

People-Pleasing in Recovery

Deep Dives · The Recovery Files

From Fawn to Foundation — Reclaiming Your Authentic Self

The Recovery Files

Fawning · Self abandoned, others first · Grounded · Self-aware, boundaries intact

In this workbook

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Each reading is followed by its check-in questions and exercises, in the same order as the app. Your scored results are shown in the app.

PART 1 OF 5 · READING

What Is People-Pleasing & Why Does It Matter in Recovery?

People-pleasing is the compulsive pattern of prioritizing other people's needs, desires, emotions, and comfort above your own — not out of genuine generosity, but out of fear. Fear of rejection. Fear of conflict. Fear of abandonment. Fear that your worth is conditional upon your usefulness to others. It is not kindness. It is not compassion. It is not service. It is a survival strategy that was once necessary and has now become a prison.

In recovery, people-pleasing is one of the most dangerous and least recognized threats to sustained sobriety. Here is why: people-pleasing requires you to abandon yourself. It requires you to suppress your true feelings, ignore your actual needs, override your instincts, and perform a version of yourself that is designed to be acceptable rather than authentic. And the last time you needed a way to cope with the pain of self-abandonment — the exhaustion, the resentment, the emptiness that comes from never being allowed to be yourself — you reached for a substance.

The connection between people-pleasing and substance use is direct and powerful. People-pleasers accumulate enormous amounts of unexpressed anger, unmet needs, and chronic emotional fatigue. These are not minor inconveniences — they are the exact internal conditions that drive relapse. The person who says "yes" when they mean "no," who absorbs everyone else's problems while ignoring their own, who smiles through resentment and performs wellbeing they don't actually feel — this person is building internal pressure with no healthy release valve. Substances provided that valve.

In the absence of substances, the pressure either finds a new unhealthy outlet (explosion, isolation, depression, relapse) or it must be addressed at the root. The root is the belief — usually installed in childhood and reinforced by years of practice — that you are not allowed to have needs. That your worth comes from what you do for others, not from who you are. That saying "no" makes you selfish. That conflict means you are bad. That being yourself, rather than the version of yourself that other people need, is fundamentally unsafe.

Recovery demands that you dismantle this belief system. Not because being kind or helpful is wrong — those are beautiful qualities — but because people-pleasing isn't kindness. It's fear wearing a kindness costume. True kindness comes from a place of fullness and choice. People-pleasing comes from a place of emptiness and compulsion. The work ahead is learning to tell the difference, and choosing yourself without guilt, without apology, and without substances.

Reflection Questions

1. How does the distinction between genuine kindness and fear-based people-pleasing land for you? Can you identify times when your "generosity" was actually driven by fear?

2. When you imagine saying "no" to someone who expects "yes" from you, what emotions arise? What are you actually afraid will happen?

3. Can you trace a direct connection between your people-pleasing patterns and your substance use? When did the pressure of performing for others become unbearable enough to need chemical relief?

4. What version of yourself do you perform most often? Who is the audience? And who is the person underneath the performance?

5. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much of your daily behavior is driven by what others want versus what you actually need? What would shifting that balance by even two points require?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Boundary Deficits & Over-Commitment

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I say "yes" before considering whether I want to or am able to
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I regularly take on more than I can handle to avoid letting anyone down
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. When I set a boundary, I immediately feel guilty and often retract it
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I have difficulty ending conversations or commitments even when I need to
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I overexplain or over-apologize when I do say "no"
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. Other people's needs consistently take priority over my own basic needs

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I feel responsible for other people's emotions and problems

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I volunteer for tasks I resent doing but feel obligated to complete

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

The "Yes" Audit

Cataloging Every Commitment You've Made

The Exercise

List every current commitment. For each one, assess: Did you say yes because you wanted to, or because you were afraid to say no?

Commitment #1

What is the commitment?

Why did you say yes?

How much do you genuinely WANT this? (1-10)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

What would happen if you released this commitment?

What is this commitment costing you?

Commitment #2

What is the commitment?

Why did you say yes?

