pleasers often struggle with feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth. Their sense of value is externally defined, meaning they feel worthy only when others validate or praise them. This creates an ongoing need to please in order to feel "good enough." Rather than feeling inherently deserving of love and acceptance, people-pleasers believe they must earn it by keeping others happy.

**Example:** You might agree to tasks you don’t want to do just to avoid feeling like a burden, even when it exhausts you.

**2. Childhood Conditioning**

Many people-pleasers learned early on that gaining approval brought acceptance or love. Perhaps you were praised only when you were obedient, helpful, or compliant. This conditional form of affection can teach a child that they are only worthy when they are pleasing others, and this belief can carry over into adulthood.

**Example:** If your parents were highly critical, you may have learned that meeting their expectations or being “perfect” was the only way to avoid criticism or feel worthy of their attention.

### 3. Addiction to External Validation

Validation from others can feel like a quick boost of self-esteem. Compliments or positive feedback trigger dopamine, the brain's reward chemical, making it easy to become hooked on these external reinforcements. Over time, people pleasers start to rely on this external validation for self-worth, seeking approval in every interaction.

**Example:** Constantly asking for reassurance at work, or needing others to affirm your decisions, even in minor situations, shows an addiction to external validation.

### 4. Fear of Rejection and Conflict

Many people-pleasers fear conflict or rejection. They avoid saying "no" or setting boundaries because they don't want to upset others. They may believe that by avoiding conflict and keeping others happy, they can avoid the painful experience of rejection.

**Example:** You might say "yes" to social events or work commitments even when you're exhausted, just to avoid disappointing others or risking conflict.

## How to Break Free from People Pleasing

### 1. Cultivate Assertiveness

Assertiveness is the ability to express your needs, opinions, and feelings confidently and respectfully. It allows you to set boundaries and prioritize your own well-being without guilt. Learning to be assertive helps you step out of the people-pleasing mindset and reclaim control over your own decisions.

**Tips for Becoming Assertive:**

- Practice saying "no" in small, low-stakes situations. For example, decline an invitation to a social event if you don't feel up to it.
- Use "I" statements to express your feelings: "I feel overwhelmed when I take on too many projects."
- Assertiveness doesn't mean being aggressive. It's about being clear, direct, and respectful with your needs.

### 2. Stop Stressing Over What Others Think

One of the biggest challenges for people pleasers is constantly worrying about how others perceive them. The truth is, you cannot control other people's opinions, and it's impossible to make everyone happy. The sooner you accept this, the less power others' opinions will have over you.

**Ways to Stop Overthinking About Others' Opinions:**

- Remind yourself that people's reactions are often a reflection of their own issues, not a measure of your worth.
- Challenge the thought: "Does this person's opinion define who I am?"
- Practice mindfulness to help reduce overthinking and stay present in the moment.

**3. Practice Self-Acceptance**

Learning to accept yourself—flaws, imperfections, and all, is essential to breaking free from people-pleasing. When you base your self-worth on internal validation rather than external praise, you feel less inclined to seek constant approval from others.

**Steps to Cultivate Self-Acceptance:**

- Recognize and appreciate your inherent worth, regardless of what others think.
- Engage in positive self-talk. Replace thoughts like "I'm not good enough" with affirmations such as "I am worthy as I am."
- Celebrate small victories and personal growth, instead of focusing solely on pleasing others.

**4. Avoid Overthinking and Catastrophizing**

People-pleasers often assume the worst, worrying excessively about how their actions or words will affect others. This overthinking can lead to anxiety and a constant state of second-guessing. Learning to stop overthinking can relieve some of the pressure to please others.

**Tips to Avoid Overthinking:**

- Challenge your thoughts by asking yourself: "Is this thought based on facts, or am I assuming the worst?"
- Limit rumination by setting a time limit for worrying (e.g., allow yourself 10 minutes to worry, then move on).
- Redirect your focus to something positive or productive.

**5. Don't Take Rejection Personally**

Rejection is an inevitable part of life. The fear of rejection often drives people-pleasing behavior, but it's crucial to understand that rejection doesn't define your worth. Sometimes rejection is about the other person's preferences or needs, not a reflection of your value.

**How to Handle Rejection:**

- Remind yourself that rejection happens to everyone, and it's not always personal.
- Focus on what you can learn from the experience, rather than dwelling on the negative.

- Develop resilience by embracing the fact that rejection is part of growth and self-discovery.

## Recognizing People-Pleasing Behaviors

If you're not sure whether you're a people pleaser, here are some common signs:

- **Constantly Seeking Validation:** You frequently ask for reassurance from others, even for small decisions, because you don't trust your own judgment.
- **Difficulty Saying No:** You agree to things you don't want to do because you're afraid of disappointing others.
- **Fear of Rejection:** You avoid expressing your true feelings, opinions, or desires to prevent upsetting or alienating others.
- **Over-apologizing:** You apologize excessively, even when you haven't done anything wrong, just to smooth things over.
- **Avoiding Conflict:** You avoid disagreements or confrontations, even if it means compromising your own needs or beliefs.

**Example:** A people-pleaser might take on extra tasks at work, even when overwhelmed, because they fear being seen as uncooperative.

## Conclusion: The Power of Risk and Growth

Breaking free from people-pleasing isn't easy, but it's a powerful step toward living authentically. Taking the risk to assert yourself, accepting rejection as part of life, and no longer relying on others' validation can feel liberating. By recognizing your people-pleasing behaviors and practicing assertiveness, self-acceptance, and resilience, you can start prioritizing your own needs and living a more balanced, fulfilling life.

## Worksheet: Steps to Manage Your Approval-Seeking Behavior

This worksheet is designed to help you recognize and manage approval-seeking behavior by taking actionable steps. It includes reflection questions, exercises, and practical tools to break the habit of constantly seeking validation from others and build more self-assurance.

