Am I Connecting or People-Pleasing?

PSYCHOEDUCATION · KINDNESS, APPROVAL AND THE SELF IN RELATIONSHIPS

The same kind act can come from care, or from fear. Noticing the difference helps.

01 Same action, different engine

original illustration

WHAT OTHERS SEE

saying yes · helping out · agreeing · offering support

the same action, from the outside

the surface

WHAT'S DRIVING IT

Connecting

comes from care and choice

- "I want to help"
- "I could say no"
- it fits my values



both people in the picture

afterwards: closer, energised, still myself

People-pleasing

comes from fear or pressure

- "they might be upset"
- "I can't say no"
- keeping the peace



I fade from the picture

afterwards: drained, resentful, unseen

02 A quick check in the moment

mark where you sit, for one recent situation

ASK YOURSELF	MORE LIKE CONNECTING	WHERE AM I?	MORE LIKE PEOPLE-PLEASING
Can I say no?	yes, and it would be okay	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	it feels impossible
Why am I saying yes?	because I want to	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	to avoid upsetting them
How do I feel beforehand?	warm, open, free	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	tense, anxious, obliged
How do I feel afterwards?	connected, energised	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	drained, resentful
Am I honest about what I think?	I share my real view	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I hide my preferences
Is it mutual over time?	care flows both ways	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	I mostly give

Why people-pleasing makes sense

It is often a strategy learned for good reasons: keeping the peace at home, feeling safer when others were happy, or being valued for being helpful. It isn't a flaw. It is a pattern that may now cost more than it protects.

Practising connection

1. **Pause before yes** · "Let me check and get back to you."
2. **Notice your body** · tension or dread can signal pressure, not choice
3. **Share one small preference** · where to eat, what time suits you
4. **Try a kind no** · warm and brief; no long explanation needed
5. **Let others own their feelings** · disappointment is allowed, and usually passes
6. **Check the balance** · who gives, who receives, over time?

03 Reflecting

optional

A recent yes: connection or pleasing?

What I feared would happen if I said no:

One small honest step this week:

What the research suggests. Studies distinguish caring for others (communion), which is linked with wellbeing, from a focus on others that excludes our own needs (unmitigated communion), which is linked with more distress and one-sided support. Care itself is not the problem; losing yourself in it can be.

SOURCES

Fritz, H. L., & Helgeson, V. S. (1998). Distinctions of unmitigated communion from communion: Self-neglect and overinvolvement with others. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 75*(1), 121–140.

Helgeson, V. S., & Fritz, H. L. (1998). A theory of unmitigated communion. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 2*(3), 173–183. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr0203_2

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