How much do you genuinely WANT this? (1-10)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

What would happen if you released this commitment?

What is this commitment costing you?

Commitment #3

What is the commitment?

Why did you say yes?

How much do you genuinely WANT this? (1-10)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

What would happen if you released this commitment?

What is this commitment costing you?

Commitment #4

What is the commitment?

Why did you say yes?

How much do you genuinely WANT this? (1-10)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

What would happen if you released this commitment?

What is this commitment costing you?

Commitment #5

What is the commitment?

Why did you say yes?

How much do you genuinely WANT this? (1-10)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

What would happen if you released this commitment?

What is this commitment costing you?

Commitment #6

What is the commitment?

Why did you say yes?

How much do you genuinely WANT this? (1-10)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

What would happen if you released this commitment?

What is this commitment costing you?

Commitment #7

What is the commitment?

Why did you say yes?

How much do you genuinely WANT this? (1-10)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

What would happen if you released this commitment?

What is this commitment costing you?

Commitment #8

What is the commitment?

Why did you say yes?

How much do you genuinely WANT this? (1-10)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

What would happen if you released this commitment?

What is this commitment costing you?

Audit Summary

1. How many commitments scored below 5? What percentage of your life is built on fear-based yeses?

2. Which THREE commitments are most urgently draining your recovery?

3. What is the total cost of your unwanted commitments?

4. Write your new "yes" policy: Under what conditions will you say yes going forward?

PART 2 OF 5 · READING

The Fawn Response: Understanding Your Survival Wiring

When people think about trauma responses, they usually know fight, flight, and freeze. But there is a fourth response that is equally powerful and far less recognized: fawn. The fawn response is the automatic, often unconscious pattern of responding to perceived threat by becoming agreeable, compliant, helpful, and pleasing. Where fight responds to danger with aggression, flight responds with escape, and freeze responds with shutdown, fawn responds with appeasement. "If I can make this person happy, I will be safe."

The fawn response typically develops in childhood, in environments where the child's safety depended on the emotional state of a caregiver. If a parent was volatile, narcissistic, addicted, depressed, or emotionally unavailable, the child learned to scan constantly for signs of the parent's mood and adjust their behavior accordingly. The child became a miniature emotional caretaker — not because they chose to, but because their survival depended on it.

If Dad was in a good mood, the house was safe. If Mom was drinking, the child needed to become invisible, helpful, or entertaining to avoid the consequences. This was not people-pleasing as a personality trait — it was people-pleasing as a survival strategy. The tragedy of the fawn response is that it works — in the short term. The child who learns to anticipate needs, manage moods, and become whatever the caregiver requires does achieve a degree of safety. They avoid conflict, they reduce the frequency of outbursts, they earn conditional approval.

But the cost is devastating. The child's authentic self — their real feelings, needs, preferences, and personality — gets buried beneath the performance. They become so skilled at reading others that they lose the ability to read themselves. They become experts at knowing what everyone else needs while becoming strangers to their own needs.

In adulthood, this pattern persists and intensifies. The fawn response doesn't require an abusive caregiver to activate — it becomes the default setting for all relationships. The boss who seems annoyed. The partner who sighs. The friend who doesn't text back. The sponsor who asks a challenging question. Each of these situations triggers the same alarm: "They're unhappy. It's my fault. I need to fix it. If I don't, they'll leave, or punish me, or confirm that I'm not enough."

For people in recovery, understanding the fawn response is critical because it explains why people-pleasing feels so involuntary. You're not choosing to abandon yourself — your nervous system is doing it for you, running a program that was installed decades ago. Recovery from people-pleasing isn't about willpower or simply "deciding to set boundaries." It's about reprogramming a nervous system response. It's about teaching your body that you can be safe without being pleasing.

The fawn response served you when you were small and powerless. You are no longer small. You are no longer powerless. But your nervous system doesn't know that yet. The work of recovery is to teach it.

Reflection Questions

1. Does the description of the fawn response resonate with your experience? Can you identify the childhood environment that installed this programming?

2. Who was the person whose mood you monitored most closely as a child? What happened when you failed to manage their emotional state?

