

**MARK WALSH
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How to set boundaries, get
your needs met, and live
unapologetically

PEOPLE UN-PLEASING:

How to set boundaries, get your needs met,
and live unapologetically

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in putting this together.

And, of course, the tens-of-thousands of students and clients I've
worked with first-hand on breaking their people-pleasing habits. I
hope this is of some help.

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Why now?

People-pleasing is a topic that has come up in more than a dozen countries that I've led workshops in over the years, and with thousands of students online.

A recent people-pleasing coaching video I shared across [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) has had over 3 million views. It's clearly an interesting topic for many!

It seems that people, and particularly women, are waking up to the fact that their needs matter. They don't only exist to serve others. Good.

Students also seem attracted to the power of embodied tools to make big shifts in this area. Talking about the topic just doesn't cut it. Embodiment works.

If you recognise some people-pleasing patterns in yourself, then this book will help you. Feel free to share it with friends, family or colleagues, too.

We've also created a free page with some videos that can supplement your learning and help you on your journey as you go through this book:

www.peopleunpleasing.com

Between this book and these videos, I'm happy that we're able to offer something accessible to everyone who needs it, and not just those who are able to join me on our online courses or in-person workshops.

So, people-pleasers: it'd really please me if you read this book and took something out of it... 😊

CHAPTER 1

What is people-pleasing?

People-pleasing is habitually prioritising others' needs at the expense of your own.

It's not just about caring for others, but caring for them in a way that harms you.

You might not even be aware of your own needs when you've been focusing on others for so long. You'll need to cultivate some self-awareness for this as a starting point.

“Habitually” is a key term here. Yes, we might choose to sacrifice. It's common, especially for parents, and it's seen as noble and beautiful. Life involves sacrifice and giving to others. But it's important to choose what you're sacrificing, how much, and when.

Other ways you could be people-pleasing include:

- Trying to meet other people's needs, so that you can get something out of them
- Not being your authentic self in order to receive love or attention

Generally, people-pleasing falls into two categories:

1. Not asking for what you want
2. Not saying no

These are key because they both relate to your needs. The first is about neglecting your own needs, whilst the second is about letting someone else's needs be met at your expense.

Some ways that you may recognise people-pleasing tendencies in yourself include:

- ❖ Fear of rejection: A deep-seated fear of being rejected or disliked if you don't meet others' expectations or demands.
- ❖ Lack of assertiveness: You may have trouble asserting your own needs, preferences, or opinions, opting instead to go along with what others want.
- ❖ Overcommitment: Regularly taking on more than you can handle to avoid letting anyone down, leading to stress and burnout.
- ❖ Seeking validation: A strong need for external validation and approval, often feeling unworthy or inadequate without it.
- ❖ Avoiding conflict: A tendency to avoid disagreements or confrontations, even if it means compromising your own interests.
- ❖ Guilt and self-neglect: Experiencing guilt when prioritising your own needs, leading to self-neglect and ignoring personal well-being.
- ❖ Being vulnerable to manipulation: Being more susceptible to manipulation, as others may take advantage of your eagerness to please.
- ❖ Emotional dependence: Your emotional state may heavily depend on how you perceive others' approval or disapproval.
- ❖ Lack of personal boundaries: You may find it difficult to establish or maintain boundaries due to the fear of alienation or criticism.

- ❖ High sensitivity to criticism: Even mild criticism can be deeply hurtful, leading to excessive efforts to avoid any form of disapproval.

Exercise 1

Before we go further, let's take a moment for ourselves...

Come back to you. How are you doing?

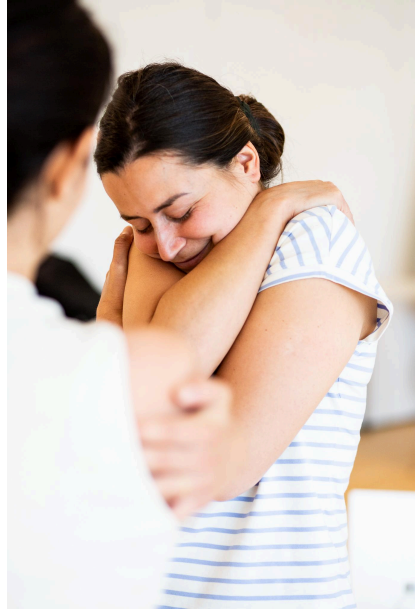
This is the base for everything I'll share with you. Take this time to check in with yourself. If you've been rushing around, maybe slow down a bit. You might be feeling nervous, or perhaps excited. Or, maybe you're even a bit hungry. Whatever it is, how are you feeling?

Why are you here? What brought you to read this book?

Do you find yourself often trying to please others? The truth is, we all do it to some extent. And if you never feel the urge to please, you might be a psychopath. That's because caring about others' feelings and wanting to make them happy is a part of being socially adaptable. If you never experience this, you might be on a very different spectrum.

I'd like to offer a quick visualisation...

Close your eyes if you're okay with it. Imagine your life 10 years from now if you keep people-pleasing just like you do today. It might even get worse because usually, as we get older, our habits get stronger. Think about older people you know. They often have stronger habits, right?



So, if you keep people-pleasing, think about your career. Really see it. What chances might you miss?

Think about your money too. Just be honest, not too positive or too negative. If this habit stays, it usually gets deeper.

What about your friends and family? Imagine those relationships. It's okay if it feels a bit tough.

If you have kids, they might start acting like this too. Really think about that.

Now, think about you – how you feel, your health, and anything else important to you.

When you're ready, come back. Maybe shake a little, stand up, walk around. It might feel a bit bad, but shaking it off helps.



How did that feel?

Probably not great, right?

What I'm aiming for here is to connect you with your motivation. A key part of not people-pleasing involves allowing others to experience discomfort when it's beneficial for them.

When something is genuinely wrong, it usually sparks feelings of sadness, anger, or disgust. These emotions are common, yet those who habitually please others might find it hard to connect with anger.

You might think, “absolutely not,” but that’s often an indication of what you don't want.

If your reaction was more like “whatever, it's not that important,” then either you don't see a problem, or you're not fully considering the potential negative outcomes. We'll work on that.

This realisation becomes particularly striking in parenting. Many say, “this ends with me.” Certain hardships may have been bearable for you, but the thought of your children enduring the same is unacceptable.

Things will not stay the same; they will get worse. This is known as The Law of Entropy, a fundamental principle of the universe.

For instance, if someone is an alcoholic now, in ten years, they'll likely be in a worse state. They won't just remain the same, and this is a pattern I've seen consistently in the hundreds of alcoholics I've worked with.

Situations don't improve on their own. It requires effort; it needs work. Being optimistic without action is not helpful in this context.

That's why this book contains a lot of practical exercises. They'll help you to take action. That action sometimes won't please others. But in the long run, it may just please you...

CHAPTER 2

What people-pleasing looks like

Well, it looks like many things!

Subtle signs of people-pleasing show up in our daily lives when we try to avoid conflict, discomfort, or displeasure in social situations, which leads to us overlooking our own needs or preferences.

Here are some real-life examples of people-pleasing behaviours (you can hear me speak about these in more detail on [Apple Podcasts](#) or [Google Podcasts](#)). Are any of these familiar?

- ❖ Not sending food back: You may not inform the waiter when your food is cold or not cooked to your liking, as you're afraid of bothering them or causing trouble.
- ❖ Listening when you don't want to: Pretending to enjoy listening to others' conversations or complaints, despite a lack of interest or time, because you're afraid that your disinterest might hurt others' feelings, or make you seem rude.
- ❖ Acting happy: You might display a cheerful demeanour and suppress sadness, stress, or frustration to avoid burdening others, or to meet others' expectations of you always being the positive one.
- ❖ Laughing off discomfort: When someone makes a joke or comment at your expense, you laugh along or brush it off, even if it makes you uncomfortable or hurts your feelings, to avoid awkwardness or confrontation.

- ❖ Offering to pay too often: Insisting on covering the bill for meals or drinks more frequently than necessary, even if it strains your budget, because you want to be seen as generous or to avoid any discussion about money.
- ❖ Apologising excessively: Saying sorry for things that aren't your fault or for minor inconveniences, like bumping into someone, in an effort to smooth over any potential conflict.
- ❖ Agreeing with opinions you disagree with: Nodding along, smiling or agreeing with opinions that go against your own beliefs or values to avoid an argument or to be liked.
- ❖ Doing favours you don't have time for: Agreeing to help friends or colleagues with tasks, even when you're already overwhelmed with your own responsibilities.
- ❖ Staying silent on your own preferences: When asked about your preference for something – like a restaurant or a movie – you respond with "I don't mind" or "whatever you prefer," even when you have a specific preference in mind.
- ❖ Enduring discomfort in silence: Not speaking up in situations where you're uncomfortable, like tolerating a friend's smoking in your presence when it bothers you.
- ❖ Overlooking mistakes at your expense: Examples include not pointing out when you've been overcharged at a store, or when you receive the wrong order, to avoid confrontation.
- ❖ Always being the one to adjust: Constantly changing your plans or going out of your way to accommodate others, such as picking a meeting spot that's inconvenient for you but closer for everyone else, without voicing your inconvenience.

- ❖ Taking on more work: Volunteering for or accepting additional tasks at work, even when your plate is already full, because you want to be seen as reliable and are worried about saying no.
- ❖ Not speaking up during sex: The worst kind of sex is when you're doing something you think they want and they're accepting it because they think you want it. Neither person is happy. In this case, people-pleasing isn't even people-pleasing because if they're people-pleasing and you're people-pleasing, you are both actually just people unpleasing. You're not actually pleasing a person – you're pleasing your imagination.

It's also possible that you may only engage in these behaviours in some areas, or with particular people. That's good. They're your “bright spots”.

This makes change easier than someone whose people-pleasing behaviours extend across the board.

Most people have at least one bright spot. You might also find your people-pleasing relates particularly to men, or to women, or to younger people or older people.



You'll see someone who's a really big people-pleaser at work, but they learnt to not be a people-pleaser with their kids.

Once you identify your “bright spots”, you can work on transferring the skill from one area to another.

Exercise 2

Which of the above people-pleasing behaviours do you engage in sometimes, or in some situations?



The body-language of people-pleasing

The body language of people who tend to please others often reflects their desire to be seen as agreeable, non-threatening, and accommodating. These physical signs, whether conscious or unconscious, are ways to communicate submissiveness, openness, and a willingness to yield to others' preferences.

Here are some common body language signs associated with people-pleasing. Do you recognise any of these in yourself or others?

- ❖ Nodding or smiling excessively: Frequent nodding or smiling during conversations – even when you don't agree or haven't fully processed what's being said – can indicate eagerness to agree or show understanding.
- ❖ Head tilting: Tilting the head to one side can be a sign of listening and engagement, but it can also indicate a submissive posture. This can be an attempt to appear friendly and non-confrontational.
- ❖ Smiling often: People-pleasers tend to smile more, even in situations where they might feel uncomfortable or disagree. This is used as a way to maintain a positive façade and avoid showing any signs of displeasure.
- ❖ Mirroring: You may automatically mimic the body language, gestures, or expressions of the person you are trying to please as a way to build rapport and show alignment.

