When Pleasing Others Comes at Your Expense

Recognize the pattern | Reclaim your choice

What is people-pleasing?

People-pleasing is a pattern of prioritizing others' approval or comfort while repeatedly setting aside your own needs. Kindness is healthy; the concern is when saying yes feels compulsory, frightening, or costly.

1. Recognize the signs

- ☐ Saying yes when I want to say no
- ☐ Avoiding disagreement
- ☐ Apologizing for reasonable needs
- ☐ Hiding my preferences to keep the peace
- ☐ Feeling guilty for having preferences
- ☐ Feeling responsible for others' emotions
- ☐ Feeling resentful or drained afterward
- ☐ Overcommitting despite feeling exhausted

2. Kindness or self-abandonment?

Ask: Am I choosing this freely, or am I afraid of the reaction if I decline?

Kindness: "I can help for 20 minutes because I have time."

Self-abandonment: "I'll cancel my plans because they might be upset if I say no."

3. Notice the cost

Think of one recent time you agreed when you wanted to decline. What did it cost you in time, energy, mood, or self-respect?

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This worksheet is not a substitute for individualized mental health care.

4. Try a Boundary Script

A **boundary** is a clear limit you set about what you are willing or able to do, how you want to be treated, or what you need to protect your well-being. A boundary communicates your choices and actions; it does not control someone else's behavior.

Try saying:

- "No, I'm unable to do that at this time."
- "I understand this is important to you, but I need to honor my existing commitments, so I won't be able to help this time."
- "I can help with one part, but not the whole task."
- "I understand you're disappointed, and my answer is still no."

My boundary statement:

_____

_____

5. The Pause Before Yes

Before automatically agreeing to a request, pause and ask yourself:

- ☐ Do I have the time and energy for this?
- ☐ Do I genuinely want to do this?
- ☐ What would I be giving up if I agreed?
- ☐ Could I offer a smaller commitment—or decline?

This week, I will practice:

- ☐ Pausing before responding to one request
- ☐ Naming a preference without apologizing
- ☐ Offering a smaller commitment instead of an automatic yes

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6. Try the Boundary Traffic Light

When someone asks for your time or energy, use this decision-making tool to respond intentionally rather than automatically.

STOP	Notice your first reaction. Am I tense, pressured, or afraid to disappoint?
PAUSE	Check my capacity. Do I have the time, energy, and genuine desire?
CHOOSE	Decline, offer a smaller commitment that works for me, or accept the request because I genuinely want to—not out of pressure.

7. My one-week boundary experiment

Choose one low-stakes opportunity to practice a boundary. Return to this worksheet afterward and notice what you learned.

The request or situation I will practice with:

The response I will try:

Afterward: What did I notice in my body, thoughts, or confidence?

Remember: Someone else's disappointment does not automatically mean you did something wrong. Healthy boundaries can feel unfamiliar at first.

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