3. How does your fawn response show up in your adult relationships today? Give a specific recent example where you automatically shifted into "please and appease" mode.

4. What does it feel like in your body when the fawn response activates? Can you identify the physical sensations — the tension, the anxiety, the automatic shift into performance mode?

5. If your fawn response was a message from your younger self, what would it be saying? What was that child trying to protect?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Fawn Trauma Response Patterns

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I automatically agree with others even when I have a different opinion

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. When someone is upset, my first instinct is to figure out what I did wrong

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I monitor other people's moods constantly and adjust my behavior
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I feel panic when I sense someone is disappointed in me
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I have difficulty identifying what I actually want or need
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I freeze when someone confronts me, then agree to whatever they want
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I befriend people who take advantage of my willingness to give
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I learned early that the safest strategy was to make others happy at all costs
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Fawn Response Mapping

Identifying When, Where & How You Automatically Appease

Why This Matters

The fawn response operates on autopilot. This exercise maps your specific triggers so you can begin to notice the pattern in real time.

Authority Figures

Bosses, doctors, sponsors, therapists

How does your fawn response activate with this type of person?

What are you afraid will happen if you DON'T appease?

What physical sensations do you notice?

What would an authentic (non-fawning) response look like?

Romantic Partners

Current or past partners, dating situations

How does your fawn response activate with this type of person?

What are you afraid will happen if you DON'T appease?

What physical sensations do you notice?

What would an authentic (non-fawning) response look like?

Family Members

Parents, siblings, children, extended family

How does your fawn response activate with this type of person?

What are you afraid will happen if you DON'T appease?

What physical sensations do you notice?

What would an authentic (non-fawning) response look like?

Peers & Friends

Coworkers, recovery peers, social groups

How does your fawn response activate with this type of person?

What are you afraid will happen if you DON'T appease?

What physical sensations do you notice?

What would an authentic (non-fawning) response look like?

Strangers & Service People

Waitstaff, customer service

How does your fawn response activate with this type of person?

What are you afraid will happen if you DON'T appease?

What physical sensations do you notice?

What would an authentic (non-fawning) response look like?

Group Settings

Meetings, work teams, social events

How does your fawn response activate with this type of person?

What are you afraid will happen if you DON'T appease?

What physical sensations do you notice?

What would an authentic (non-fawning) response look like?

Pattern Summary

1. Which type of person triggers your fawn response most intensely?

2. Is your fawn response about fear of conflict, rejection, punishment, or abandonment?

3. When you read your "authentic response" entries, how do they make you feel?

4. Write: "I fawn because..." and then add: "I am learning to..."

PART 3 OF 5 · READING

The Hidden Cost: How People-Pleasing Destroys Recovery

People-pleasing appears harmless from the outside. The world rewards it. You are called "selfless," "dependable," "the one who holds everything together." But beneath the surface, people-pleasing is inflicting systematic damage on your physical health, your emotional wellbeing, your relationships, your sense of self, and — most urgently — your recovery from substance use disorder.

The physical cost is significant and measurable. Chronic people-pleasing keeps your stress response perpetually activated. Your body exists in a state of hypervigilance — constantly scanning for signs of others' displeasure, constantly ready to adjust, accommodate, and appease. This sustained stress produces elevated cortisol, disrupted sleep, tension headaches, gastrointestinal distress, muscle pain, compromised immune function, and cardiovascular strain.

The emotional cost is perhaps the most devastating. People-pleasers experience a unique form of loneliness — the loneliness of being surrounded by people who don't actually know you. Because you have been performing a version of yourself designed for their approval, the affection and connection you receive is directed at the performance, not at you. This creates an agonizing paradox: the more people like you, the lonelier you feel, because you know that what they like is not the real you.

The relational cost is corrosive. People-pleasing does not create healthy relationships — it creates codependent dynamics built on an unspoken contract: "I will give you everything, and in return, you will never leave me, never be angry with me, and never require me to be authentic." When this contract inevitably fails — when the other person gets angry anyway, leaves anyway, or takes your giving for granted — the people-pleaser experiences betrayal and rage that is proportional to years of accumulated, unexpressed resentment.