- ❖ Leaning in: Leaning towards the person you are interacting with can indicate attentiveness and a desire to please or be liked.
- ❖ Avoiding direct eye contact: While some people-pleasers maintain eye contact to show attentiveness, others might avoid it as a sign of submission or because they feel uncomfortable with confrontation or asserting themselves.
- ❖ Shoulders down and inwards: Slouching or rolling the shoulders forward can be a sign of trying to make oneself appear smaller or less imposing, reflecting a non-dominant stance.
- ❖ Fidgeting: Displaying nervous gestures, such as playing with one's hands or fidgeting with objects, can indicate discomfort or anxiety about pleasing others or making a good impression.
- ❖ Minimal personal space: People-pleasers may not enforce their personal space, allowing others to get physically closer than they might be comfortable with, as a way to not seem distant or unfriendly.
- ❖ Quick to gesture compliance: Rapidly moving to carry out requests or show agreement with someone's suggestions, through actions like getting up quickly to do a task or hurriedly nodding in agreement.

These body language cues can vary widely among individuals and are often context-dependent. Being aware of these signs can help you to understand your own people-pleasing tendencies or in recognising these tendencies in others.

However, it's important to interpret these signs within the broader context of someone's behaviour and the situation at hand, as body language can be influenced by many factors. One or more of these is on display doesn't necessarily mean someone is people-pleasing.

Exercise 3

How do you know you're a people-pleaser? What are the concrete behaviours that led you to reading this book? Write at least five examples. It will make me happy (only joking 😊).

Types of people-pleasers

People-pleasing behaviours can manifest in various styles or archetypes, each with its own unique characteristics and methods of seeking approval or avoiding conflict. Understanding these archetypes can provide insight into the diverse ways individuals might engage in people-pleasing. Here are some examples:

- ❖ **The Sweetheart:** This archetype is characterised by a consistently pleasant, agreeable demeanour. Sweethearts aim to avoid conflict at all costs, often going out of their way to make others feel comfortable and happy. Their primary tool is their affability; they believe that by being nice, they can avoid disapproval and ensure that everyone likes them.
- ❖ **The Seducer:** Seducers use charm and allure as their primary means of people-pleasing. They may dress attractively, flirt, or use their physical appearance to gain favour and approval. This style isn't solely about sexual attraction but includes any behaviour that seeks to captivate and win others over through charisma and appeal.
- ❖ **The Caregiver:** Similar to the motherly/fatherly archetype, the caregiver prioritises nurturing and looking after others' needs, often at the expense of their own. They derive their sense of worth from being indispensable to others, believing that their value lies in their ability to care for and support those around them.

- ❖ **The Intellectual:** Intellectual pleasers rely on their knowledge, expertise, or intelligence to gain approval. They may attempt to impress others with their insights or problem-solving skills, offering advice or solutions as a way to be valued and needed. This archetype believes that being seen as smart or competent is the key to acceptance.
- ❖ **The Jester:** Jesters use humour and lightheartedness to please people. They're the ones who lighten the mood, often using self-deprecating humour or entertaining antics to gain approval and avoid conflict. Their goal is to be liked for their wit and to use laughter as a way to bond with others and deflect potential criticism.
- ❖ **The Hero:** Heroes are always ready to help, often taking on more than they can handle to prove their worthiness. They want to be seen as reliable and strong, the person everyone can count on in a crisis. This archetype believes that their value comes from their ability to solve problems and be the "saviour."
- ❖ **The Peacemaker:** Peacemakers are dedicated to maintaining harmony and avoiding discord. They are adept at mediating conflicts, often sacrificing their own opinions and desires in the process. Their people-pleasing strategy is rooted in the belief that peace at any cost is preferable to the discomfort of disagreement.
- ❖ **The Achiever:** This archetype seeks to please through accomplishments and success. They believe that by achieving high standards, winning awards, or attaining prominent positions, they will earn the admiration and approval of others. Their worth is tied to their achievements and how these are perceived by their social or professional circles.

Each of these archetypes represents a different strategy for navigating social interactions and seeking validation. People may identify with one or multiple

archetypes, depending on the situation or their personal history. Recognizing these styles can be the first step toward understanding and addressing people-pleasing behaviours in a healthier, more balanced way.

Exercise 4

What's your style of people-pleasing? It can be a combination of several archetypes.

CHAPTER 3

Where people-pleasing comes from

People-pleasing is influenced by a variety of factors, ranging from innate personality traits to learned behaviours and psychological responses to stress or trauma. Understanding these influences can provide insight into why individuals might develop a tendency to prioritise others' needs and approval over their own well-being. These are some influences on people-pleasing behaviour:

- ❖ **The fawn response:** Originating from trauma, especially childhood trauma, the fawn response is a coping mechanism for avoiding conflict, criticism, and rejection. People who have experienced trauma may learn to anticipate and cater to the needs of others as a way to ensure their own safety and avoid further trauma. This response becomes a habitual way to manage stress and perceived threats, leading to people-pleasing behaviours.
- ❖ **Agreeableness:** As one of the Big Five personality traits, agreeableness is characterised by a natural disposition towards being kind, polite, empathetic, cooperative, and considerate. While these are positive traits, high levels of agreeableness can predispose individuals to people-pleasing, as they may find it difficult to assert their own needs or disagree with others, for fear of causing upset or conflict.
- ❖ **Anxiety:** Anxiety, particularly social anxiety, can impact people-pleasing behaviours. The constant worry about how one is perceived by others can lead to a hyper-focus on pleasing as a way to mitigate anxiety and ensure social acceptance.

- ❖ **Attachment Styles:** Certain attachment styles, especially anxious attachment, can contribute to people-pleasing. Individuals with anxious attachment may exhibit a heightened sensitivity to the needs and moods of others, driven by a deep-seated fear of abandonment and an intense desire for closeness and approval.

These influences can interact in complex ways, contributing to the development and reinforcement of people-pleasing behaviours. Addressing people-pleasing often requires a multifaceted approach, including building self-esteem, learning to set boundaries, and processing underlying fears and traumas that drive the need to please.

At its core, people-pleasing develops in two primary ways – as an evolutionary mechanism, and through early-life relationships (often family). This is essentially nature and nurture.

Evolution: We're social animals. We evolved in small tribal groups, with likely up to 150 people.

We have a virtual reality system in our heads called a neocortex, so that you can not only think, but think what other people could think. And think what other people think I could think. That means that most of your brain is occupied by imaginary other people.

We inherited this through evolution because it helped us to survive.: will the tribe like me? Will they share their food with me when I'm pregnant? Will they take me back to the cave to heal when I break my leg? Will they share their berries with me when I don't find berries, but they do?

In Ethiopia, they say "I store food in the belly of my brother". That means you feed your friend when you've got food, so that when you're hungry, he'll feed you.

We also have a negative bias about what other people think of us. Does he hate me? Does she give me a weird look?

We're over-defensive about not offending people, because that was death to our ancestors. It's also why the cancel-culture stuff is so awful. People kill themselves when they are publicly shamed, because it's better to be dead than publicly shamed. That's how over-defensive we are against other people not liking us.

Relationships: Often, you're not really people-pleasing, you're parent pleasing. You're just stuck in that mode, influenced by your family, and by extension, your culture. So, in your family and/or culture of origin, you were conditioned to think, "I'll get love if I please people".



There are different flavours of this. British people can be polite, whereas Americans can be smiley and charming. They're two slightly different flavours of people-pleasing.

In some countries, people-pleasing has a flavour of obligation. In Portugal, "thank you" – "obrigado" – means "I am obligated to you." In Eastern Europe, there's a sense of familial obligation, like "we have to do this because it's my family". Obligation ends up as something you don't want to do, but have to.

—*—

So, people-pleasing comes from evolution and families. It's essentially a defence mechanism, a way of establishing safety.

Much of this book is about managing stress. You're stressed by the thought of

a social slight, the fear of being ostracised from the group, the worry of not being liked, because historically, these situations had serious consequences for our ancestors. The stress of facing these risks is what we'll address.

As with anything I've taught before, for those familiar with my work, practice is key. We'll focus on practising stress management techniques throughout. We'll start with small, manageable steps to and calibrate as we go along.

When you begin to move away from people-pleasing behaviours, your instinct might scream, "You're going to die!" But don't worry. You won't.

Through practice, you'll improve and your system will adjust to the new norm.

CHAPTER 4

The costs of people-pleasing

People pleasing harms us. Also, our work and our relationships.

Once we can identify what particular behaviours cost us, we can become much more motivated to change.

Here I'll use the I, we, it model to elaborate, which can help us to understand the impacts of people-pleasing on ourselves (I), on our relationships with others (We), and on broader aspects of life or work environments (It).

Which of these apply to you?

I (Individual Level)

- ❖ Loss of self-identity: I sacrifice my own interests, preferences, and needs, leading to a diminished sense of self and personal values as I constantly mould myself to fit others' expectations.
- ❖ Decreased self-esteem: My constant need for external validation and fear of disapproval undermines my self-esteem, as I measure my worth through others' eyes.
- ❖ Chronic stress and burnout: I face physical and emotional exhaustion from overcommitting and the inability to say no, which can lead to burnout and health issues.
- ❖ Emotional exhaustion: I continually suppress my emotions to maintain harmony, leading to emotional fatigue and possibly mental health issues like anxiety and depression.

- ❖ **Lost opportunities:** I miss out on opportunities that align with my true interests and aspirations because I'm too busy trying to live up to what others expect or want from me.
- ❖ **Compromised physical health:** I ignore my physical needs, such as rest, exercise, and proper nutrition, because I prioritise others' demands, leading to long-term health consequences.

We (Relational Level)

- ❖ **Superficial relationships:** We sacrifice depth and authenticity in relationships because I hide my true feelings and needs, fearing that expressing them might lead to conflict or disapproval.
- ❖ **Resentment:** Over time, resentment builds within me because I feel unappreciated and taken advantage of, which can erode the foundation of our relationships.
- ❖ **Dependency dynamics:** We create unhealthy dependency dynamics, as my constant accommodation encourages others to rely on me for their happiness and decision-making, limiting their growth and mine.
- ❖ **Diminished trust:** Our relationships may suffer from a lack of trust because I'm not being honest about my feelings and needs, leading others to question the sincerity of our interactions.
- ❖ **Conflict avoidance:** We avoid necessary conflicts that could lead to growth and better understanding, resulting in stagnant relationships that don't evolve to handle real challenges.



- ❖ **Overburdening others:** By not allowing others to contribute or take responsibility, we inadvertently burden ourselves and deprive others of the chance to be supportive, fostering an imbalanced dynamic.

