

Effects of People Pleasing Behavior on Human Mental Health among Emerging Adults

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ABSTRACT

Most people want to be liked and viewed positively by others. Some people want to be liked so badly that they will sacrifice their wishes and desires to prioritize fulfilling other's desires. It's these traits that show our compassionate and consideration human nature. But when these tendencies turn into a constant need to please others, they can quietly take a toll on our mental health. People pleasing may seem to create harmony and acceptance; its long-term effects are devastatingly destructive. The constant suppression of authentic needs and feelings creates a perfect storm for mental health problems while simultaneously undermining the very relationships it aims to preserve. The irony is that trying to be loved by everyone often results in feeling truly known by no one. Overcoming codependency and people-pleasing takes time and effort. Because this pattern is often rooted in attachment, trauma, and emotional regulation, therapy plays an important role in helping people-pleasers unlearn this deeply ingrained response.

Keywords: People pleasing behavior, Mental Health, Therapy

Many of us pride ourselves on being dependable, caring, and easy to get along with. It's these traits that show our compassionate and consideration human nature. But when these tendencies turn into a constant need to please others, they can quietly take a toll on our mental health.

Most people want to be liked and viewed positively by others. Some people want to be liked so badly that they will sacrifice their wishes and desires to prioritize fulfilling other's desires. Excessive self-sacrifice can lead to resentment and an unhealthy dependence on other people. If this sounds like one, he/she might have people-pleasing tendencies. Individuals with these tendencies tend to have big hearts and give a lot to others to the detriment of themselves, which can be damaging to their mental health.

People-pleasing might look like being the "go-to" person for everyone in one's life, saying "yes" even when one is get exhausted, or feeling anxious at even the thought of disappointing someone. On the

surface, this might seem like kindness. Underneath, though, people-pleasing is often driven by fear – of rejection, criticism, or conflict.

In emerging adulthood (ages 18 to 29), the heightened sensitivity to social pressures and the exploration of identity can exacerbate these vulnerabilities, leading to increased levels of low self-esteem and social anxiety. The present paper tries to explore the causes of excessive people pleasing behavior that hampers mental health and the way out to rescue own self from the situation.

Objectives

- ❑ To find out the causes of excessive people pleasing behavior that hampers human mental health.

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- To find out the way to rescue own self from the situation.

Analysis and Discussion

People pleasers are individuals who often disregard their own needs to please others. One may get caught up in giving all of own self to others. People-pleasers may have challenges distinguishing their likes, dislikes, and hobbies from others. Knowing their true desires, wishes, and goals may be hard for them. They may also have difficulty saying no, or they say yes to things they don't want to do.

People-pleasers will often go to great lengths to be liked, avoid disagreements, and mitigate the feeling that they will be abandoned.

People-pleasing behavior can often lead to resentment and relationship burnout, leaving the person experiencing it feeling drained and exhausted. If one exhibits people-pleasing behaviors, he/she may also be prone to experiencing other mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety.

People-pleasing is a pattern of behavior in which we prioritize the needs, expectations, and feelings of others over our own – sometimes to our own detriment. A strong desire to be liked and viewed positively by others is what usually drives these behaviors. For instance, we might go out of our way to make sure others are comfortable, happy, or impressed, even if doing so leaves us feeling drained or resentful later.

In psychological terms, people-pleasing is a form of emotional over functioning, which can come from the desire for harmony, approval, and connection.

Rather than expressing personal preferences or boundaries, people-pleasers tend to prioritize keeping the peace or maintaining control through compliance. This can create a pattern of self-neglect and emotional suppression that feels safe in the short term but is often damaging over time. Simply put, while the pattern of people-pleasing can appear helpful or generous at first, it often comes at a cost. Over time, continuously trying to please others can lead to emotional exhaustion, low self-esteem, and a blurred sense of identity. This effect can make it difficult to know where one ends and others begin.

