**People Pleasers and People Pleasing Behavior**

As human beings, we are social creatures and therefore we desire and need engagement with others. We have a need to fit in and to be liked and valued. Our desire to feel included also makes us prone to peer pressure which can lead to people pleasing behavior. We all have exhibited people pleasing behavior at some time or another. But there is a big difference between the desire for acceptance and people-pleasing that constitutes dysfunctional behavior.

People-pleasers are often generous, kind people who do nice things for others. However, people pleasers have an underlying motivation that feeds their need to feel better about themselves, feel worthy of love, and stave off their fear of rejection and abandonment. Many times, they are not even aware of this underlying motivation. Becoming aware of and examining your motivations is key says, psychologist, Jay Earley. “Ask yourself, ‘Why am I doing this? Is it because I really care about this person, or because I’m afraid I’m going to lose them?

**Where Does People Pleasing Come From?**

There’s no single underlying cause of people-pleasing tendencies. Instead, they tend to develop from a combination of factors. According to Jay Earley, “People-pleasing behavior comes from fear, from an assumption that others are in control of you. “Healthy behavior comes from genuinely wanting to be connected to people.”

*Studies on people pleasing tendencies find that the following contribute to this behavior.*

**Past trauma**

People-pleasing behaviors sometimes arise as a response to fear associated with trauma. If you’ve experienced trauma, such as child or partner abuse, or witnessed domestic violence as a

child, you may not have felt safe maintaining certain boundaries. You may have learned it was safer to do what other people wanted and take care of their needs first. By pleasing, you made yourself likable, and therefore safe.

**Self-esteem issues**

Messages about your identity from your early relationships with caregivers can be difficult to erase. If you learn, for example, that your value comes from what you do for others, this will probably play on throughout your life unless you work to undo the message.

**Fear of rejection**

Early relationships can stick with you in other ways, too. If your parent or caregiver offered you approval and love based largely on your behavior, you probably realized pretty quickly it was best to keep them happy. To avoid rejection in the form of criticism and punishment when you did something wrong, you learned to always do what they wanted, perhaps before they asked it of you.

**Fear and Insecurity**

Growing up in a household where one or both of your parents struggled with addiction, mental illness, or their own codependent issues may have caused you to feel apprehensive, unsafe and fearful. People-

pleasing may have been a coping mechanism that you developed for the sake of your own survival.

**Signs of People Pleasing Behavior**

* **You have a low opinion of yourself**

People pleasers often deal with low self-esteem and draw their self-worth from the approval of others. You may believe people only care about you when you’re useful and need their praise and appreciation in order to feel good about yourself.

* **You need others to like you**

People pleasers often spend a lot of time worrying about rejection. These worries often lead to specific actions designed to keep people happy with you, so they don’t reject you.You might also have a strong desire to be needed, believing that you have a better chance of receiving affection from people who need you.

* **You have a difficult time saying “no”**

People pleasers worry that telling someone “no” or turning down a request for help will make others think you don’t care about them*.*Agreeing to do what they want might seem like a safer option, even if you don’t actually have the time or inclination to help. Many people pleasers agree to do something when they’d rather not. But a pattern of this can cause problems, since it tells people their needs come before yours.

* **You apologize or accept fault when you aren’t to blame**

People-pleasing involves readiness to take on blame, even when what happened has nothing to do with you. You feel the need to apologize when something goes wrong.

* **You’re quick to agree, even when you don’t really agree**

People pleasers often agree with others. Agreeability often seems like a surefire way to win approval. Going along with something you don’t agree with just to keep everyone happy, sets you (and others) up for future frustration.

* **You’re overly responsible**

People pleasers are very responsible and take what they do seriously. You work hard and don’t want to let anyone down. You pride yourself on being the “go-to person.”

* **You judge yourself harshly**

People pleasers usually have perfectionistic tendencies. You expect perfection and nothing else will do. When you fall short, you’re degrading and mean to yourself.

* **You struggle with authenticity**

People pleasers often have a harder time recognizing how they really feel. Continuing to push your own needs to the side makes it harder to acknowledge them. Eventually, you might not even feel sure about what you want or how to be true to yourself. You also may not be able to voice the feelings you *are*aware of, even when you want to speak up for yourself.