Simply put, people-pleasing leads to worse relationships, not better relationships. You're not authentic. Intimacy is only achieved through knowing your own needs, expressing them and being honest about your inner world. People-pleasing is actually a recipe for loneliness, bad relationships and divorce.

It's conflict avoidant in the short-term, but the conflict doesn't go away. It doesn't just magically disappear.

Ultimately, you can't love a people-pleaser because you can't get to know them.

It (Systemic or Contextual Level)

- ❖ **Workplace inefficiency:** In a work context, it leads to inefficiency and imbalance, as I take on more tasks than I can handle, potentially sacrificing the quality of work and my own well-being.
- ❖ **Reinforcement of unhealthy norms:** It perpetuates a culture where saying no is seen negatively, discouraging assertiveness and boundary setting, which are crucial for healthy teamwork and personal development.
- ❖ **Limited personal growth:** It limits opportunities for personal and professional growth, as I avoid challenges and new experiences that might lead to conflict or require assertiveness, hindering my ability to learn, adapt, and become resilient.

- ❖ Culture of overwork: In the workplace, it contributes to a culture that glorifies overwork and undervalues personal boundaries, setting unrealistic standards for what it means to be committed or dedicated.
- ❖ Stifled innovation: It hinders creativity and innovation because I might refrain from voicing unique ideas or challenging the status quo due to fear of rejection or causing upset, leading to a homogenised and less dynamic environment.
- ❖ Impaired decision-making: It affects collective decision-making processes, as I might withhold my genuine opinions or concerns, leading to decisions that aren't fully informed or that don't consider all perspectives, potentially impacting the success of projects or initiatives.

The "I, We, It" model illustrates how the sacrifices and disadvantages of people-pleasing extend beyond the individual, affecting relationships and broader systems in which individuals operate. Recognising these impacts can be the first step toward addressing and mitigating the negative consequences of people-pleasing behaviours.



If you're people-pleaser, here are some hard truths about what you can't be:

- ❖ Innovative: Forget about innovation. Why? Because stepping out of the box means risking ridicule. People might laugh, critique, or dismiss your ideas. So, if you're scared of a bit of laughter or disapproval, innovation is off the table.
- ❖ Successful: Success demands taking stands, making unpopular decisions, and sometimes stepping on toes. If you're too worried about keeping everyone happy, you'll never push the boundaries necessary for true success. Success isn't built on universal approval.

- ❖ Creative: Creativity thrives on originality and breaking the mould. If your primary concern is how your ideas will be received, you'll likely censor yourself before anything groundbreaking sees the light of day. Creativity and fear of judgement cannot coexist.
- ❖ Entrepreneurial: The heart of entrepreneurship is innovation, risk, and, quite often, failure before success. If you're a people-pleaser afraid of criticism or failure, you'll avoid the bold moves essential for entrepreneurial success. Entrepreneurs can't afford to play it safe based on others' opinions.
- ❖ A good parent: Good parenting isn't about being your child's best friend; it's about making tough decisions for their long-term benefit, even when they're unpopular. If you can't stand up to your child for fear of upsetting them, you're sacrificing their growth for momentary peace.
- ❖ Authentic: Authenticity? Please. Being true to yourself is sidelined because you're too busy mirroring what you think others want to see. You can't be real if your greatest fear is disappointing anyone.
- ❖ Decisive: Decision-making is a no-go. Why? Because making decisions often means taking a stand, and heaven forbid you make a choice that someone disagrees with. If you can't handle the heat of dissent, then steer clear of decision-making roles.
- ❖ A respected leader: Leadership requires making the tough calls, often to the dismay of some. If you're constantly seeking approval, forget about respect. Leaders stand firm in the face of adversity, not crumble under the fear of unpopularity.
- ❖ Truly happy: Genuine happiness comes from living a life that's aligned with your values and desires, not someone else's. If your priority is to

keep everyone else happy, you're putting your own happiness on the back burner. Guess what? You can't find happiness there.

- ❖ **Confident:** Confidence comes from knowing who you are and being okay with it. Constantly seeking external validation erodes self-confidence. If you can't stand on your own two feet without looking around for approval, you'll never truly be confident.
- ❖ **A risk-taker:** Taking risks involves the potential for failure, and failure can lead to criticism. If you're a people-pleaser, you're likely risk-averse, preferring the safety of the known and the accepted. No risks, no rewards.
- ❖ **Fulfilled:** Fulfilment comes from pursuing what matters to you, even when it's not popular or understood by others. If you're living for others' approval, you're likely to find yourself on a path that feels empty and unfulfilling.

In a nutshell, people-pleasing is a straightjacket. It confines you to a life of mediocrity, fear, and unfulfilled potential.

It may not be nice seeing what people-pleasing costs, but truth is the most valuable thing. Imagine for a moment that you're living in a tribal society from 10,000 years ago. The phrase "Hey, there are wolves coming to eat us" would be more valuable than "Hey, I know you're upset, so let's pretend there are no wolves. Everything's fine". Maybe in the short term, "everything's fine" is nicer to hear, but ultimately, the harsh truth is actually nicer. It's better to tell someone something they don't like to hear but will actually help them, rather than appease their feelings in the short-term.



Are you motivated yet? Do you feel like crying? This is tough love, but it's something you may need to hear. Love is not telling you what you want to hear.

There may be two things going on for you at this point. On one side, you've got, "It's my family. It's my culture. It's my evolutionary heritage. It's not my fault. Okay." But on the other hand, you're asking, "What the f*** am I doing? It's time to sort this s*** out."



You really need both perspectives here. You need to be kind to yourself and say, "Hey, this is my survival strategy. This is my outdated, no longer appropriate way of finding love and safety." Don't beat yourself up, but don't do yourself a PR job either.

One extreme would be going, "I'm a piece of s***, I'm a coward, I'm awful," and now you're depressed as well as a people-pleaser. Good job (not)! The other end of the spectrum is like, "This is my evolutionary heritage, I'm a people-pleaser, and this is just how I am." It's like someone saying, "I'm a bit of a manipulative psychopath and, you know, I'm gonna destroy my life. My children's lives are gonna be f***** up, and I've got a nice name for it."

It's about finding a balance – recognising the deep roots of your behaviour without letting it become an excuse to continue on a detrimental path. You've got to acknowledge the issue without burying yourself in guilt or shrugging it off as "just the way things are."

Exercise 5

What does people-pleasing cost you?

CHAPTER 5

Stories people-pleasers tell themselves

People-pleasers often tell themselves stories that rationalise their behaviour and justify the continuous prioritisation of others' needs above their own. These narratives are deeply ingrained and can serve as both a shield against perceived threats and a strategy for navigating social environments.

Here are some examples of these internal stories:

- ❖ "If anyone loves me, I'm going to be okay." This story is based on the belief that external validation and affection are the keys to inner peace and security. People-pleasers who subscribe to this narrative often feel that as long as they are loved and approved of by others, any internal turmoil or insecurity will be resolved.
- ❖ "The world is not safe; I make it safe by making everyone my friend." Here, the person tells themselves that they can control their environment and minimise threats by ensuring that no one has a reason to dislike them. This belief fosters a relentless pursuit of friendships and alliances, often at the expense of the individual's authenticity and personal boundaries.
- ❖ "If I'm charming enough, everyone will love me, and I'll no longer have self-esteem issues." This narrative suggests that charm and likeability are the solutions to low self-esteem. By winning over others, the person hopes to bolster their self-worth and alleviate feelings of inadequacy.
- ❖ "Saying no means I'm selfish." People-pleasers often equate setting boundaries or refusing requests with being selfish or uncaring. They

believe that to be a good person, they must always be accommodating, even when it harms their well-being.

- ❖ "My needs aren't as important as everyone else's." This story reflects a deeply ingrained belief that the needs of others always take precedence. It's rooted in a sense of unworthiness, where the individual feels their own desires and needs are trivial compared to those of others.
- ❖ "I must be needed, to be valued." In this narrative, the person believes that their worth is directly tied to their utility to others. They feel that they must always be helpful and indispensable to be considered valuable in their relationships and social circles.
- ❖ "Conflict is dangerous; harmony at all costs." People-pleasers who tell themselves this story are convinced that any form of disagreement or conflict will lead to catastrophic outcomes, such as abandonment or hostility. They strive for constant harmony, even if it means suppressing their own thoughts and feelings.
- ❖ "I can only be happy if the people around me are happy." This belief suggests that the individual's emotional well-being is entirely dependent on the moods and states of those around them. They prioritise others' happiness over their own, often neglecting their emotional needs in the process.

These stories that people-pleasers tell themselves are powerful drivers of behaviour, shaping how they interact with the world and perceive their place within it. Recognising and challenging these narratives is a critical step toward developing healthier relationships with oneself and others, marked by authenticity, self-respect, and mutual respect.

Exercise 6

What stories do you tell yourself? For example, “if anyone loves me, I’m gonna be okay”, “the world is not safe, but I can make it safe by making everyone my friend”, or “if I’m charming enough, everyone will love me, and I will no longer have self-esteem issues”. Does your story sound logical?

What’s a more honest framing for people-pleasing?

What would we call people-pleasing if we were being less complementary to ourselves? What would be a more honest framing?

Highlighting the manipulation aspect of people-pleasing reveals its complex and often overlooked negative side. While on the surface, people-pleasing might appear as a benign, even selfless act of putting others first, the underlying dynamics can be more self-serving and manipulative than they seem.

- ❖ **Covert control:** people-pleasing can be a form of covert control. The people-pleaser seeks to manage others’ feelings, responses, and even behaviours by catering to their wants and needs, not necessarily out of genuine care, but with the aim of keeping the environment predictable and to their liking.
- ❖ **Emotional blackmail:** At times, people-pleasing veers into emotional blackmail territory. The people-pleaser might not outright demand reciprocity, but there’s an unspoken expectation that their efforts should be noticed, appreciated, and reciprocated, creating a guilt-driven response from others.
- ❖ **Creating dependency:** Through constant people-pleasing, a manipulative dynamic can emerge where others become dependent on the people-pleaser’s support and validation. This dependency isn’t

about empowering others but ensuring they remain essential and central to the lives of those around them.

- ❖ **Avoiding responsibility:** people-pleasers often manipulate situations to avoid taking responsibility for their own needs and desires, placing the onus on others to infer and meet them. This indirect approach can lead to frustration and misunderstanding in relationships.
- ❖ **Shifting blame:** When conflicts arise, people-pleasers may manipulate the situation by shifting blame or playing the victim. This deflects attention from their own role in the situation and maintains their self-image as the agreeable, selfless one.
- ❖ **Suppressing authenticity:** The manipulation extends to the self, where the people-pleaser suppresses their true feelings, opinions, and desires. This self-manipulation not only harms their authenticity but also prevents genuine connections with others, as relationships are based on a constructed persona rather than the real person.
- ❖ **Exploiting sympathy:** people-pleasers may unconsciously exploit others' sympathy and goodwill. By appearing always willing, helpful, and self-sacrificing, they can engender a sense of obligation in others, manipulating them into feeling they must reciprocate or support the people-pleaser in return.
- ❖ **Manipulation of perceptions:** A subtle form of manipulation in people-pleasing is the effort to shape how others perceive them by constantly crafting an image of themselves as indispensable, kind, and generous. This can be a strategy to ensure their social desirability and to avoid any negative judgments.
- ❖ **Indirect communication:** Instead of direct communication, people-pleasers often use manipulation through hints, passive-aggressive comments, or non-verbal cues to express their

needs or displeasure, making it difficult for others to respond appropriately due to the lack of clarity.

