

# Ep #11: How to Address Your People-Pleasing



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Nicole Symcox**

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## Ep #11: How to Address Your People-Pleasing

When you put a lot of time and energy into making sure other people like you or making sure other people are happy, it creates a lot of anxiety and stress because you are trying to constantly predict the unpredictable, which is other people.

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Here's your host, educator, coach and licensed psychotherapist, Nicole Symcox...

Hello, everyone. Welcome to episode number 11. Today, we are going to be talking about people pleasing. And before we get into today's topic, I just want to give a quick shout to all of you who have left ratings and reviews on Apple Podcasts. That's just been amazing feedback to get and it helps me make the show even better and do more of the things that you're enjoying about the show.

So again, thank you so much for all of you who have left ratings and reviews on Apple Podcasts. It means so much to me. And I love reading them.

So, without further ado, let's jump into today's topic, which is on people pleasing. If worrying about what other people thought was a sport, I swear, we would all be in great shape. Like, we would have no problem burning calories and we'd have no problem exercising. I think we waste so much mental energy on this, it's amazing.

So, let's talk about how to maybe not do that, or maybe change some of the patterns that we have in place that make us do this very thing, because I think for most people pleasers, they almost feel like they are stuck in a

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cycle, like somewhere along the way they lost their voice and they've forgotten how to use it.

So when you put a lot of time and energy into making sure other people like you or making sure other people are happy, it creates a lot of anxiety and stress because you are trying to constantly predict the unpredictable, which is other people. And I hate to break it to you, but no matter how hard you think about it, no matter how hard you try, you still cannot control the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of other people.

It is a dead-end street. It will burn you out. It will make you exhausted. And for most people pleasers, y'all know this. But what you don't know how to do is live life a different way.

So let's cut straight to the chase. The only thing in life you can control is yourself. So, as we've talked about in previous episodes, no one can make you feel anything and you can't make anyone else feel anything. And so we want to stay in places of empowerment. We don't want to get lost in anxious powerless cycles because they lead to Nowheresville – and yes, that's a place.

So, if this is a strategy of yours, it's time to move on and find a new one because it's not going to work. All it's going to make you do is spend endless hours talking to anyone who will listen about why you can't change someone and how powerless that makes you feel. But rarely do people pleasers actually use the word powerless.

You're actually probably using the word how pissed off you are or how frustrated you are that someone isn't changing the way you think that they should be changing. And again, being consumed with the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of others will drain you faster than anything else and it's going to create a frustration cycle that ends up leaving you feeling powerless and overwhelmed by everyone else.

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So, let's stop this. And here's the problem though; if you are a people pleaser, it gets even more complicated because usually the main goal of people pleasing is not to make waves. You don't want to make anyone happy, you don't want to make anyone sad, and you definitely don't share your thoughts and opinions unless it aligns with other people, because then you know it's a sure shot and it's going to be well received.

And the thing about people pleasers is you tend to align yourself with people that are in power. You tend to be drawn to people who use their voices all of the time and are very sure of themselves. It creates a complement for you because you tend to live in hiding your voice and being very unsure of yourself. So you're really drawn to powerful people.

And this can kind of be a double-edged sword because if you align with powerful people – and how I'm defining powerful people, I don't necessarily mean the rich, the wealthy, the influential, all that stuff. What I mean is powerful personalities, powerful personalities that don't give two bananas about what anyone thinks or feels and they just kind of plow forward and live life how they think they should live life.

And so it's kind of interesting because you get that kind of a person, and then you get a people pleaser as their friend and it's like two extremes that are trying to balance each other out. And this all happens unconsciously, of course, because unconsciously, these powerful personality types know they need to tame it back a little bit, and the people pleasers know that they need to speak up a little bit.

And that's the main goal. We always want to be in the middle. We want to be a little bit of both. We don't want to be on the extreme of either one.

