

ARE YOU HOOKED ON PLEASING?

By Ginger E. Blume, Ph.D.

Are you hooked on pleasing others at your own expense? Are you the perennial nice person who wears a public “happy face” to conceal your own displeasure with others? Do you give yourself to others, sometimes to a fault? Do you avoid confrontations and conflict at all costs? Do you need everyone to like you? If so, you probably fit the profile of the typical “people pleaser.” Why worry---others seem happy with your style? In this article I’ll examine why it is a dangerous myth to believe that “people pleasing” is a benign problem.

After being a guest on the Oprah show, psychologist, Dr. Harriet Braiker, was encouraged by Oprah to write a book describing this common, destructive psychological problem of people pleasing. In 2001, [The Disease to Please](#) was published. The book details the various causes of obsessive “people pleasing” and how to take positive steps to rid oneself of this disease. Dr. Braiker points out that this style of relating is particularly difficult to change because those who suffer from it truly believe that by fulfilling other’s expectations, she can prevent other’s rejection or anger toward her. She rationalizes that her behavior is motivated by a desire to avoid hurting other people’s feelings. This belief system helps maintain this exhausting habit.

On the surface, the people pleaser looks like a nice person who is just going overboard attempting to make everyone happy. But, the people pleaser constantly struggles with where, when, and how to draw the line between her own desires and the demands of others. What she doesn’t understand, however, is that she is causing serious damage to herself, others, and to those relationships that mean the most to her. She is acting dishonest with herself and others, by not giving herself permission to speak from her core. She is saying “Yes” when she truly wants to say “NO.” People pleasers are camouflaging themselves behind the cover of chronic “niceness,” out of a debilitating fear of others anger, confrontation, and rejection. These underlying fears drive their addiction to receiving approval from others.

The road to recovery from chronic people pleasing involves examining all aspects of yourself: your thoughts, feelings, and behavior. The book, [The Disease to Please](#), describes the disease triangle and helps you work toward changing your destructive habit in a routine and concise manner. You’ll discover how to establish a balanced way of living that allows you to still consider others, but within the context of your own needs. Recovery involves placing your own needs first and gaining your own approval, rather than the approval of others. Your health and happiness will depend upon your willingness to get back in touch with your inner being and to express this self awareness through your behavior in the world.

After “The Disease to Please” was published, Dr. Braiker told The Times: “The issue is not to be so driven and compulsive about using every moment. You can’t possibly keep

up. People tell themselves, 'I'll relax after I've finished everything I have to do. They tell themselves that downtime is a luxury after you finish. That's a wrongheaded way. Downtime is what's important to do." In essence, Dr. Braiker was pointing out the chronic level of self pressure and self-imposed demands that the people pleaser places upon herself and the inability to relax.

According to Dr. Braiker, "self acceptance is about being on your side—being your own ally, best friend and cheerleader. It involves being friendly to your emotions, your struggles, your goals, dreams and aspirations." Seems to me that a dose of "self pleasing" might be just the proper antidote to this disease to compulsively please others.

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