In essence, the manipulation inherent in people-pleasing is multifaceted, affecting both the people-pleaser and those around them. It's a strategy for navigating social relationships that prioritises the people-pleaser's need for approval and fear of rejection over honest and open interaction. Recognising and addressing these manipulative aspects is crucial for anyone seeking to move beyond people-pleasing towards healthier, more authentic ways of relating to others.

Exercise 7

What's your psychotic, megalomaniac fantasy? What would the world look like if everyone loved you?

CHAPTER 6

The funny side of people-pleasing

Okay. Let's lighten things up 😊

Let me introduce the concept of laughing with yourself, a refreshing alternative to laughing at yourself or taking yourself too seriously.

Typically, people feel they must choose between these two: to carry themselves with unwavering seriousness or to mock their own actions. Laughing with yourself is like observing your own actions and saying, "Oh, look, I'm doing it again" with a light-hearted acknowledgment.

This approach to humour creates differentiation, a gap between action and reaction. It's in this gap that opportunities for behavioural change and embodiment arise. Humour opens up this space, enabling us to address and adapt our actions with a more relaxed attitude.



This is why we often make jokes about subjects that provoke anxiety.

For instance, young children frequently joke about taboo subjects like bathroom habits because they're somewhat embarrassed by them. As we mature, the topics might change – in America, it often revolves around race, a topic that can perplex those from other cultures, like the British, who might wonder, "Why is this such a sensitive issue?"

Across the board, sex and politics are universally charged topics that we often tackle with humour. Making jokes about these subjects allows us to create a space where we can breathe a little easier.

Let's add a playful twist to some classic people-pleasing behaviours, highlighting them with humour but steering clear of criticism:

- ❖ Saying "yes" to everything: Picture yourself as a superhero, "Yes-Man" or "Yes-Woman," cape and all. Your superpower? Agreeing to every single request, invitation, and favour. "Save our city?" Yes! "Babysit my pet tarantula?" Of course! Your calendar is as packed as a rush-hour subway, but hey, who else can claim they've attended a webinar, baked a three-tier cake, and walked seven dogs simultaneously?
- ❖ Apologising profusely: Imagine if "Sorry" were a magic spell you cast to smooth over any situation. Accidentally bumped into a mannequin? "Sorry!" Someone steps on your toe? "Oh, terribly sorry for my toe being in your way!" You've become so adept at apologising that you're considering a side gig as a professional apologist. Business slogan? "I'm sorry for everything (even though I did nothing)."
- ❖ Laughing at every joke: You laugh so heartily at every joke; folks start wondering if you've missed your calling as a live studio audience member. Even when the joke's so bad it makes dad jokes sound like comedy gold, you're there, championing laughter as the best medicine – even if the joke is more of a placebo.
- ❖ Constantly adjusting your opinions: You're like a human chameleon, but instead of changing colours, you adapt your opinions to match the crowd. "Love pineapple on pizza?" Absolutely – in the presence of pineapple enthusiasts. "Think pineapple on pizza is a crime?" Couldn't agree more – when among the culinary purists. You're contemplating adding "opinion acrobat" to your resume.

- ❖ **Overloading on compliments:** If compliments were currency, you'd be the central bank. You dish them out with the generosity of an Oprah giveaway. "You get a compliment! And you get a compliment! Everyone gets a compliment!" Your knack for finding something praiseworthy in everyone makes you the ultimate cheerleader – minus the pom-poms.
- ❖ **Master of vague responses:** Asked about your weekend plans, you're as mysterious as a detective novel. "Oh, you know, this and that." Your ability to keep plans as vague as a weather forecast ensures you're never committed but always considerate.

Remember, recognising and laughing a bit at these behaviours can be the first step toward striking a healthier balance between pleasing others and staying true to yourself.

Exercise 8

What aspects of your life could you benefit from laughing a bit more about?

Encouraging laughter at your imperfections can be a gentle way to acknowledge personal growth areas without the weight of self-criticism.

CHAPTER 7

Awareness is the first step towards change

The problem is not being nice. The problem is having to be nice. The latter is a tyranny and it's not real kindness.

Holding compassion in one hand and fierce determination to change in the other can be difficult. It's a bit like trying to juggle water and fire – tricky, but not impossible.

Change, especially when it's tied up with survival instincts, childhood memories, or trauma, is like trying to teach an old dog new tricks. And not just any tricks, but ones that go against years of instinct. It's going to take more than a week or two, and likely more than a few months, of steadfast effort.

So, let's get one thing straight – you're probably not going to transform into a badass, disagreeable person overnight. Most of us won't suddenly swing from being pathologically nice to the complete opposite end of the spectrum, or at least not for any length of time.

It is possible that you'll “overshoot” the mark for a short period of time and go from being under- to over-boundaried, for example, before finding a happy middle-ground. I call this the “obnoxious stage”, but it doesn't usually last!

Eventually, most of us will graduate from being pathologically nice to, well, nicely average, which means that you don't need to worry about turning into a grumpy cynic who scowls at puppies and rainbows overnight.

Shifting behaviours

The basic process of change is pretty straightforward: we spot our habits and then practise doing something a bit different.



Sure, you might have some lightning-bolt moments when taking psychedelics ceremony or while trying some wild breathing exercises, and that's all good. But the real magic happens in the day-to-day, the small steps and the consistent effort.

So, keep at it. It's about progress, not perfection. And who knows – maybe one day, you'll find yourself laughing with yourself about the whole journey.

Awareness

The safe, slow, steady, reliable method to behavioural change is simply to build awareness and make other choices. How do we do that?

The easiest way to do something else is through the body. Why? Because this is the most concrete thing we can change. If I say “change your mind” you might be like, “How?”. But if I said, change your posture, or sit differently, or tilt your head this way, or breathe differently, you'd go, “Oh, I can do that.”

But before making changes through the body, you might like to practise simply becoming aware...

Exercise 9

We'll call this the "people-pleasing meditation"...

Find a comfy spot to sit, whatever feels good for you. I'd suggest doing this for about five minutes, but shorter or longer works too.

First off, start by really feeling your body - notice its temperature, its weight. Get yourself into a comfortable position.

Take a few deep breaths. Maybe do a small act of kindness for yourself, like a gentle touch, a namaste, or even a hug. Just a simple gesture to show yourself some love, letting yourself know you're looking after you.

Now, ask your body, "What's at the heart of my people-pleasing? Where does this urge come from?" Trust that your body holds wisdom. You might need more time to explore this deeply on your own, but sometimes insights come quickly.

Question, "What is the root of my people-pleasing? What do I need to shift away from people-pleasing? What new strength do I need to develop?"

Finally, send some good wishes your way. Acknowledge that what you're doing is brave, maybe tough, and likely a bit uncomfortable at times, but it can be joyful too. It's all part of experiencing new growth. Offer yourself a bit of love for doing something many might not - which is growing.

You're putting in the effort, even when it feels awkward. You've shown up for this, dialling down the distractions.

Just remember, you're doing something remarkable here.

Any insights from that little tuning in? Any thoughts or observations?

If you feel like a bit of soothing balm after this meditation, you may also like to try the “self-soothing meditation” on this book’s free resources page:

www.peopleunpleasing.com



Working with embodiment isn’t some abstract thing. Quite the opposite – there’s nothing more concrete than your own body. You have more control over it than your mind. If I asked you to sit still you probably could do that for a few minutes, but if I said don’t think, well... good luck with that.

The basic method is:

Stop → Notice → Centre → Act differently.

Exercise 10

Let’s do a little bit of virtual reality training. Luckily, you’ve got an inbuilt VR system called your mind.

If you’re willing, please close your eyes and remember the last time you did one of these people-pleasing behaviours I mentioned in this book.

Notice what happened in your body. It may be a smile, a head tilt, it may be a movement towards someone or something. Often it’s some sort of anxiety, because we can think of the people-pleasing as an attempt to alleviate that anxiety.

So just do the noticing part, bringing your mind to that situation where you stayed, where you didn’t want to stay, where you helped, or you didn’t want to help, etc.

Once you’ve got a good sense of that, stop. You may like to wriggle, move or shake, to help “let it go”.

You may have practised embodied awareness before and found that relatively easy. Or maybe you're new to this and struggled a little. Either's okay.

So... What did you notice? What did you do in your body?



Here's a closer look at what a person could do in their body during such moments:

- ❖ Mini-freeze: Experiences a moment of hesitation, almost like freezing in place, indicating a split-second of internal conflict between their desires and the urge to please.
- ❖ Collapse: Their body may subtly slump or collapse, especially around the shoulders or chest, reflecting a sense of resignation or the feeling of being overwhelmed by others' demands.
- ❖ Stands taller: Automatically straightens up, an involuntary spine extension, as if trying to physically rise to the expectations of others, even if it's uncomfortable.
- ❖ Drops their head: Tilts their head downward in a gesture of submission or to avoid direct confrontation, signalling a prioritisation of someone else's needs or opinions.
- ❖ Curls shoulders forward: Rolls their shoulders inwards, adopting a protective stance that suggests a discomfort with the situation or an attempt to shield themselves.
- ❖ Displays nervous movements: Engages in fidgeting or touching their face, a sign of nervousness or anxiety driven by the compulsion to appease.

- ❖ Offers a forced smile: Puts on a smile that seems strained or insincere, an effort to appear agreeable or to mask true feelings of reluctance or disagreement.
- ❖ Avoids making eye contact: Shies away from looking someone in the eye, possibly to evade the discomfort of resisting the impulse to conform or agree.
- ❖ Holds tension: Their body might hold tension in specific areas like the jaw, neck, or shoulders, a physical manifestation of the stress associated with the need to please.
- ❖ Nods or smiles excessively: Frequent nodding or smiling happens, even if they don't fully agree or understand, as a non-verbal cue of agreement and to avoid conflict.
- ❖ Changes voice tone: Their voice might become higher, softer, or fluctuate unexpectedly, attempting to sound more pleasing or less confrontational.

For many people, it's going to be either tension or a collapse. These are the basic fight or flight responses. But for some, it could be more of a freeze, a bit more of a shutdown.

It's going to vary from person to person, and you really do need to notice it. You've got to be in the body to make these changes. So, practise deeply tuning into the body.,

How did you do the particular emotional reaction from the exercise in your body? What's the red light that lets you know you might be people-pleasing? What's the thing that would be like, whoop, whoop, whoop, people-pleasing alert?

