

Do You Try to Please Everyone During the Holiday Season?

Objective

To manage your need to please other people during the holiday season.

What to Know

For many people the holiday season is busy and stressful. Holiday parties, gift exchanges, family gatherings, celebratory social events, and decorations all contribute to the hustle and bustle of this time of year. You might travel to see family members, attend multiple holiday gatherings, and go out of your way to make everyone around you happy. But managing expectations and taking care of everyone else's needs can be depleting, and soon enough all the stress of pleasing others will take a toll on your wellbeing.

If you tend to be a people pleaser throughout the year, the holiday season might heighten your stress, anxiety, worry, or depression. So, what can you do to manage your need to please others during the holiday season?

1. Understand it is a problem. Perhaps you believe it is easier to accommodate others rather than deal with the consequences. While it is important to be flexible, excessive people-pleasing is a habit that can impact your mental health. Always putting the needs of others before your own can lead to:

- excess stress
- depression
- resentment
- passive-aggressive behavior
- anger
- exhaustion
- dreading the holidays
- over- or undereating
- neglecting self-care
- frustration about being taken advantage of

2. Realize the effects on relationships. Perhaps you believe your people-pleasing helps relationships because it reduces conflict, but you are actually creating a wedge between you and your loved ones because true connection cannot occur if you hide your feelings.

3. Take responsibility for your happiness. You cannot control whether someone else is happy. Accept that no matter what you do (or choose *not* to do), you are only responsible for your own happiness, so avoid concerning yourself with what others think.

4. Consider what you are sacrificing. Saying “no” can be difficult but consider what you are sacrificing every time you say “yes” to please others.

5. Delay your response. Instead of immediately saying “yes” to a request, make your default response, “let me get back to you.” Take time to decide so you can consider the pros and cons of the request.

6. Help the other person feel understood. Sometimes it can be difficult to say “no,” so you can soften your response so the other person feels understood. Tip: sometimes it is best to be vague; you might say, “I understand cookie decorating is a lot of work, but I’m not available this weekend to help out.”

7. Avoid giving to earn approval. Perhaps you tend to give too much because you are seeking others’ approval. But giving should not come at the expense of your own wellbeing. Before you give gifts, your time, or money, ask yourself:

- Do I truly want to give?
- Do I have the time or resources to give?
- Can I give without harming myself?
- Will it bring me enjoyment to give?
- What am I expecting in return?

8. Avoid overhelping. You might help too much or offer help without being asked. Pause before you volunteer to help, and ask yourself, did they ask? If so, run through some of the above questions to determine if helping will work for you.

9. No need to apologize! People pleasing involves a readiness to take on blame – even if what happened has nothing to do with you. Be aware of how many times you say “sorry” at a holiday gathering or event. Practice refraining from apologizing unless you are 100% certain you need to say “sorry.”

10. Sit with your discomfort. If someone is angry with you, you might believe you have failed. You might rush to do whatever you think will make them happy. Instead, sit with the discomfort you experience when someone is upset. Breathe. Do not rush to apologize, fix the problem, or volunteer to help. Trust they can deal with their upset without your input.

11. Avoid the temptation to overschedule yourself. Instead, prioritize and block out time to do things you enjoy. After taking care of responsibilities (such as work, household tasks, childcare, and family festivities), what time is left for you? Have you made time to relax, exercise, enjoy hobbies, or participate in holiday activities you love?

What to Do

Is people-pleasing a problem for you? Explain.

Mentally prepare for the holidays by identifying potential triggers to people-please that may cause stress, anxiety, or discomfort during this time of year. Write them down.

Referring to the eleven suggestions above, write down potential solutions for dealing with family members. Keep these tactics firmly in mind so you avoid falling into old habits.

How much pressure do you feel from others who push you to do something that does not support your wellbeing? A little or a lot? Describe.

Did this activity help you manage your people-pleasing tendencies? _____

Why or why not? _____

What else can you do to reduce your need to please others?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
