

Are You a People Pleaser?

DOES LONELINESS cause adults and teenagers with ADHD to people please? Sadly, often the answer is yes. For many of us with ADHD, years of rejection, friendship struggles and generally feeling lonely or misunderstood often affects how we approach making new friends.

We worry about things like: *Should I say no to the one person who is willing to hang out with me? Should I reject someone whose joke or values don't match my own when they're one of the few people inviting me to hang out with them? Should I try harder to make people like me, so I actually feel like I have friends?*

All these questions and internal dilemmas are very real for many people with ADHD, and often cause them to fall into the hidden trap of people pleasing.

So, what exactly is people pleasing?

Psychologists define people-pleasing behaviors as “seeking the approval of other people” and “putting the needs of others before your own.” In certain circumstances, this may seem like normal, adaptable behavior, but when it goes to an extreme or it happens at the expense of your own well-being, people pleasing crosses into a territory that's not great for your mental health.

This is especially true when it comes to friendship, because friends are meant to bring something truly special into your life. Healthy friendships are reciprocal and balanced, so the needs of both people are met. In practical terms, friends do things they both like—or they take turns picking activities, topics to talk about, or ways to spend time so everyone's needs are met.

But when a friendship is not a two-way street, or you feel like you have to hide your needs, your feelings, or you simply can't be yourself, something is wrong.

If you have found yourself doing or saying things to please someone or get them to like you, you may be vulnerable to people-pleasing behaviors. Once you see this, you can start to explore how you *really* want to behave in your relationships and make different choices.

Here are four ways to shift away from people pleasing in friendships.

1. Get to know yourself and the kind of friend you want to be to others. What do you like and dislike to do?



What is fun for you? What would you really like to avoid doing? What do you want and need from your friends? And what do you want to give to your friends?

When you encounter something or someone new, ask yourself these three questions: *Does this interest me? Do I want to do this activity? Does this serve my personal goals?* When you get a “yes” you know the person/activity matches your friendship goals.

2. Set your own friendship goals. Ask yourself what you want from your friends. Do you want people you can open up to and share your deepest secrets with? Or do you just want friends to hang out and have fun with? Do you like being around a lot of people or just a few?

Knowing what you want from your friends helps you understand who different people are meant to be in your life. That helps you set healthy expectations around what your goals are for finding new friends in your life.

3. Practice acting like the friend you want in your life. If people pleasing isn't a behavior you want to have, look for ways that you accidentally say “yes” when you mean “no” or where you offer answers that are really not what you really agree with or feel.

When you do things like you used to, practice taking back your words and correcting yourself, so you do what you really

want to, not to please someone else. Try these phrases out to help: “Oops, I accidentally said yes when I really can’t do that” or “Hey thinking about that again, I really want/don’t want, can/can’t...”

4. Build your confidence by practicing not giving the “right” answer. Practice is what’s required to change any behavior, and that applies here as well. When you feel the need well up inside to make someone happy by doing what they want, take a breath and pause before you act. Then, give your real answer, not the people-pleasing one.

Practicing this and doing it overtime will help you build your confidence around speaking up, taking care of yourself. It will also help you to learn through experience that the worst-case scenario that you may be worried about doesn’t always come true. This builds confidence and internal strength, and it will reinforce trusting yourself which is a priceless skill to have.

LEARNING TO REDUCE people-pleasing behaviors is a journey for most of us. But with practice, you will learn how to stand

up for yourself and to speak from your heart with personal integrity. This reduces the fear so many of us have that we’ll be rejected by a potential friend.

Because the truth is, it’s much better to find your real friends instead of being in relationships with people who are not quite your cup of tea. Learning that lesson when you’re young is invaluable, but really, learning it at any age will change how you feel about yourself. This is how you get closer to friends who are a better match for you and how you want to spend your time and energy. 🗣️



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