Exercise 11

Write down the body reaction alerts you've noticed.

Knowing your preferences

The very first step, before you even think about saying no, asking for help, or making any kind of move, is getting clear on your own preferences.

Start by asking yourself, "What's my need? What do I really want?"

Exercise 12

Commit to checking in with yourself five times a day.

You're likely to forget, so set up a reminder system. It could be an alarm, a sticky note, anything that works for you.

Then, take a moment to really tune into your body. Close your eyes for 30 seconds – which, believe it or not, feels longer than you'd expect – and genuinely ask yourself, "What do I want right now?"

You could also tie this check-in to routine activities like washing your hands, going to the bathroom, making a cup of tea, or even when you're about to light a cigarette.

Extend this practice to your eating habits too. Every time you're about to choose what to eat, especially when you're out, give yourself that extra bit of time to really tune into what you fancy.



Starting with this can make a difference, and gradually, other areas of your life will begin to fall in line. Consider this the foundation – becoming deeply

connected with your own desires and needs, in the small things first, paving the way for the bigger shifts to become achievable.

Embodiment practices have two parts – awareness and choice. Now that you have some exercises to build awareness and get more in-tune with what you truly want, we can move on to some practices to choose alternative behaviours, like saying “no” and asking for what you want...

CHAPTER 8

Saying “no”

Before you start saying "no" to others, it's important to be able to handle a "no" – both saying it, and when it's directed at you, too.

Somewhere I set firm boundaries is by not allowing people into in-person workshops an hour late, even if they come with a list of excuses. On three recent occasions, I've delivered a gentle "no", and in all of those instances, the reactions were, well... less than gracious. It was like witnessing a mini-tantrum, because each of these people were accustomed to others bending over backwards to accommodate them. People often aren't really used to boundaries sadly, because so many play the people-pleaser role. That was a bit of an eye-opener for me.

People-pleasers often struggle with setting boundaries themselves when others say "no". It's as if there's an unspoken rule: "I've let my boundaries slide, so you should as well." But here's the crux – no one has the right to dictate how you use your time, your body, or anything else for that matter.

It's crucial to have the right emotional undertone when you say “no”. This means your “no” isn't just a rejection, but a statement of care, either for yourself or for the person you're saying it to. So, when you say no, it's like saying, “no, because I care about myself” or “no, because I care about you”.

The key here is that your “no” isn't suggesting “you're wrong to ask me that”. Rather, it's saying, “I'm saying no because I'm taking care of myself”.

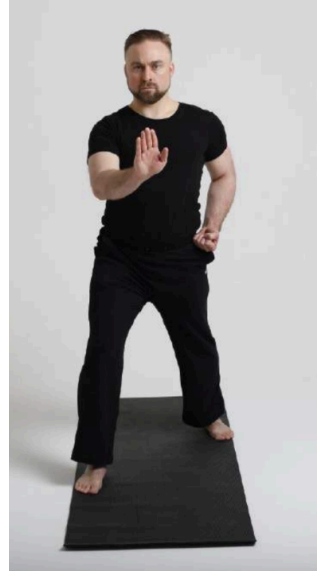
Sometimes, especially with something like a child asking, “Can I have another candy bar?” your response, “No, I'm looking after you”, comes from a place of

love. The crucial bit is that this boundary, this “no”, is tied to love – whether it’s self-love or your love for them. That’s what really matters.

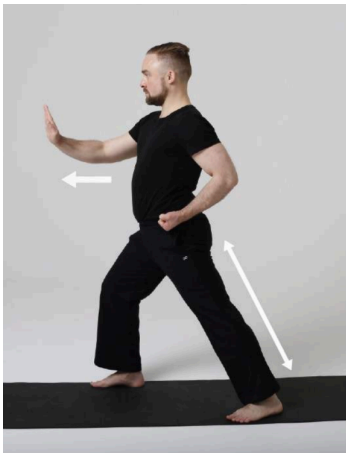
Exercise 13

“No” is a posture from the [Embodied Toolkit](#) (formerly Embodied Yoga Principles, EYP – look out for the book being released in mid-2024 featuring all 26 postures from this system), which allows us to explore saying “no” and boundaries, both with ourselves and others.

To set up for this posture, bring your feet about shoulder width apart, or a little wider, and take a nice step forward with your front knee bent, back leg extended, so you can have 60% of your weight on your front leg.



Keep your head straight, with your gaze focused and forward, and with a serious, non-smiling face.

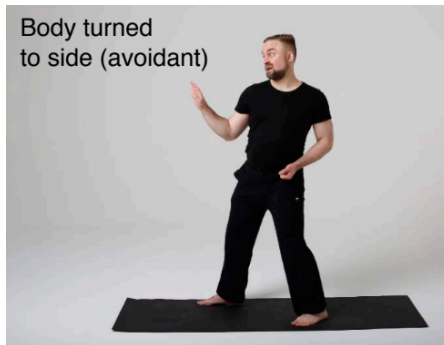


Extend your spine slightly and bring one hand in front of your chest in a “no” gesture, slightly bent at the elbow, with the other in a fist by your hip, neither tight nor loose.

Breathe steadily and firmly, emphasising the out-breath as you say “no” in your first language.

If someone were to apply gentle pressure to the open hand of the arm that’s extended in front of you, you should be able to oppose it (rather than “give in” when someone tries to cross your boundaries).

There are many common mistakes when doing this posture, many of which may be indicative of people-pleasing patterns. These include:



The opposite pattern, for example, would be:



You'll find some good videos diving deeper into “No” on the book’s page here:
www.peopleunpleasing.com



***A quick note for “No” posture, along with all the other postures you’ll be offered from the Embodied Toolkit system:** they do NOT need to be done standing up. If standing isn’t possible for you, or you need a rest, you can also practise them sitting.

If doing this, try to replicate the positioning and directionality. For “No”, that’d still mean your weight distributed forwards 60%, and for the upcoming “Yes” posture, 60% back, etc.

Try your best to replicate the general sense or feel of them in other positions, and over time, you may be able to practise “micro” versions of them by just taking on a single cue and instantly dropping into the appropriate state.

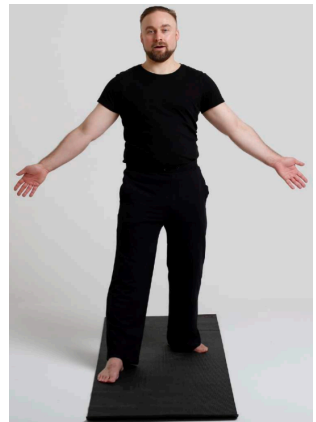
For more on this (it can be quite subtle), look out for the Embodied Toolkit book to be released in mid-2024, or take a look at the full course:
<https://embodimentunlimited.com/embodied-toolkit>



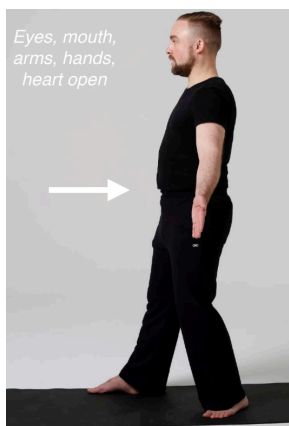
It can also be useful to contrast a “no” to its alternative, “yes”. After all, saying “no” to one thing is actually saying “yes” to something else (and vice-versa).

Exercise 14

“Yes” is another posture from the Embodied Toolkit, which allows us to explore saying yes, allowing, empathy, acceptance and letting in.



To set up for this posture, bring your feet about shoulder width apart, and take a step forward with your front foot facing forwards, and your back foot comfortably out on a diagonal. Bend your back leg at the knee, with your front leg extended, allowing you to have 60% of your weight through your back leg.



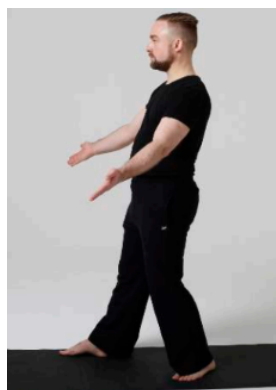
Keep your head upright and relaxed, your gaze softly open and peripheral, with your face being “open”, your mouth relaxed and slightly open.

Soften your spine so that it’s slightly flexed, and allow your arms to open and relax downwards, with your hands softly open around hip-level.

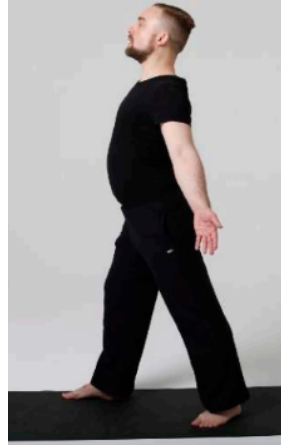
Emphasise the in-breath, and breath out as a soft “ahhh” as you say “yes” in your first language.

Allow your attention to be drawn from out to in, saying “yes” as it’s drawn towards you.

There are many common mistakes when doing this posture, and some which may feel familiar from habitual people-pleasing. A big one to watch for is the passive “yes”, which can have connotations of powerlessness (you MUST say “yes”), or coming too far forward (e.g. into “giving” posture, which you’ll see in Chapter 10):



Other mistakes, although not normally associated with people-pleasing, include arms coming too far out (“taking space”, see Chapter 9) or back (“enthusiasm”):



—*—

Ultimately, it can be a useful practice to cut "maybe" out of your vocabulary. Just scrap it. Eventually, it's either a "yes" or a "no." There's a way to do this properly...

Exercise 15

Turn your maybe into a “yes” or a “no”.

If you need time to decide, be specific about when you'll respond. For example, say, "I need to check with my boss. I'll get back to you by 3pm." That's solid. It's not a "later" or a "maybe," but a clear, specific plan.

Don't compromise when you really should just say “no”. It's like saying, "You can't cut off both of my legs. How about just one?".

Jokes aside, anything involving your body or dignity is never up for discussion.

CHAPTER 9

Asking for what you want

Asking for what you want is a habit you can build. Get into the habit of asking for what you want...

Exercise 16

Make it a point to request something you desire each day. There are loads of fun ways to go about this, but the key is to actually do it.

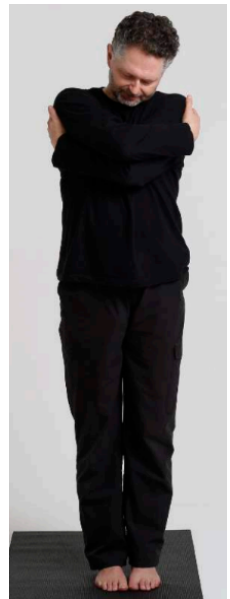
Sometimes, people-pleaser's are so accustomed to fulfilling others' desires that they struggle with identifying their own. This is what the daily check-ins exercise earlier was about, but another powerful way to identify what you want can be from a place of self-care...

Exercise 17

“Self-Care” is another posture from the Embodied Toolkit, allowing us to explore self-love, self-care, tenderness and how we look after ourselves.