The recovery cost is the most urgent. People-pleasing undermines every pillar of recovery. It compromises honesty — because you tell people what they want to hear instead of the truth. It compromises boundaries — because you cannot protect your sobriety if you cannot say "no." It compromises authenticity — because recovery requires you to know who you are, and people-pleasers have lost access to their authentic selves. It compromises self-care — because you cannot take care of yourself if everyone else's needs always come first.

And it generates the exact internal conditions — resentment, exhaustion, emptiness, emotional numbness — that make relapse feel like the only available relief. Here is the most dangerous truth about people-pleasing in recovery: it looks like recovery. The person who says "yes" to every service commitment, who shows up for everyone else's crisis, who never asks for help, who performs wellness and gratitude — this person appears to be thriving. But they are running on empty, performing recovery the same way they've performed everything else in their lives, and they are one accumulated resentment away from picking up a substance because the weight of being everything to everyone has become unbearable.

Reflection Questions

1. Which cost of people-pleasing — physical, emotional, relational, or recovery-specific — resonates most powerfully with your experience? Give a concrete example.

2. Have you experienced the paradox of being surrounded by people who "love" you but feeling profoundly lonely because they don't know the real you? What is that experience like?

3. Can you identify a specific time when your people-pleasing directly contributed to relapse risk? What was the accumulated pressure that drove you toward substances?

4. Are you currently "performing recovery" the way you perform everything else — saying the right things, showing up for everyone, looking good on the outside while running on empty inside?

5. If people-pleasing is silently undermining your recovery, what would change if you addressed it directly? What becomes possible when you stop performing and start being authentic?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Identity Loss & Self-Abandonment

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I have lost track of my own preferences, interests, and opinions

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I often feel like a chameleon — becoming whoever the person needs me to be

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I struggle to answer "what do you want?" or "what do you enjoy?"
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I have sacrificed important values or recovery practices to avoid conflict
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. When alone, I feel empty or unsure of who I am without someone to perform for
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I have abandoned my own needs so frequently I sometimes don't recognize them
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I shape my appearance or opinions to match what I think others want
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. Much of my personality has been constructed around being useful or likeable
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5**Resentment & Emotional Burnout**

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I feel chronic resentment toward people I've over-given to
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I experience emotional exhaustion from keeping everyone happy
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I have fantasies about disappearing or being completely alone
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I swing between martyrdom ("I do everything") and rage ("no one appreciates me")
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I feel physically depleted — headaches, fatigue, tension — from people-pleasing
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I blow up disproportionately because accumulated resentment has nowhere to go
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I give with strings attached — expecting reciprocation
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. My burnout and resentment have contributed to substance use or relapse risk
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE**Identity Reclamation Inventory**

Rediscovering Who You Are Beneath the Performance

Purpose

People-pleasing buries your authentic self under layers of performance. This inventory excavates who you actually are.

Reclaiming Your Preferences

For each category, write what YOU actually prefer:

Food & Meals

What do you actually like to eat?

Free Time

What do you genuinely want to do?

Social Life

How much socializing do you actually want?

Work & Career

What kind of work do you find meaningful?

Living Environment

How do you want your space to feel?

Appearance & Style

How do you want to look for yourself?

Values & Beliefs

What do you actually believe?

What I Lost to People-Pleasing

1. What hobbies or passions did you abandon?

2. What relationships did you stay in too long or leave too soon?

3. What opinions or values have you suppressed?

4. What version of yourself do you miss most?

5. If you could introduce the REAL you, what would people be surprised to learn?

PART 4 OF 5 · READING

The Neuroscience of People-Pleasing

Understanding the neuroscience of people-pleasing provides a scientific foundation for why these patterns feel so involuntary, why they are so resistant to change, and how recovery is neurologically possible.