### 1. Recognizing Approval-Seeking Behaviors

**Goal:** Identify the situations where you seek approval and understand the underlying reasons.

**Instructions:** List three recent situations where you noticed yourself seeking approval or validation. Describe how you felt during and after the interaction.

**Example:**

- **Situation:** I asked my coworker if my presentation was good multiple times.
- **Feeling during:** I felt anxious and unsure of myself.

- **Feeling after:** I felt briefly relieved but then started doubting again.
- **Your turn:**

1. **Situation:**
   **Feeling during:**
   **Feeling after:**
2. **Situation:**
   **Feeling during:**
   **Feeling after:**
3. **Situation:**
   **Feeling during:**
   **Feeling after:**

**2. Understanding Your Triggers**

**Goal:** Identify the triggers that cause you to seek approval and validation.

**Instructions:** Reflect on why you seek approval in certain situations. Is it fear of rejection, low self-esteem, or a habit formed in childhood? Write down your insights.

**Example:**

- **Trigger:** I feel uncertain about my abilities and want validation from others to feel secure.
- **Insight:** This might be because I grew up seeking praise from my parents to feel loved and accepted.
- **Your turn:**
  **Trigger 1:**
  **Insight:**

  **Trigger 2:**
  **Insight:**

  **Trigger 3:**
  **Insight:**

**3. Challenging Approval-Seeking Thoughts**

**Goal:** Shift your mindset from external validation to self-approval.

**Instructions:** Write down a common approval-seeking thought you have, then challenge it by reframing it with a more self-assured and empowering thought.

**Example:**

- **Approval-seeking thought:** “I need my friend to tell me my outfit looks good so I feel confident.”
- **Reframed thought:** “I feel good in this outfit, and that’s what matters.”
- **Your turn:**

1. **Approval-seeking thought:**
   **Reframed thought:**
2. **Approval-seeking thought:**
   **Reframed thought:**
3. **Approval-seeking thought:**
   **Reframed thought:**

**4. Practicing Self-Validation**

**Goal:** Build self-confidence by affirming yourself without relying on others.

**Instructions:** Write down three situations where you can practice self-validation instead of seeking approval from others. For each, write a self-validating affirmation you will use.

**Example:**

- **Situation:** Before a work presentation.
- **Self-validation:** "I’ve prepared well for this presentation, and I trust my abilities."
- **Your turn:**

1. **Situation:**
   **Self-validation:**
2. **Situation:**
   **Self-validation:**
3. **Situation:**
   **Self-validation:**

**5. Learning to Say “No”**

**Goal:** Practice setting boundaries by saying "no" without guilt or needing approval.

**Instructions:** Identify situations where you tend to say “yes” to gain approval, and think about how you can respectfully say “no.” Write out what you might say in these situations.

**Example:**

- **Situation:** A friend asks me to help with a project, but I’m already overwhelmed with work.
- **Response:** "I’d love to help, but I’m stretched thin right now and can’t take on anything else."
- **Your turn:**

1. **Situation:**
   **Response:**
2. **Situation:**
   **Response:**
3. **Situation:**
   **Response:**

**6. Reducing Overthinking**

**Goal:** Avoid over-analyzing others' reactions and focus on your own feelings.

**Instructions:** Think of a recent situation where you overthought someone's reaction or opinion. Write down what you were overthinking and then challenge it by writing a more balanced perspective.

**Example:**

- **Overthinking:** "My coworker didn't respond to my email quickly. Maybe they're upset with me."
- **Balanced perspective:** "There are many reasons someone might delay an email. It doesn't necessarily mean they're upset with me."
- **Your turn:**

1. **Overthinking:**
   **Balanced perspective:**
2. **Overthinking:**
   **Balanced perspective:**

**7. Accepting Rejection as Normal**

**Goal:** Develop resilience by not taking rejection personally.

**Instructions:** Recall a time when you felt rejected and how you responded. Write down how you can reframe rejection as part of growth and not a reflection of your worth.

**Example:**

- **Rejection:** I didn't get invited to a friend's party, and I felt hurt.
- **Reframed thought:** "Not being invited doesn't mean I'm unworthy. People have different reasons for their choices, and it doesn't define my value as a person."
- **Your turn:**

1. **Rejection:**
   **Reframed thought:**
2. **Rejection:**
   **Reframed thought:**

**8. Taking Small Risks to Build Confidence**

**Goal:** Step out of your comfort zone and take small risks that help you build self-confidence.

**Instructions:** Choose one or two small risks you can take in the next week where you would normally seek approval. Write down the risk and how you will handle it.

**Example:**

- **Small Risk:** Sharing my opinion in a group meeting without worrying if everyone agrees.
- **Handling it:** I will remind myself that my opinion is valuable, and it's okay if others don't agree with it.
- **Your turn:**

1. **Small Risk:**
   **Handling it:**
2. **Small Risk:**
   **Handling it:**

## Final Reflection

**Goal:** Evaluate your progress in managing approval-seeking behavior.

**Instructions:** After two weeks of using this worksheet, reflect on the following questions.

- **What changes have I noticed in my approval-seeking behaviors?**
  *Example:* "I'm more comfortable validating my own decisions without asking for reassurance."
- **What has been the most challenging part of managing my approval-seeking?**
  *Example:* "Saying 'no' without feeling guilty has been difficult, but I'm getting better at it."
- **How do I feel about my sense of self-worth now?**
  *Example:* "I feel more confident in myself and less dependent on what others think."

By working on this character trait, you'll develop greater self-awareness and build confidence in managing your approval-seeking behavior. Remember, breaking the habit of seeking external validation takes time, but with practice, you'll feel more empowered and in control of your own worth.