To set up for this posture, bring your toes together with your heels slightly apart (meaning your feet will be turned inwards). Bend your knees slightly, as is comfortable, and have your weight evenly spread.

Let your head dip, tilting it slightly to one side, with your gaze down or your eyes closed. Let your face relax.





Soften your spine so that it's gently flexed, and wrap your hands around yourself tenderly, as you'd hold a loved one. You may vary this as is comfortable. If it works for your body, one to try may be having one hand coming under your left armpit, cradling the heart-side of your ribcage, whilst your other hand rests over the top of your opposite shoulder.

You may breathe with an “mmm” or an “ahhh”, and allow your attention to be drawn inwards to yourself.

Some common mistakes associated with people-pleasing may include your attention still being “outwards” (i.e. still worrying about others, not yourself), along with your self-touch being hard or mechanical.

Other mistakes that people make with this could include not tilting the head or having the chin up.

You'll find some examples of “Self-Care” and its uses on the book's resources page:

www.peopleunpleasing.com



Once you've identified what you actually want, it's time to get started. This can turn into quite the laugh, especially if you live with someone, like a housemate or your partner.

Start by asking for simple things, like doing the dishes, then escalate to more whimsical requests, like foot tickles or even getting them to fetch a palm leaf to fan you while topless. It's all in good fun, pushing the boundaries of what's

reasonable until you find where the limit lies. And who knows? You might just spice up your sex life along the way.

Here are some tips to help you to ask for what you want effectively:

- ❖ Know what you want: Before you ask for anything, take the time to understand clearly what it is you want or need. This might require some introspection to distinguish between what you genuinely desire and what you think you should want based on others' expectations. Some of the previous exercises can help with this.
- ❖ Be direct yet kind: When expressing your needs or desires, be straightforward and clear, but also considerate of the other person's feelings and circumstances. Clarity helps prevent misunderstandings, while kindness fosters a positive environment for your request.
- ❖ Practise assertiveness: Assertiveness is about expressing your thoughts and feelings confidently and respectfully. It's a balance between aggression (forcing your desires on others) and passivity (suppressing your needs). Practising assertiveness can help you ask for what you want more effectively.
- ❖ Use "I" statements: Frame your requests from your perspective to avoid sounding accusatory. For example, "I feel" or "I would like" statements allow you to express your needs without implying blame or making the other person defensive.
- ❖ Prepare for different outcomes: While it's important to ask for what you want, it's equally important to be prepared for any response. Not all requests will be met with a yes, and that's okay. Preparing for various outcomes can help manage your expectations and reduce anxiety about asking.

- ❖ Understand timing and context: Choosing the right moment to make your request can significantly impact the response you receive. Consider the other person's mood, the current setting, and whether it's an appropriate time to discuss your needs.
- ❖ Explain why it's important: Providing context about why your request is important to you can help the other person understand your perspective and potentially make them more inclined to accommodate your needs.
- ❖ Practise empathy: Consider the other person's situation and how your request might affect them. Showing that you understand and care about their feelings or circumstances can create a more empathetic and cooperative dialogue.
- ❖ Be willing to compromise: Sometimes, you may need to negotiate or adjust your requests to find a mutually acceptable solution. Being open to compromise demonstrates flexibility and respect for the other person's needs as well.
- ❖ Build your self-esteem: Asking for what you want also involves believing that you deserve to have your needs met. Work on building your self-esteem and self-worth, as this can make it easier to assert yourself and ask for what you need.
- ❖ Practice: Like any skill, asking for what you want gets easier with practice. Start with smaller requests to build your confidence, and gradually work up to more significant tasks.
- ❖ Remember your value: Don't base your self-worth on whether your request is granted. You are valuable and deserving of respect, regardless of the outcome. Asking for what you want is a courageous step in advocating for yourself.

I get it. It can be scary to ask for things. If you're not used to it, it can be very uncomfortable. We've often learnt to stay "hidden".

If you want to see me coaching a student on how to ask for what you want, you may like [this video](#).

We also have a posture that may help you to build confidence with this...

Exercise 18

"Taking Space" is a posture from the Embodied Toolkit, which allows us to explore taking up space, visibility, social expressiveness, extroversion, and generally being noticed.

To set up for this posture, bring your feet out as wide as you can manage whilst maintaining balance, with your weight evenly distributed.



Keep your head straight, with your gaze forward and out, open your mouth slightly, then grin widely.

With an upright spine, extend your arms out above your head, palms open and fingers spread.

Emphasise breathing out with an expressive "aaahhhh".

Try to extend out in all directions, both physically and with your awareness. This is a good time to channel your inner "Freddie Mercury" 😊

Some common mistakes when doing this posture can be indicative of confidence struggles, and include not extending your arms, your arms being too low, and letting your attention come inwards, rather than extending outwards to your surroundings.



Now, as you start to confidently ask for things, people may actually give them to you! At this point, you may also notice that it can be quite difficult to “receive” what you ask for (whether that’s help, compliments, gifts, or anything else).

That’s why it can also be helpful to practise the art of receiving...

CHAPTER 10

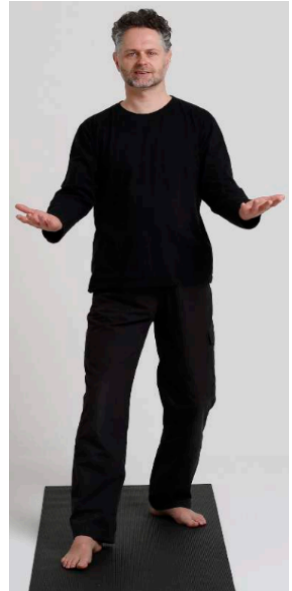
Comfortably receiving and authentically giving

When you're so used to giving, being on the receiving end can be strange. Start with small requests. It can also be helpful to practise receiving as a standalone exercise...

Exercise 19

Another posture from the Embodied Toolkit is "Receiving", which allows us to explore making requests, accepting, asking and taking (e.g. compliments or gifts).

It has a similar setup to "Yes". Bring your feet about shoulder width apart, and take a step forward with your front foot facing forwards, and your back foot comfortably out on a diagonal. Bend your back leg at the knee, with your front leg extended, allowing you to have 60% of your weight through your back leg.



Keep your head upright and relaxed, your gaze soft, with your face being "open", with your mouth relaxed and slightly open.

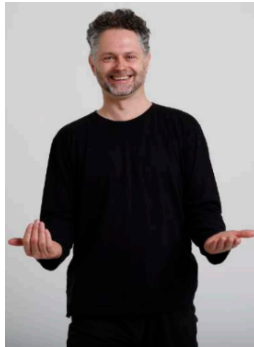
Relax your spine so that it's slightly flexed, relax your arms and bend them at your elbow so that your hands reach out forwards, open and relaxed.

Emphasise the in-breath, breathing silently or with a gentle "mmmmm".

Allow your attention to be drawn from out to in, “receiving” inwards.

Receiving can be difficult for people-pleasers, with common mistakes being your arms instead coming forward (e.g. into “Giving” – see Exercise 23) or rolling around, arms being at the wrong angle to create a “barrier” to receiving or dropping the “gift”, extending the spine, or having a “closed” face.

A variation of this that could also be helpful is “Asking”, where you can curl your fingers up and move them back-and-forth in a “come here” or “give me that” motion:



—*—

If the thought of asking makes you nervous, then it’s important to speak up.

Here’s a solid approach, which can be especially effective with men: “Hey, buddy / lover / husband / wife, I could really use your help with something.”

This is far better than coming across as if something’s broken or blaming them, which can be daunting. Most times, the immediate reaction you’ll get is, “Yeah, what do you need?” And you’re being completely upfront, right? There’s no trickery involved here.

Exercise 20

Identify the folks in your life who'll be on this journey with you. Here's what I'd like you to say to them: "Could you gently remind me if I slip into people-pleasing habits?"

The emphasis on 'gently' is crucial here. It's not about catching you in the act with a "Gotcha, you muppet." You might even suggest a subtle signal they can use, which could really help. It's about them aiding you in your journey.

Exercise 21

Another strategy to try with them could be to make the request that, "Before you ask me to do something, could you give me a moment to check in with myself?" Or even, "Could you please ask me twice before I commit to anything?"



These exercises are tactics I often employ as a coach when working with folks inclined to people-please. The goal is to afford them more breathing room and dial down the pressure.

This approach isn't off-limits with children either. For instance, you might say, "Mum's going to give you a dollar every time she unnecessarily says 'please' when she actually means 'now'." Or "Mum will pop a euro in the jar every time she apologises for something that's actually on you." This way, every time Mum falls back into people-pleasing, it's time to contribute to the jar.



Coming back to asking for what you want, you can always provide some extra context to those you're more intimate with.

You may say something like, “Hey, could you lend me a hand with something? I’m focusing on this personal goal to increase my happiness and self-care. It would mean the world if you could do X, Y, Z for me.”

It’s also perfectly okay if they choose to say “no”. You’re not trying to turn them into people-pleasers!

This approach reinforces your commitment to self-improvement while fostering supportive relationships that respect your journey towards less people-pleasing and more self-authenticity.



When it comes time for you to be “giving”, it can be helpful to differentiate whether you’re choosing to support someone, versus falling back into old people-pleasing habits. We all have natural compassion, so want to help, but in people-pleasing, this can go too far.

Here are some ways to tell the difference:

- ❖ Check your motivations: At the core, examine why you're choosing to give or help. If it's driven by fear—of rejection, conflict, or losing someone's approval—it's likely people-pleasing. Authentic giving comes from a place of genuine desire to contribute without expecting anything in return, not from a place of fear or obligation.
- ❖ Assess your feelings: People-pleasing often leaves you feeling drained, resentful, or as if you've compromised your boundaries. In contrast, authentic giving tends to be energising and fulfilling, leaving you with a sense of joy and satisfaction.
- ❖ Consider the presence of guilt: If you feel guilty when you think about not giving or saying no, it might be people-pleasing. Authentic giving is

free from guilt; it's a choice made because you truly want to, not because you feel you have to.

- ❖ Evaluate the impact on your self-esteem: People-pleasing can erode your self-esteem over time, as it might signal that others' needs are always more important than your own. Authentic giving, however, can enhance your self-esteem because it aligns with your values and respects your own needs and boundaries.
- ❖ Look for reciprocity: In healthy relationships, giving is a two-way street. If you find you're always the one giving while your own needs are consistently unmet, it may be more about people-pleasing. Authentic giving occurs in the context of mutual respect and care, where there's a balance of give and take.
- ❖ Notice if there's pressure: People-pleasing is often accompanied by a sense of pressure or urgency, feeling like you must give to keep the peace or be liked. Authentic giving is done freely and willingly, without feeling pressured by external circumstances or internal fears.
- ❖ Reflect on your ability to say no: If saying no fills you with anxiety or fear about the other person's reaction, it might indicate people-pleasing. When you're genuinely moved to give, you also feel comfortable declining when it's not right for you, knowing it won't fundamentally alter your relationships or self-worth.