People-pleasing is mediated by several interconnected brain systems. The first is the threat detection system, centered in the amygdala. In people-pleasers, the amygdala has been calibrated through repeated experience to flag social disapproval as a survival-level threat. A frown, a tone of voice, a lack of response — these social signals activate the same neural alarm that would fire in response to a physical threat. The amygdala doesn't distinguish between "my boss seems annoyed" and "a predator is nearby." Both trigger the same cascade of stress hormones, the same urgent drive to eliminate the threat. For people-pleasers, eliminating the threat means making the other person happy.

The second system is the reward circuit, primarily involving dopamine pathways. People-pleasers have developed a powerful neurological association between social approval and dopamine release. When you make someone happy, when you receive praise, when you successfully avoid conflict — your brain rewards you with a hit of dopamine. This is the same reward system that is hijacked by substances. The parallel is not metaphorical — it is neurological. People-pleasing can function as a behavioral addiction, driven by the same dopamine circuitry that drives substance use. You are literally addicted to approval.

The third system involves the prefrontal cortex — specifically the medial prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for self-referential processing. Research shows that chronic people-pleasers show reduced activity in the regions of the brain responsible for understanding one's own needs, desires, and identity. The neural circuitry that answers "What do I want? What do I feel? Who am I?" has been underdeveloped because so much neural real estate has been dedicated to answering "What do they want? What do they feel? What do they need from me?" This is why people-pleasers genuinely struggle to identify their own preferences — it's not a character flaw, it's a neurological pattern.

The good news — and it is substantial — is that the brain is plastic. Neuroplasticity means that these patterns, while deeply established, can be rewired. Every time you pause before saying yes, you strengthen the prefrontal cortex's ability to override the amygdala's alarm. Every time you tolerate someone's temporary displeasure without rushing to fix it, you teach your nervous system that social disapproval is not a survival threat. Every time you ask yourself "What do I actually want?" you activate the self-referential processing circuits that have been dormant.

The neurological rewiring of people-pleasing is gradual. You will not override decades of conditioning in a single therapy session or a single act of boundary-setting. But each act of authentic self-expression, each tolerated moment of someone else's discomfort, each honest "no" — these are neurological events. They are literally building new neural pathways. The discomfort you feel when you set a boundary is not a sign that you're doing something wrong — it's the sensation of new neural pathways being forged, which is always uncomfortable before it becomes natural.

Reflection Questions

1. Does understanding the neuroscience reduce self-blame to know this is a neurological program, not a character flaw?

2. Can you feel the "approval dopamine hit" when someone praises you? How is this similar to the reward you experienced with substances?

3. When you try to answer "What do I actually want?" how easy or difficult is it?

4. Think of a recent time you tolerated someone's displeasure without rushing to fix it. Can you reframe that discomfort as "neurological rewiring in progress"?

5. If every act of authentic self-expression is building new neural pathways, what small act can you commit to practicing daily?

PART 5 OF 5 · READING

From Pleasing to Authentic: Building a Recovery of Integrity

Liberation from people-pleasing is not about becoming selfish, cold, or disconnected. It is about becoming real. It is the transition from a life organized around "What do they need from me?" to a life organized around "What is true for me, and how can I honor that truth while also being caring toward others?" It is the difference between compulsive giving — which depletes you — and conscious generosity, which comes from fullness rather than emptiness.

Liberation begins with grief. You must grieve the years you spent performing instead of living. The relationships that were built on a false version of you. The needs that went unmet while you were busy meeting everyone else's. The person you might have become if you had been allowed to be yourself from the beginning. This grief is not self-pity — it is the necessary emotional processing of a profound loss. You lost yourself. Acknowledging that loss is the first step to recovery.

Liberation requires the development of what therapists call "window of tolerance" for the discomfort of authenticity. When you first begin to set boundaries, express honest opinions, and prioritize your own needs, you will experience significant distress. Guilt. Anxiety. Fear of abandonment. A feeling that you are being "mean" or "selfish." This distress is not a sign that you're doing something wrong — it is the predictable withdrawal symptom of stopping an addictive pattern. Just as your body protested when you stopped using substances, your nervous system will protest when you stop using people-pleasing as a safety strategy. The distress is temporary. The freedom is permanent.