When we're constantly monitoring for others' reactions, we often end up living in a state

of heightened alertness, scanning for cues of disapproval or disappointment. Being on edge like this can activate the body's stress response, flooding the nervous system with cortisol and adrenaline. Over time, this ongoing activation may lead to anxiety, fatigue, irritability, or burnout.

The mental health consequences of constant people-pleasing can be significant and include:

Anxiety and burnout: Continually striving to meet others' expectations can lead to chronic stress and exhaustion. In other words, ongoing stress and approval-seeking can create burnout.

Depression and low self-worth: Low self-esteem and people-pleasing often occur together. When validation only comes from others, any sign of disapproval may trigger feelings of inadequacy or shame

Resentment and emotional fatigue: Overextending yourself for others can build quiet frustration, especially when your efforts go unnoticed or unreciprocated

Difficulty forming authentic relationships: People-pleasers often hide parts of themselves to avoid conflict, which can create distance and a lack of genuine intimacy

In many cases, people-pleasing becomes a way to maintain control and avoid discomfort in relationships. But the more we rely on the external approval of others, the harder it becomes to trust our own needs and feelings.

Because the signs of people-pleasing hide behind behaviors that seem positive, like being helpful, thoughtful, and agreeable, they can be hard to identify. However, building awareness of these could help one spot the traits in own self or someone one care about.

Some of the common signs of approval-seeking behaviors in adults include:

Difficulty saying "no": Agreeing to tasks, favors, or plans, even when you're overwhelmed, or fearing that setting limits might upset others or make you seem selfish

Chronically apologizing: Frequently saying "sorry" for small inconveniences, misunderstandings, or things outside of your control

Going out of one's way to avoid disagreement: Fearing conflict and often staying silent rather than expressing one's true opinion

Ruminating after social interactions: Replaying what was said in conversations and worrying whether one is offended someone or didn't say the "right" thing

Taking responsibility for others' feelings: Feeling compelled to fix others' moods or problems believing their comfort depends on one.

Having unmet needs: When one is used to putting others first, he/she might struggle with identifying one's own needs and knowing what one's actually want and feel

Going above and beyond to prove one's worth: Trying to prove own self even when no one expects one to prove him/herself.

Feeling guilty when one prioritize own self: Rest, boundaries, or self-care may feel uncomfortable, as if they're acts of neglect rather than necessity

These signs often overlap with anxiety, perfectionism, or codependency but they all share one core feature: a belief that we must earn love and acceptance.

For many people, approval and people-pleasing behavior are learned behaviors; a survival strategy that formed in environments where approval, acceptance, or safety felt conditional. Over time, these continued patterns teach the nervous system that keeping others happy is the best way to avoid rejection or conflict. Therefore, such begins as self-protection can eventually turn into a deeply ingrained habit of self-abandonment

The following are some of the common causes of people-pleasing behavior.

Early Family Dynamics

Growing up in a household where love or attention depended on performance can teach us, as children, to suppress our own needs. If we had parents who were critical, unpredictable, or emotionally unavailable, that may have unintentionally reinforced the belief that being "good," quiet, or helpful was the safest way to receive care.

Trauma Responses

People-pleasing can develop as part of the fawn response. Research suggests that fawning is a

trauma reaction, especially in cases of childhood sexual abuse, where appeasing others helps to avoid danger or emotional pain.

Cultural or Gender Expectations

People-pleasing behaviors can be a result of cultural or gender norms that teach people to value harmony, selflessness, and care giving over assertiveness. Women, especially, may be taught to devalue their own ideas in favor of upholding the preferences of others or following the status quo. These social pressures and norms can make setting boundaries feel uncomfortable or even wrong.

Personality Traits

Personality traits, like empathy, conscientiousness, and sensitivity, are typically seen as strengths. But under stress, they can tip into over-responsibility. Highly empathetic people often absorb others' emotions, making it difficult to tolerate others' discomfort and more likely that they'll place others' needs over their own.