But, if you're asking the question as to whether you were giving out of choice or habit, well... it's likely you already know. You bloody know already!

How do you know? If you people-pleasing rather than actually wanting to give, you'll feel resentment and exhaustion afterwards, as opposed to feeling good about authentically helping.

Exercise 22

What are the side effects of people-pleasing that you tend to notice during or after?

It just feels good doing it, and you don't feel like you're being sucked dry, good. It feels like "Yep, I'm doing my thing, doing my little bit", good. Authentic giving doesn't have any negative side effects. There's a pleasure to it. It can be energising.



It may be useful to practise the identifying when giving turns into "over-giving", versus when it feels authentic and right, too...

Exercise 23

"Giving" is a posture from the Embodied Toolkit, which allows us to explore giving, generosity and our offers, along with exploring life purpose and attraction.

To set up for this posture, bring your feet about shoulder width apart, or a little wider, and take a nice step forward with your front knee bent, so you can have 60% of your weight on your front leg.



Keep your head straight, with your gaze forward and open, relax your facial muscles, and open your mouth slightly or smile.

Slightly extend your spine, extend your arms out almost straight at heart-level, and orient your palms up with your fingers spread.

Emphasise breathing out and you may voice a relaxed “ahhh”.

Your attention should be forwards and out, directed as if you’re offering or giving.

Common mistakes include an unstable base, bringing your head in front of your hips, arms being too wide or too narrow, or over- or under-extended, along with palms being turned in or out.

Some of these are associated with people-pleasing:



As opposed to the opposite patterns:



CHAPTER 11

How to practise people un-pleasing

When you're working on changing your people-pleasing habits, there can be a big difference between practice and application.

Practising is about giving those new behaviours a whirl when there's not so much at stake. It's about learning to say "no" when the pressure's off, setting your boundaries in quieter moments, and voicing your needs when everything's more or less tickety-boo.

"Practice is what we do without consequences. Application is our life. Practice is how we build the "muscle" as we can repeat it safely in a controlled way. Application is how we use the muscle."

Build the muscle through practice. Then, when you're up against it, in situations where you'd normally fall back into people-pleasing habits, that's your time to shine, to apply what you've practised.

You've already had a bash at these new approaches; you're not just trying them on for size at the eleventh hour. You're prepped and ready to go.

So, don't hang about until you're deep in the mire to start changing your ways. Get stuck into practising those new behaviours well in advance, so when it's showtime, you're bang on form. It's all about getting cosy with these new habits before they're really put to the test. Start now.

Let me illustrate what I mean by practice by introducing "centring" – which I briefly mentioned in Chapter 7 as being part of the basic method for change – with an accompanying exercise...

Centring

Centring can mean specific techniques that involve focusing attention on the centre of gravity of the body to bring us into a specific state, or generally to mean any body-mind techniques used for self-regulation that bring us back into holistic balance. It can help with managing the stress that often accompanies new behaviours.

To me, centring can refer to a range of techniques one may use to create a positive foundational state, from which any further action can be engaged in with greater awareness and choice.

This can involve reducing arousal levels and the famous “fight or flight” reaction, as this is often helpful in a stressful world (this is “down-regulation”). Centring also includes techniques for regulating ourselves to greater alertness and stimulation (“up-regulation”), and techniques for shifting state without reference to arousal level.

The following is a specific centring technique I created, which I’ve taught tens-of-thousands over the last fifteen years, which can be used for all of the above – ABC Centring...

Exercise 24

The ABC in **ABC Centring** stands for:

A: Aware – feel your body here and now.

B: Balanced – balance your posture, expanding your awareness outwards as you do so.

C: Core relaxed – relax your centreline, the eyes, jaw, shoulders, belly and pelvic floor.

The first few times, it can be helpful to add some deeper instructions before coming back to this simpler “ABC” cue. I’ll also add some extra parts, in case you want to include those, too:

- ❖ Awareness – Put your feet flat on the floor and put anything in your hands down. Be mindful of the present moment using the five senses, especially feeling the body, your weight on your chair / feet and your breath. Scan up and down the body with your attention and remember to include the back. Notice what you can see, hear, smell and taste.
- ❖ Acceptance – It's all good 😊 Start where you are, saying “yes” to whatever is.
- ❖ Balancing – Balance your posture and attention. Relax down so your bones, not your muscles, support your weight. Imagine floating up from the back of the head, as if being pulled up by an imaginary string, so you keep alert. Balance both sides of your body symmetrically and make sure you are not squashed or leaning more on one foot or hip. Balance front and back so you are self-supporting and not leaning on yourself or your chair. Cultivate an expansive feeling of “reaching out” in all directions from the surface of your body.
- ❖ Boundaried – Feel the boundaries of your skin and your personal space around you..
- ❖ Breathe – Lengthen the in-breath into the belly for relaxation, or breathe strongly into the chest to energise, as appropriate.
- ❖ Core Relaxed – Relax your eyes, mouth, tongue, jaw, shoulders, stomach, back muscles and pelvic floor. Breathe deeply with your diaphragm so your belly and lower back move out slightly as you breathe in. If you struggle with relaxing your muscles, tighten them first and then try to relax them. Focus on your physical centre of gravity, a point a few inches below the navel, inside of you. Allow yourself to be supported (e.g. let your feet “sink” into the floor). This “core” or “centre-line” relaxation will spread to the rest of your body, enabling

the muscles to be as relaxed as your (now well balanced) structure allows.

- ❖ Connected to Care – Bring to mind the reason why you are doing this (for the sake of what?). Imagine the people or ideas you serve, and all those who support you, both now and from the past (e.g. inspiring figures or mentors).
- ❖ Creative Imagery – Use an image or a word that serves you, e.g. picture a calm mountain lake and say “calm”.

Now, obviously you won't be able to do all of this immediately when a situation calls for it, unless you practise first.

Set aside some time to try out all of these instructions multiple times, and then choose what resonates most with you.

Start out practising by yourself when you're in a good mood, and over time slowly increase the challenge by bringing in an increasingly difficult “trigger”.

This could mean imagining a slightly difficult situation from the past, or watching a video featuring someone or something you find challenging. Start out with “triggers” that are about a three on a scale of one to ten, and increase over time as you're able to stay in your desired state when confronted with them.

Once you get good at this, you could imagine yourself doing one of the new behaviours you're aiming for (e.g. saying “no” to working overtime to your boss), and practise staying centred when imagining that.

Once you've done that, you're now ready to do the real thing 😊

Of course, you needn't wait until you're perfectly prepared for a situation either – sometimes life happens, and you've gotta use whatever tools you have to assist you.

If all you do is relax your shoulders or lengthen your breath into your belly when something difficult happens, and that helps, great! You can now apply centring in life.

If you prefer, you may also like to follow the instructions for [ABC Centring on this video](#).



Taking just five minutes a day for a bit of practice can ensure things don't get overwhelming. You're not facing any real-life consequences; it's all pretty chill. It's about teaching yourself to trust that you can do it – you can say no or opt out without the sky falling down, yeah?

The beauty of this approach is that you're giving yourself a chance to try new behaviours without risking any serious fallout in your actual life. It's a safe space to experiment, to learn that asserting yourself won't lead to disaster.

This way, you're building confidence bit by bit, in a way that doesn't throw you into the deep end before you're ready.

Luckily for you, there are a wide range of practices that already exist that allow you to practise in controlled environments...

Embodiment practices

Embodiment practices offer a unique avenue for working on people-pleasing tendencies by engaging the body in activities that promote assertiveness, boundary-setting, and self-compassion. Here's a list of practices that can help:

- ❖ Competitive martial arts: Engaging in something like Jiu-Jitsu, where you learn to physically assert yourself, can be incredibly empowering. It's a direct challenge to people-pleasing because you simply cannot advance by making your opponent happy. It's about skill, strength, and strategy.



- ❖ Weightlifting: If martial arts seem a bit daunting, weightlifting can be an excellent alternative. It's about pushing your limits, setting personal goals, and respecting your body's boundaries. Plus, the physical strength you gain is a great metaphor for emotional and mental resilience. People of all ages and body types can learn strength training with the right coach.
- ❖ Competitive sports: Taking up a competitive sport, whether it's badminton, tennis, or even team sports, can shift your focus from pleasing others to pursuing your own victory. Allow yourself to feel good about winning; resist the urge to apologise for your success.
- ❖ Metta meditation: Practise metta (loving-kindness) meditation with a focus on directing kindness towards yourself. It's a gentle reminder that you deserve compassion and care just as much as anyone else, challenging the people-pleaser's habit of always putting others first. Metta practice is a great foundation.
- ❖ Improv comedy or theatre: Engage in improvisational theatre or classes. Improv requires you to think on your feet, express your ideas boldly, and sometimes disagree or compete with others in a supportive

environment. It's a fun way to break out of the people-pleasing mould by prioritising spontaneous expression over conformity.

- ❖ **Dance classes:** Dance, especially in styles that encourage individual expression like contemporary, hip hop, or even ballroom, helps you get comfortable with your body and its movements. It's an embodiment practice that encourages you to take up space and assert your presence, countering tendencies to shrink or fade into the background.
- ❖ **Yoga:** Specifically, yoga practices that focus on personal strength and boundary setting. While yoga is often seen as a peaceful and calming practice, it also teaches about respecting and listening to your body's needs and limits, offering a counterbalance to people-pleasing behaviours. It can be a gentle place to learn to listen to yourself (with a teacher who supports this of course as not all do).
- ❖ **Rock climbing:** This sport demands presence, focus, and the ability to assert oneself against physical challenges and fear. It teaches you to trust in your abilities and make decisive movements, which can be a powerful metaphor for overcoming people-pleasing tendencies. It's also great for confidence generally.

Another alternative is to engage in real-world simulation exercises. These exercises place you in everyday situations where you can practise asserting yourself, setting boundaries, and moderating your natural inclination to please others at your own expense.

Here are some practical exercises to try:

- ❖ **Elevator stand:** When entering an elevator, instead of automatically turning to face the exit, stand facing the back or side. It's a small act of nonconformity that challenges the impulse to do what's expected by societal norms. Don't underestimate this one!

- ❖ Moderate gratitude: When buying a coffee or interacting in similar transactions, offer a polite "thank you" without layering on excessive gratitude. It's about finding a balance that acknowledges the service without overcompensating.
- ❖ Send food back: If your meal isn't to your liking at a restaurant, politely but firmly ask for it to be corrected, whether it needs to be heated up or entirely replaced. This exercise helps you assert your needs in a respectful manner.
- ❖ Decline store receipts: When offered a receipt for a small purchase you don't need a record of, practise saying "no thank you." It's a simple way to get comfortable with refusing unnecessary offers.
- ❖ Take the lead walking: In a group setting, take the initiative to lead the direction or pace rather than always following along. This can help you feel more comfortable taking charge and asserting your preferences.
- ❖ Choose where to eat: When going out with friends or family, be the one to suggest a place to eat instead of deferring to others. It's a step towards expressing your preferences openly.
- ❖ Don't rush to fill silences: In conversations, practise not rushing to fill silences. Allowing for natural pauses can help you become more comfortable with not always needing to please or entertain others.
- ❖ Express a different opinion: In discussions, if you have a different viewpoint, voice it rather than agreeing for the sake of harmony. It's important to express your thoughts and opinions, even if they differ from the group consensus.
- ❖ Resist apologising unnecessarily: Pay attention to how often you say "sorry" in situations where it's not warranted. Practise holding back the

apology when you haven't actually made a mistake or inconvenienced someone.