Liberation involves building the skills of authentic living: identifying what you actually feel (not what you think you should feel); recognizing what you actually need (not what makes you easiest to be around); expressing those feelings and needs clearly (not wrapped in apologies and qualifications); tolerating the reality that some people will not like the authentic version of you (and recognizing that the people who only liked the performance were never really connecting with you anyway); and — perhaps most importantly — learning to sit with the space that opens up when you stop filling every moment with service to others.

In recovery, liberation from people-pleasing is not optional. It is essential. Every recovery principle requires it. The First Step requires the honesty to admit that your life is unmanageable — including the unmanageability created by your compulsive need to manage everyone else. Inventory work requires self-awareness that is impossible when you're focused entirely on others. Making amends requires the discernment to know when you've genuinely harmed someone versus when you're taking responsibility for their feelings as you've been programmed to do.

The goal is not to stop caring about others. The goal is to include yourself in the circle of people you care about. The goal is to give from choice rather than compulsion. The goal is to let others see and know the real you — messy, imperfect, and sometimes inconvenient — and to discover that you are worthy of love not because of what you do, but because of who you are.

Reflection Questions

1. What do you need to grieve about the years you spent people-pleasing? What was lost — relationships, opportunities, parts of yourself — because you were too busy performing?

2. Have you experienced the "withdrawal symptoms" of setting a boundary — the guilt, anxiety, and fear? Can you reframe this distress as evidence that you are healing?

3. If you stopped performing for one week — if you only said yes when you meant it, only helped when you genuinely wanted to — what do you think would happen? What are you most afraid of?

4. Who in your life would you lose if you stopped people-pleasing? And what does it say about those relationships that they depend on your self-abandonment to survive?

5. Write a personal declaration of recovery from people-pleasing — a statement of who you are choosing to become, what you will no longer tolerate, and what you know you deserve.

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Authentic Self-Expression Capacity

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I can express my honest opinion even when others may disagree

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I can say "no" without excessive guilt or anxiety

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I have at least one relationship where I feel safe being completely honest

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I can tolerate someone being temporarily disappointed with me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I regularly engage in activities purely for my own enjoyment

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I can identify what I actually feel, want, and need in most situations

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have grown in my ability to set and maintain boundaries

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I believe taking care of myself is essential to my sobriety

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Boundary Building Workshop

From Theory to Practice — Learning to Say No

The Truth

A boundary is not a wall. It is a gate — you decide what comes in and what stays out. Boundaries are the foundation of every healthy relationship.

Scenario #1: Someone asks you to do something you don't have time for

Work, recovery, social, family

Your OLD response (the people-pleasing response):

What you ACTUALLY feel:

The BOUNDARY statement (clear, direct, kind):

What you're afraid will happen:

What will ACTUALLY likely happen:

Scenario #2: Someone makes a comment that crosses a personal line

Any relationship

Your OLD response (the people-pleasing response):

What you ACTUALLY feel:

The BOUNDARY statement (clear, direct, kind):

What you're afraid will happen:

What will ACTUALLY likely happen:

Scenario #3: You are pressured to attend an event that threatens your sobriety

Social pressure

Your OLD response (the people-pleasing response):

What you ACTUALLY feel:

The BOUNDARY statement (clear, direct, kind):

What you're afraid will happen:

What will ACTUALLY likely happen:

Scenario #4: Someone is dumping their problems on you and you are depleted

Friend, family

Your OLD response (the people-pleasing response):

What you ACTUALLY feel:

The BOUNDARY statement (clear, direct, kind):

What you're afraid will happen:

What will ACTUALLY likely happen:

Scenario #5: You need to end a conversation but feel trapped

Phone call, visit, meeting

Your OLD response (the people-pleasing response):

What you ACTUALLY feel:

The BOUNDARY statement (clear, direct, kind):

What you're afraid will happen:

What will ACTUALLY likely happen:

My Boundary Scripts

Write 5 boundary statements you can use this week:

1. Boundary Script #1:

2. Boundary Script #2:

3. Boundary Script #3:

4. Boundary Script #4:

5. Boundary Script #5:
