

4 Pointers for Using Mindfulness to Stop People Pleasing

Wanting to please and take care of others is natural. But when pleasing others is based in fear of being unloved, it can become habitual and unhealthy, according to Micki Fine, MEd, LPC, author of *The Need to Please: Mindfulness Skills to Gain Freedom from People Pleasing & Approval Seeking*.

Specifically, people pleasing becomes problematic when your behavior is motivated by the fear of losing someone's love or being abandoned, Fine said. She sees people pleasing as a cycle of thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

As she writes in *The Need to Please*, "This cycle consists of deep feelings of unworthiness, excessive attempts to be or do what you think others want from you, worry about meeting those supposed demands, and sacrificing your own well-being to please or fit in with others."

People pleasing can be really subtle, such as agreeing with someone when you actually don't agree, so they'll like you, and you can be who they want you to be, she said. Or "it can be really big and overt," such as doing something illegal for another person.

The need to please tends to arise from childhood "when we don't receive enough unconditional love, [and] we don't have our inner goodness mirrored to us by our caretakers enough."

For instance, maybe your family showed you lots of love, except when you made a mistake or got a bad grade, Fine said. You learned to believe you weren't good enough and had to do better to earn someone's affection.

Maybe your family wanted you to be someone else entirely, she said. For instance, they wanted you to be an extrover instead of the introvert you really are. Over time you came to believe you're not OK as you are.

Or maybe your family hovered around you, conveying that you couldn't make your own decisions, Fine said. You learned to "look outside yourself for who and how you should be."

People pleasing isn't just destructive to ourselves; it's also ineffective. "Because people pleasing behaviors are based on the idea that we must do these things in order to be loved, they actually deny us the experience of being accepted as we are."

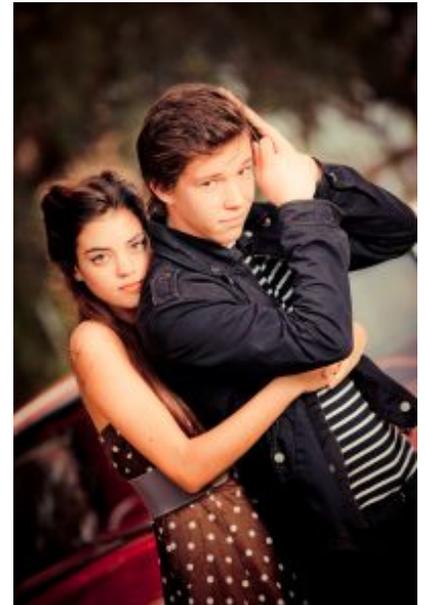
Mindfulness can help you notice your people-pleasing ways and reduce them, according to Fine, founder of the organization [Mindful Living](#) and a mindfulness teacher who teaches courses at The Jung Center and Rice University.

She defines mindfulness as: "the awareness that arises when we intentionally bring our attention into the moment and notice, and let go of judgment, critical thoughts and preconceived ideas."

Below, you'll learn how to use mindfulness to reduce your need to please.

1. Pay attention to small experiences.

According to Fine, there are two ways to practice mindfulness: formal and informal. The formal way includes setting time aside to meditate, while the informal way includes simply paying attention during the day.



Start practicing mindfulness by paying attention to small everyday experiences, Fine said. For instance, notice the sensations of pouring milk into your cereal bowl or walking from your car to work. As you do this, you can notice what's on your mind, as well, she said.

You might not even realize it, but thoughts such as “Did I put enough cereal in the bowl? Will they like it this way?” or “My colleague will need my help today” may arise.

This simple practice helps you to practice mindfulness in more difficult moments and better understand how your thoughts form and when they surface, she said.

2. Pause.

Mindfulness also helps you get off of autopilot. For instance, when someone asks you for help, you might automatically blurt out “yes!” before even considering if you're interested or available.

By practicing mindfulness every day, you can learn to simply pause. This way, the next time someone asks you for help, you can “stop and take a breath.” Then you might say: “Let me think about that for a while” or “I'm just overloaded right now. I need to say no, but I appreciate the offer.”

3. Create a new relationship with your thoughts.

In addition to noticing thoughts that usually fly under the radar — and perpetuate the people-pleasing cycle — mindfulness helps you gain independence from these thoughts and relinquish them.

According to Fine, these are several examples of common people-pleasing thoughts: “I'll do anything to be loved;” “What do other people want from me?;” “I'm not worthy of love;” and “I'll be judged and rejected.”

In her book, Fine suggests making a list of recurrent thoughts and labeling them. For instance, thoughts such as “How can I make her like me?” or “I have to say yes” can be labeled “approval-seeking thoughts.”

Any time these thoughts arise, accept and label them. Another strategy is to smile at a thought and just say, “Oh, there you are again.”

4. Recognize your inner loveliness.

When you realize your own inner loveliness you don't have to look outside yourself or seek others' approval so much, Fine said. You realize, “I already have what I need. I don't need to look for proof to know I'm OK.”

Fine features a loving-kindness meditation in her book. She suggests setting aside 20 minutes for this practice. Whatever thoughts or feelings arise, respond to them with kindness.

Call to mind a being, human or otherwise, who makes you smile and whom you love a lot. If you can't think of such a being, you can imagine someone you don't know but who embodies love, perhaps Jesus, the Dalai Lama, Gandhi, Mother Teresa, or Martin Luther King Jr. Imagine that you are in the presence of this being now. Allow yourself to feel this being's presence. Notice what happens in the body, perhaps feelings of lightness or gladdening of the heart. See this particular being through the eyes of love. Sit for a few moments, relishing this imagined presence.

Now turn your eyes of love toward yourself. Notice your experience as you do so, remembering that nothing special needs to happen. Simply notice whatever happens inside you. You are watering seeds of love toward yourself, not trying to force them to grow and blossom right away.

Quietly repeat the following blessings to yourself for about fifteen minutes or for whatever time you

have. Experiment with allowing gentleness and kindness to inform the way in which you speak to yourself as you say these phrases:

May I be free from fear and suffering.

May I have physical well-being.

May I have mental well-being.

May I be happy and truly free.

Don't blame yourself for your people-pleasing habits, according to Fine. They stem from a deep desire to be happy. Instead, pause, pay attention to your thoughts and practice kindness.

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