And so what's interesting about people pleasing is you will never meet a people pleaser who is happy with being a people pleaser because it usually makes them feel unheard, unseen, and unloved. But they feel powerless to change it, so they stay stuck in the cycle of staying mute or complying or just going with the flow.

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And so what I've noticed in working with people is there's a few different types of people pleasers. Okay, so people pleasing is kind of a general term, but it also breaks down for people depending on their personality and their life experiences. I've noticed that this splays out a little bit differently for each person.

Okay, so there's one type that is just probably the more stereotypical type when we think of people pleaser, which is just quiet and goes with the flow, doesn't really have strong opinions about anything. They just kind of go with whatever's thrown at them and they align themselves with other people and they just agree with them. They're yes people.

So that's probably the most stereotypical people pleaser avatar that we have and that we see, but it is not the only one. There are many shades to people pleasing, as there are with anxiety, perfectionism and any other kind of thing. There's always a spectrum involved because any of these types of labels always are coming with a person's life experiences and their personality and their biology. So things all kind of mix together and create its own little unique set of symptoms.

So there's another type of people pleasers that is just the hyper-controlling type, almost like the type-A, but not the one that is always telling people what to do. It's the exact opposite. They're taking orders from everyone. So they are stuck in go mode, like they do a lot of things, so they're always doing, planning, and executing things for other people.

Like, they're taking their marching orders from someone else. But silently, they feel resentful and angry over always having to please others and never being able to really do anything for themselves. This particular version of people pleasing, like, a person tends to be quite angry inside, that they're doing so much for other people and not getting the love and respect that they feel like they deserve, however, they're not using their voice either. They're not taking a stand for anything. They're just kind of stuck in this powerless cycle they feel stuck in.

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There's a third type and I think this is the more avoidant type. There is a people pleaser type that just wants to avoid conflict. They don't want to start fights. They don't want to have confrontation. They don't want to argue with anybody because then they might have to show up and fight for something.

And so for people pleasers, that can be incredibly anxiety-provoking. They only know how to do things that people approve of or that people like and they're not used to knowing their own voice. So they want to avoid conflict and struggle and confrontation at all costs because when push comes to shove, they're not going to know how to fight for themselves, right?

You probably don't have a strong enough developed voice inside of you that if someone started a fight with you, you wouldn't even know what to say, so you just want to stay away from making people angry or sad because you don't like seeing the emotional response and you don't know how to fight for yourself.

And I think there's another common type that is an anxious type, that no matter what they do, they can't hear their own voice because they are so consumed with the voice of others. And because of this, because they have internalized the voices of so many people around them, they can't even hear their own voice.

So they get kind of lost in what's mine and what's yours. And so they just swirl in anxiety and it ends up being people pleasing. And they're like, I don't really know what I think so I'm just going to do what you think.

And so in some ways, it's hiding the fact that you don't actually know what your own voice is saying, and this is a little bit of a deeper issue that usually you have to address in therapy. So these four types, let me just tell you, these are not official things, but these are just some categories of how I think people pleasing can show up for different people.

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Now, of course, maybe you're all four or maybe you're two out of the four, or maybe you're one out of the four. There's always a spectrum of things, but this is kind of what I see that shows up for people when they are people pleasing.

So I'm sure, out of those four, one of them felt like I was probably talking directly at you. And I've heard that from many people who are listening to the podcast, like some of the examples that I use, you're like, oh my gosh, you were talking directly to me. So I'm sure one of those four is probably you.

And my hope is that that just normalizes it for you, that people pleasing is a thing and it's also a thing we can recover from. It's a thing we can learn from, grow from, and change.

And here's the deal, I think, with people pleasing as well. Because people pleasers don't really make waves – and this is true for kids just as well as it is for adults because people pleasing shows up very early on in life. I see many, many children who are young who are already in this people pleasing cycle. So there's usually a lot of anxiety and there's some relational patterns that are being put into place. And so it's important to heal and grow from those experiences so you can find your own voice and you can use it.