* **You’re a giver**

People pleasers like giving to others, often with a goal of being liked. Making sacrifices often feeds your sense of self, but it can also lead to a sense of martyrdom. You might give and give, hoping people will recognize your selflessness and reciprocate with appreciation and praise and the affection and love you desire.

* **You are always busy and don’t have any free time**

People pleasers are relentlessly busy “doing” and “on the go” and feel they don’t have any free time. After taking care of essential responsibilities, such as work, childcare, chores, etc. there is very little time, if any, to enjoy relaxing or doing pleasurable things like hobbies.

.

* **You avoid conflict and arguments**

People-pleasing tends to involve a fear of anger. Your goal is to avoid conflict and keep people happy, anger means you’ve failed at pleasing them. To avoid this anger, you might do whatever you think will make others happy, even if they’re not angry at you. You might also fear conflict that has nothing to do with you.

* **You’re tired. Really tired.**

People pleasers are tired, and many times feel exhausted. People pleasing zaps energy. This is no surprise considering all the work you do with little or no time to recharge and take care of yourself.

**How Does People Pleasing Affect You?**

People pleasers are more susceptible to feelings of resentment, anger, stress, anxiety and depression. Psychologist, Jay Earley, says people-pleasers are prone to extreme anger when their behavior causes them to lose sight of their own needs. In this way, people-pleasing has a lot in common with codependence; in a codependent relationship, you’re so caught up in your partner’s life, you neglect your own wellbeing. “People please, please, please, please, and then they explode,” says Earley. This explosion can manifest outward, for example, in a fit of temper, or it can turn inward, calcifying into resentment and depression. “If you’ve been a pleaser for a long time, you’re going to get more and more resentful of the person you’re pleasing, and that can lead to passive aggressive behavior,” explains Earley.

Trying to earn the regard of others usually means you neglect your own needs and feelings. By doing what you think people want so they like you, will eventually lead to problems that affect you and your relationships in the following ways:

*You feel frustrated and resentful*

If you spend all your time doing things for others, the people you help *might* recognize and appreciate your sacrifices. But many times, they do not. Over time, they might take advantage of you, even if that’s not their intention. They may not realize all that you do and that you’re making sacrifices for them. Doing for others, with underlying ulterior motives, can eventually cause frustration and resentment. This

often comes out as passive-aggressive behavior, which can confuse or even upset people who genuinely don’t understand what’s happening.

*People take advantage of you*

Some people will quickly recognize and take advantage of people-pleasing tendencies. They may not be able to name the behavior, but they know you’ll agree to whatever they ask, so they’ll keep on asking. Because you want to keep them happy, you continue to say yes. Over time, this can have serious consequences, as there is a higher risk for manipulation or emotional/mental abuse by others. As a parent, pleasing your children could have other consequences. For example, you might let your child dodge responsibilities because you don’t want to lose their affection. But this prevents them from learning valuable life skills.

*Your relationships don’t satisfy you*

Healthy, strong relationships are balanced and involve give-and-take. You do nice things for loved ones, and they do the same for you. You probably won’t have very fulfilling relationships when people like you only because you do things for them. Affection isn’t a commodity. When all you do is give to present

yourself as the person you think others want you to be, you’re not authentic as you are not showing up in the relationship as yourself. Relationships where you aren’t actually present are difficult to maintain and leaves you drained and exhausted and very dissatisfied.

*Stress and burnout*

One huge impact of people-pleasing is increased stress and anxiety. This happens when you take on more than you can handle for others. You have less time for things you really need to do and even less time for self. To get the bare essentials taken care of, you might end up working longer hours or going without sleep, eventually facing physiological, emotional and mental consequences attributed to worry and stress.

*Partners and friends become frustrated with you*

Your partner might notice the way you do so much for others, agree with everyone or wonder why you apologize for things you didn’t do. It’s easy to fall into the habit of helping others at the expense of putting time and energy into your significant relationship. People-pleasing can also backfire when you do so much for others that you take away their agency to do things for themselves.