

Getting to Know Your People-Pleaser

Questions you can ask the part that says yes when you do not mean it

In our work together, we've been noticing the people-pleaser — the part of you that says yes, agrees, smooths things over, or takes the extra job before you have even felt what you wanted. This handout gives you questions you can ask that part directly. It is not a library of ways to refuse people. It may sound strange to “talk to” a part of yourself, but these parts tend to respond when we approach them with genuine curiosity, instead of arguing with them or trying to shut them down.

How to use this

- 1. Ground first — then notice.** Before any questions: look around the room, name a few things you can see, and feel both feet on the floor. Keep your eyes open if closing them makes you lose the room. Then notice the people-pleaser — a yes that arrived before you felt it, a tightness (chest, throat, jaw), or the sense of scanning someone else's face.
 - 2. Check how you feel toward it.** If you notice anger, fear, or “I just want this gone,” that's another part of you reacting. Gently ask that part if it would be willing to step back for a few minutes so you can listen. If what you notice instead is agreement — “it's just who I am” or “I am a nice person” — that is the people-pleaser speaking in your own voice; see if you can find even a little space between you and it. And if something in you doesn't want to step back, don't force it. Get curious about that part instead, or simply stop for today — either way, you haven't done it wrong.
 - 3. Ask one question inward, then wait.** Answers don't always come in words. They can arrive as images, memories, feelings, or body sensations. Don't force or invent an answer — whatever comes, including nothing, is useful.
 - 4. Thank the part** for whatever it shows you, even if it stays quiet.
 - 5. Know when to stop.** If at any point this feels like too much, stop. Look around the room, name a few things you can see, and feel your feet on the floor. Stopping early is doing it right — we can always continue together in session. If you are left in a dark place, call or text 9-8-8, the Suicide Crisis Helpline, anywhere in Canada (the same number also works in the US). In an emergency, call 911. Kids Help Phone (for young people): 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868.
- You don't need to use every question — pick the ones that draw you in. If a memory of harm starts to open, stop and bring it to session; do not explore it alone. If saying no is punished with someone, this is not homework on that person.*

Getting acquainted

- Where do I notice you — in my body, or somewhere around me?
- Do you have an image, a shape, or a voice?
- Is there a name you'd like me to call you?
- How old are you? And how old do you think I am? (You might be surprised by the answer — this part may not realize how old you are now.)
- How long have you been saying yes for me?

Understanding its job

- What is your job? What are you trying to do for me when you say yes for me?
- What are you afraid would happen if I paused — even once — before agreeing?
- What have you been carrying that I might not have seen?
- What would help you feel a little safer, right here?

Its history

If a memory of harm, fear, or something you have never told anyone starts to open, stop. Bring it to session — do not explore it alone. If saying no is punished with someone, this is not homework on that person — bring that to session.

- When did you first start saying yes this way? What was happening in my life back then?
- What did you need then that you didn't get?
- What was that time like for you?

Letting it know you heard it

If anything it has shown you makes sense — even a little — tell it so. Something as simple as: *“I can see you've been working hard to keep me liked, easy, or safe. Thank you for showing me.”* You don't have to agree with every yes it has made to appreciate its effort. This step matters more than any question on this page. Parts like this soften from being understood, not from being questioned.

Its hopes and needs

- Do you know I'm here, listening? How is it for you to have me pay attention to you this way?
- What do you need from me — not someday, but this week, in a way I can actually keep?
- What would help you trust that I won't throw you out and become cold?
- Is there anything you've been wanting me to know for a long time?

Building a different relationship

Only try these if, during this conversation, the part has felt noticeably softer toward you. If it hasn't, staying curious is the whole practice — that's a full success, not a failure.

- Would you like to see what my life is like now — that some rooms are safer than they were then?
- Would you be willing to let me pause before yes this week, in a room that is safe enough?
- When you're ready, would you be open to letting me handle one small request myself, as an experiment?
- Would you be willing, someday, to let me get to know more of what you've been holding? *(This last one is just a question to ask — not something to explore on your own. If yes, or if it is holding old harm, bring that to session.)*
- And when you finish: “I need to stop for now — is there anything you want me to remember? I'll come back and check on you.” *(Then do — even a brief hello later in the week counts.)*

If it asks you for something, keep your side of it only if it is small, kind, and possible — and do not agree to go into old memories alone, or to practise a no with someone who punishes it. A people-pleaser that is promised the world and then forgotten will have a point.

Afterwards

Jot down whatever you noticed — words, images, memories, surprises, or the fact that nothing came. There's nothing to fix and no right answer. If you'd like, bring your notes to our next session and we'll explore them together. And if you never got around to this before we meet, that's completely fine too.

Good to remember

The people-pleaser is not trying to erase you. It is almost always still doing a job that once kept something working — waiting for a safer room, and a you who can stay. The goal is not to become colder, or to collect speeches for saying no; it is to build a relationship where this part no longer has to answer before you have felt what you wanted. If this practice leaves you in a dark place, call or text 9-8-8, the Suicide Crisis Helpline, anywhere in Canada (the same number also works in the US). In an emergency, call 911. Kids Help Phone (for young people): call 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868.