And so what's so interesting for the adults that I've worked with, you know, as we heal some of these parts of themselves that have felt passive or have felt like they are powerless or they don't have a voice or they don't matter or have importance, as some of that stuff heals and resolves, a lot of times, people who were once people pleasers and super passive, they jump on the spectrum to super aggressive. And it's a fascinating process to watch.

And it makes sense to me, and here's why; if you have spent your entire life not knowing what your voice is, not using your voice, and not sharing your thoughts and feelings with other people, by the time you get enough

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confidence to start doing that, you're probably going to overdo it. You're probably going to jump too far to the other side and go a little extreme.

And so it's really interesting, when I work with people like this, we kind of talk about it and I'm like, okay, so we've gone from passive and now we're just full blown aggressive. How about we come a little bit more in the middle? Let's just be assertive.

And I bring this up because I feel like this is a really common thing for people and I don't want you to be caught off guard when it starts to happen for you, but you don't want to stay there. The answer is not to go from passive to aggressive. It's not from going from caring too much to caring too little, which is, a lot of times, what people pleasers think the goal is.

They're like, I just need to not care about what anybody thinks or about anybody else's feelings but my own. And my friend, that makes you selfish. That's not a good goal. The goal is to be balanced, always, to be balanced, to know your own voice, to advocate for things that are right for you, to put up healthy boundaries to protect your emotional and mental energy, but not to not care about people or to just be selfish and only care about yourself.

That's not the goal either. We want to come back on this spectrum of passive and aggressive and we just want to be assertive with boundaries and know our own voice. That is actually the goal when you're healing from people pleasing. But it is a bit of a process.

And so what I've noticed, for a lot of people pleasers, is that healing from this, this is usually a cluster of symptoms that usually is pointing to something quite a bit deeper. And so I think we get like, "Oh I just need tools and strategies for how to speak up."

If you say that to somebody who doesn't know their own voice or feels incredibly anxious over using their voice, there are no tools that will actually work until you heal from the part of you that feels lost. And that has a

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solution. That, you can work through in therapy and then starting to employ some bigger skills.

So, here's some things that you can do if you are a people pleaser. And these are going to be a little bit deeper probably than some of the other tools that I've given because, like I said, a lot of times, people pleasing is pointing to some bigger issues and that usually takes a little bit more than just tools and strategies.

I mean, tools and topical strategies are good, but to really make it sustainable and to really heal this button that you have inside of yourself, you're going to probably have to go a little bit deeper in therapy. So let's talk about number one, which is healing out any traumatic experiences that have left you feeling powerless.

So when it comes to people pleasers, this is likely, not always – so keep in mind, everything I talk about in these podcasts is general because I'm talking to a large group of people. I'm not in one on one therapy where I could really tailor that down. So just hear what you want to hear from this.

But likely, for a lot of people pleasers, it's relational trauma. Somewhere in your past, you have probably felt afraid or repressed or scared about the consequences of using your own voice, or potentially, for some kids that grow up in very chaotic households where maybe someone was sick or there wasn't enough money or there wasn't enough time to go around.

But anyway, so when you're younger, sometimes you learn that either your voice doesn't matter, or you don't really get to develop it. So sometimes this is what happens and this is what I mean by it being a little bit of a deeper issue. It really depends on the person, on what you need to try to heal from being a people pleaser. But I wanted to just kind of clarify for you, what am I talking about when I'm talking about trauma.

And so sometimes relational trauma can make us have the same felt experience as being trapped and stuck with no way out. And if that was the

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case for you and if you learned people pleasing was the way you got out of those tough relational binds, then it's probably still a coping skill you are using in your life. And that is why therapy can be helpful, because you need to heal the traumatic experience that is around that, that is shooting off that message to you that in order to be safe in the world, I have to please people.

So this becomes a really key and important thing. And as I talked about in the previous episode, not every therapist is the same. Like, if you have relational trauma, you want to work with a therapist that is trained in helping you heal from trauma because the healing process is different than it is for other disorders.