- ❖ Ask for help: Reverse the dynamic and ask for assistance with something, even if it's something small. This can help you break the pattern of always being the one who offers help and get comfortable with the idea that it's okay to have needs too.
- ❖ Limit your apologies: Put three stones or coins in your pocket, then keep count by switching pockets or throwing them out, so that you are only allowed to apologise three times in a day. For some people that is really difficult. Once you can do it three times a day, progress to doing it three times a week.

Exercise 25

What are you committed to practising ongoing? Get specific. When, what duration, where?

CHAPTER 12

The consequences of change

There's often a lot of shame tied to the fear of hurting others, especially when setting boundaries or saying no.

If you express your needs and someone starts questioning your choices, it's easy to spiral into self-doubt. But actually, this can be good news. It's a chance for you to strengthen your assertiveness muscle, right?



People react differently in these situations. If someone accuses you of being a bad person simply because you said no, then you might be dealing with someone with narcissistic traits or even a psychopath. Essentially, it's likely someone you don't want in your life. The extent of their reaction can reveal a lot about their character.

If their reaction is mild, it's tough to hold it against them, especially if you've been consistently accommodating for, say, the last five years. It's going to be a shock to them because, well, we all want what we want. So, if your partner gets a bit upset when you start asking them to share the cooking duties after years of doing it all yourself, try not to panic. It's understandable for them to be taken aback.

However, there is a line. If someone resorts to psychological manipulation or nastiness in response to your boundaries, that's a different story. It's one thing

for someone to be surprised or even a bit resistant at first, but entirely another if they're using manipulation or cruelty.

Another challenge is conflict. If you're scared of conflict, the trick will be to get better at handling it. Make conflict less terrifying.

Don't dodge a little argument now only to swap it for a massive fallout later on. If you're always people-pleasing in your marriage, skipping an argument today could end up in divorce court down the line.

Avoiding conflict doesn't actually fix anything. It just kicks the can down the road. When conflict arises, you may like to use the ABC Centring technique you were introduced to in the last chapter, or...

Exercise 26

Invent your own technique for centring.

Combine and adapt pieces you've already practised, or include other techniques you know help you.

You may like to include things that are important to you, come up with an acronym you like, etc.

Your next steps

Building new habits takes more than a week or two. But, if you're aiming to develop new habits, you've got the tools to do so now. You will need to do the work though.

You have practices to try, different actions to take, things to keep an eye on. But let's be real, it's probably going to take at least a few months to truly embed these changes.

Rehab typically lasts for 90 days. That's because it takes about that long to firmly establish a new habit. You're also a kind of addict if a people-pleaser so this is more than an analogy actually!

Watch out for the temptation to backslide. It's all too easy, after a month or so, to think, "Right, I'm sorted. I can handle this. I can do what I like." And before you know it, you're sliding back into old ways. Try not to let that happen.

Remember, these patterns often stem from deep-rooted sources – family, cultural norms, trauma, survival tactics. We're dealing with something pretty fundamental here.

But remember, it's not you. It doesn't define who you are. It's just a pattern. And just like you can learn a new language, you can also learn new ways of communicating that don't rely on people-pleasing.



I've coached many people to change these habits so I know it's possible. So what are you waiting for? Go on, I'll be really really pleased :-) FAR more importantly, you'll be back in the driving seat of your life. Enjoy.



P.S. Feel free to pass this on to friends and family who'd benefit from it and thank you for doing so.

As for other places to continue your journey or supplement your learning...

- ❖ You can find our free video resources on the embodied exercises (to really help to make them clear) here: www.peopleunpleasing.com
- ❖ I will also personally respond to any questions you may have about people-pleasing on Instagram, as long as they're concise (1-2 sentences please). I'm @warkmalsh on Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/warkmalsh>
- ❖ You may also like to join our active community on Facebook, which by social media standards is actually really pleasant. It is: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/embodimentconference/>
- ❖ There's also a tonne of free learning on this topic and embodiment more generally on The Embodiment Channel on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@Theembodimentchannel>
- ❖ The Embodiment Podcast – which is available to listen to on [Spotify](#), [Apple Podcasts](#) and [Google Podcasts](#), along with other podcast platforms – is similarly an absolute goldmine of good stuff, with a heap of experts who are much more well-known than me, too. It's approaching 600 episodes: <https://embodimentunlimited.com/podcast/>

QUIZ

Are you a people-pleaser?

Here you'll find two quizzes that you can take to determine how strong your people-pleasing habits go. The first is for general situations, whilst the second is more specific.

On both, you can score yourself as you go, giving yourself...

- ❖ 3 points if you respond with “often”
- ❖ 2 points if you respond with “sometimes”
- ❖ 1 point if you respond with “rarely”
- ❖ 0 points if you respond with “never”

Generalised people-pleasing quiz

1. Difficulty Saying No: Do you find it hard to refuse requests or say no to others, even when you're overwhelmed?
2. Avoiding Conflict: Do you often avoid conflicts, preferring to keep peace at all costs?
3. Prioritising Others' Needs: Do you frequently put the needs and happiness of others before your own?
4. Seeking Approval: Do you seek approval or validation from others for your actions?
5. Over-apologizing: Do you tend to apologise often, even when not at fault?
6. Struggle with Authenticity: Do you struggle to express your true feelings for fear of others' reactions?

7. Feeling Responsible for Others' Happiness: Do you feel responsible for the happiness of those around you?
8. Difficulty Making Decisions: Do you find it hard to make decisions without others' opinions?
9. Fear of Rejection: Are you afraid of being disliked if you don't meet others' expectations?
10. Overcommitting: Do you often agree to tasks even when your schedule is full?
11. Nodding or Smiling Excessively: Do you find yourself frequently nodding or smiling during conversations, even when you disagree?
12. Head Tilting: When listening, do you often tilt your head to one side, perhaps to seem less confrontational?
13. Smiling Often: Do you tend to smile more, even in uncomfortable or disagreeable situations?
14. Mirroring: Do you automatically mimic the body language of those you want to please?
15. Leaning In: Do you lean towards people during conversations to appear more engaged?
16. Avoiding Direct Eye Contact: Do you often avoid eye contact, possibly as a sign of submission or discomfort?
17. Shoulders Down and Inwards: Do you frequently slouch or roll your shoulders forward, perhaps to appear less imposing?
18. Fidgeting: Do you display nervous gestures, like playing with your hands, when trying to make a good impression?
19. Minimal Personal Space: Are you less likely to enforce personal space, allowing others to get closer than you might prefer?
20. Quick to Gesture Compliance: Are you quick to act on requests or show agreement, perhaps by getting up quickly or nodding rapidly?

Add up your score. If you have...

- ❖ 50-60 points, then you likely have high people-pleasing tendencies. You may often neglect your own needs to satisfy others, which can be taxing.

- ❖ 30-49 points, then you likely have moderate people-pleasing tendencies. While you try to maintain balance, you might still prioritise others' approval over your own well-being.
- ❖ 10-29 points, then you likely have low people-pleasing tendencies. You generally uphold your boundaries, though you might occasionally give in to please others.
- ❖ 0-9 points, then you likely have very low people-pleasing tendencies. You are comfortable setting and maintaining personal boundaries and rarely seek external approval.

Situational people-pleasing quiz

1. Not Sending Food Back: Do you hesitate to inform the waiter if your meal is not prepared as you asked, fearing you might bother them?
2. Listening When You Don't Want To: Do you pretend to enjoy conversations even when you are disinterested or pressed for time, to avoid hurting someone's feelings?
3. Acting Happy: Do you often mask feelings of sadness or stress to maintain a cheerful appearance and not burden others?
4. Laughing Off Discomfort: When someone makes an uncomfortable joke at your expense, do you laugh it off to avoid confrontation?
5. Offering to Pay Too Often: Do you frequently insist on paying for others, even when it's financially burdensome, to be seen as generous or avoid money discussions?
6. Apologising Excessively: Do you find yourself apologising for things that aren't your fault, like minor bumps or accidents?
7. Agreeing with Opinions You Disagree With: Do you find yourself agreeing with others' opinions that you don't share, just to avoid conflict or to be liked?
8. Doing Favours You Don't Have Time For: Are you agreeing to help out others with tasks despite your own tight schedule?

9. Staying Silent on Your Preferences: When deciding on things like eating out or movie choices, do you often defer to others' preferences over your own?
10. Enduring Discomfort in Silence: Do you avoid speaking up in situations where you're uncomfortable, like tolerating smoking or inappropriate behaviour?
11. Overlooking Mistakes at Your Expense: Do you ignore errors like being overcharged or receiving the wrong order to avoid confrontation?
12. Always Being the One to Adjust: Do you frequently adjust your plans or make accommodations for others at your own inconvenience?
13. Taking on More Work: Do you volunteer for or accept additional responsibilities at work, even when overwhelmed, to appear reliable or because of fear of saying no?
14. Not Speaking Up During Intimate Moments: Do you find it hard to voice your preferences or discomfort during intimacy because you don't want to upset your partner?
15. Avoiding Negative Feedback: Do you refrain from giving constructive criticism because you fear the other person might take it poorly?
16. Excessive Gratitude: Do you thank people profusely for the smallest favours or feel a deep need to express overwhelming gratitude?
17. Suppressing Your Achievements: Do you downplay your success or achievements so others don't feel envious or left out?
18. Always Available: Do you struggle to set boundaries with your time, always saying you're available even when you're not?
19. People-Pleasing in Driving: Do you go out of your way to drop people off at their destination, even if it means significant detours or delays for you?
20. Pretending to Enjoy Activities: Do you participate in activities you dislike because friends or family enjoy them, to avoid being the odd one out?

Add up your score. For this one, if you have...

People Un-Pleasing

- ❖ 45-60 points, then you likely have high people-pleasing tendencies. You may often neglect your own needs to satisfy others, which can be taxing.
- ❖ 30-44 points, then you likely have moderate people-pleasing tendencies. While you try to maintain balance, you might still prioritise others' approval over your own well-being.
- ❖ 15-29 points, then you likely have low people-pleasing tendencies. You generally uphold your boundaries, though you might occasionally give in to please others.
- ❖ 0-14 points, then you likely have very low people-pleasing tendencies. You are comfortable setting and maintaining personal boundaries and rarely seek external approval.