Therapy for People-Pleasers

Overcoming codependency and people-pleasing takes time and effort. Because this pattern is often rooted in attachment, trauma, and emotional regulation, therapy plays an important role in helping people-pleasers unlearn this deeply ingrained response. Therapy can help you identify triggers, set healthy boundaries, and rebuild a sense of safety in authentic self-expression.

Below are some effective therapies for coping with approval-seeking:

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Behavioral therapy strategies taught through CBT can help those stuck in people-pleasing patterns to identify and challenge the automatic thoughts that link self-worth to others' approval. CBT also teaches people healthy ways of setting boundaries and reframing guilt around saying "no." By identifying and challenging automatic thoughts, one can recognize one's patterns, making it easier to build in healthier, more adaptive behaviors.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)

Poor emotional regulation and people-pleasing patterns often go hand-in-hand, as these behaviors

tend to stem from an inability to manage uncomfortable emotions like fear or guilt.

DBT teaches skills for emotional regulation and interpersonal effectiveness – two key areas for those who struggle with people-pleasing.

By learning to tolerate discomfort when asserting one’s needs, regulating one’s emotions, and communicating one’s needs to others, one can reduce the fear and anxiety around possibly displeasing others.

Inner Child and Attachment-Based Work

Inner child and attachment therapy help address the origins of people-pleasing behavior that occur because of early attachment wounds. These practices focus on uncovering unmet needs, healing shame, and re-parenting internalized beliefs about love and safety. By acknowledging how past experiences have shaped one’s present-day behaviors and emotions, one can start treating own self with more compassion and kindness.

Self-Compassion and Assertiveness Training

Many people-pleasers equate assertiveness with selfishness. Building self-compassion and assertiveness rewrites that narrative and teaches one how to validate one’s own emotions and normalize self-care and rest as expressions of worthiness. One can learn that saying “no” doesn’t have to mean he/she is “bad” person or that one doesn’t care about others. Instead, by knowing when and how to prioritize one’s own care, one can develop more authentic and secure relationships.

Practical Strategies for Overcoming People-Pleasing Tendencies

While behavioral therapy strategies can help you identify and understand your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, there are some everyday tools one can use to help reduce people-pleasing tendencies. Here are some strategies one can try:

- Start with small “nos” to low-stakes requests, like going to a social event, without over explaining one’s reasons
- Practice pausing before agreeing to something. This gives time to consider how the request is making feel

- Journal about motives. For example, “Do I want to do this, or am I afraid not to?”
- Use grounding techniques, like repeating an uplifting phrase when guilt arises
- Communicate boundaries clearly and kindly
- Surround yourself with emotionally healthy people who respect limits

CONCLUSION

The difference between genuine kindness and people pleasing lies in the motivation. Healthy kindness energizes one and comes from authentic care. People pleasing deplete one, arising from the terror of rejection or desperate attempts to control others’ opinions of one. When every interaction becomes a performance designed to earn approval, one can lost touch with who he/she is underneath the mask.

While people pleasing may seem to create harmony and acceptance, its long-term effects are devastatingly destructive. The constant suppression of authentic needs and feelings creates a perfect storm for mental health problems while simultaneously undermining the very relationships it aims to preserve. The irony is that trying to be loved by everyone often results in feeling truly known by no one.

The hidden nature of these costs makes them particularly dangerous. People pleasers often appear successful and well-liked on the surface, making it difficult for others, and sometimes themselves, to recognize the internal suffering. This invisible struggle can persist for years before reaching a crisis point that demands attention.

Overcoming codependency and people-pleasing takes time and effort. Because this pattern is often rooted in attachment, trauma, and emotional regulation, therapy plays an important role in helping people-pleasers unlearn this deeply ingrained response. Therapy can help you identify triggers, set healthy boundaries, and rebuild a sense of safety in authentic self-expression.

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