So, number two – and this goes with another type of people pleaser, you need to work on your anxious brain. The problem with anxiety is it is so loud and so overwhelming that we have a hard time hearing our own voices, feeling solid in our own bodies, and expressing our needs because anxiety makes us second guess ourselves constantly because the very nature of anxiety, if you think about what that is, it is complete uncertainty around safety or the outcome.

So if your brain is flooded with constant anxiety, it's going to be really hard for you to hear your own voice and fight for it because all you're hearing is anxious thoughts. And so again, therapy or talking to your doctor about what your options are, are all really good things to help employ some tools to get your anxious brain to calm down. Because there's a lot of tools out there for how to manage anxiety, and of course, processing pain and therapy is obviously, in my opinion, the best. But there's a lot of different things that you can do to try to get your anxious brain managed.

And number three – so one of the main goals, as we talked about, for people pleasing is learning your own voice, learning how to hear it, learning how to express it, learning how to own it. Because if you don't know your own voice, you're going to default to people pleasing because you don't

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know what you're fighting for. You don't know what your opinion is. You don't know how you feel about things.

And this is actually quite uncomfortable for people pleasers when they're learning what their own voice is because a lot of times, it comes with trial and error. Do I feel strongly about this thing? Do I feel strongly about that thing?

And sometimes, you have to fight for some things and learn how to navigate, you know, the conflict that potentially might come up around that. But these are core elements, like taking the time to figure out who you are as a person, what is your voice in this world, like, what do you want to say?

And a lot of that – and this is where you actually can – your takeaway tool for today is to really sit and kind of evaluate a few areas of your life and figure out how you feel about those things. Get to know yourself, okay. So some questions to ask yourself, what are your opinions? What are your values? What are your beliefs? What do you want out of life? What is your goal? What kind of person do you want to be? What kind of person do you want to be surrounded by? What lights you up and makes you excited? What brings you down and makes you feel sad?

Because this, my friends, gives you a lot of information into who you are and how you work, because when we know our core values and beliefs, we start to align with our own voice because our own voice is going to align with values and beliefs. It's what drives us.

And so it's really important for you to get in touch with those things. And so sometimes that's actually working with a mentor or a friend or a teacher or someone who is, like, a safe person in your life, a healthy person in your life that might be able to help reflect back to you who you truly are, not who your anxiety or your past traumatic experiences say you are.

You want more of those people in your life that are active reflectors that tell you, no, this is what you believe in or this is your values. And they're not

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telling you in a controlling way, they're mirroring back what you already believe.

It's really important in this day and age, everyone's picking a side. You have to believe in something and stand for something, or like the quote goes, you'll fall for anything. So this is incredibly important, to get to know yourself. Knowing yourself and knowing how to respond to yourself and take care of yourself is probably one of the most important relationships you have in your life. So it is very important that you take the time and energy to pour into that, so you can make your life be everything you want it to be.

I want to do a little disclaimer here as a way to empower your sense of wellbeing. If you notice things come up for you when you're listening to this podcast, such as strong emotions, feeling triggered, or feeling stuck, I highly recommend you seek support from a mental health professional in your local state of residence.

You have to remember, triggers and emotional responses are just information that something in your emotional world needs support. There is absolutely no shame in seeking out support from a mental health professional in your local state of residence.

And lastly, if you enjoyed today's show and you don't want to worry about missing an episode, you can subscribe on Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen to your podcasts and, if you haven't already, I would so appreciate if you could leave a rating and a review to let me know what you think and help others find this podcast.

You can visit my website at [nicolesymcox.com/podcastlaunch](http://nicolesymcox.com/podcastlaunch) for step by step instructions on how to subscribe, rate, and review. Alright, my friends, I hope this was helpful and I'll see you next time.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of Mental Health Remix. If you like what you've heard and want to learn more, go to [nicolesymcox.com](http://nicolesymcox.com).

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