



ADAPTIVE PATTERN MODEL · ADAPTATION SERIES

GUIDE ONE · THE PLEASING PATTERN

Learning to Have a Shape.

A guide to recognising the Pleasing pattern — and beginning to build a self that can be known.

Connection Psychotherapy · Adaptive Pattern Model

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

This guide is not a self-improvement plan.

It won't ask you to be more assertive, speak up more, or stop being so nice. Those instructions tend to reach the surface of behaviour without touching anything underneath — and you've probably already tried versions of them.

This is something different. It's an attempt to help you understand what the Pleasing pattern actually is: where it came from, what it's been doing for you, and — slowly, carefully — what it might mean to begin organising yourself differently.

The Pleasing pattern is one of six adaptations described in the Adaptive Pattern Model (APM). Each adaptation began as a survival strategy — a way of staying connected and safe in a relational environment where that required some cost to the self. The pattern began as intelligence. It was paying attention to what was needed.

"The Pleasing pattern made you very good at reading other people — and it cost you the habit of reading yourself."

What follows is structured as a gradual process, not a checklist. Work through it at whatever pace fits. There is no correct speed.

UNDERSTANDING THE PATTERN

What the Pleasing pattern *actually* is.

CORE ORIENTATION

"I organise myself around other people."

Reading the room, adjusting the response, anticipating the need, managing the atmosphere — as a default mode of being, not just in moments of conflict or high stakes.

O1 The Central Fear

"If I become fully visible — if I have a shape — I will lose connection."

Often pre-verbal, formed in early experience: that having preferences, opinions, moods, and needs of your own will make you too much, or not enough. That connection depends on being useful, agreeable, or easy.

O2 What Begins to Go Missing

When a person consistently organises around others, certain things stop being practiced:

- Preference — what you actually want, before considering what would be easiest
- Spontaneity — responding from impulse rather than calculation

- Self-reference — checking in with yourself before checking with the room

- Desire — knowing what you long for, beyond what you feel permitted to need

- A clear yes and no — without delay, softening, or explanation

- Emotional honesty — saying what's actually happening inside

- Irritation — often the first signal that something matters to you

None of these disappear suddenly. They fade under the accumulated weight of a thousand small adjustments. And because each adjustment was made in the name of keeping the peace, it's easy not to notice the cost.

03 Where It Comes From

The Pleasing pattern tends to form in relational environments where connection felt conditional — where love, attention, or approval seemed to depend on performance, agreeability, or managing others' emotional states. Sometimes this is explicit. More often it is atmospheric: a parent whose moods required careful navigation, a household where conflict felt dangerous, a family system where being easy was the safest way to belong.

The child adapts. The adaptation is intelligent. What this guide is asking is whether it still serves you now — and what it would mean to update it.



DIRECTION OF CHANGE

The developmental movement.



This movement is not away from relationship — it is toward a different kind of relationship. One where you are also present as a distinct person, not only as a responsive surface.

*"A silhouette forms through repeated acts of self-reference.
Not aggression. Not domination. Just shape."*

A silhouette can still be warm, attuned, generous. But it is distinguishable. It takes up space. It has edges. And crucially — it can be known.

THE CORE QUESTION

"What do I actually want?"

Sitting with that question, even when you cannot answer it, is already movement.

Healthy Entitlement

The belief that needs to be built — gradually, experientially, not through affirmation alone:

"I am allowed to exist as a separate person while remaining connected to others."

Separateness and connection are held apart by the Pleasing pattern as if they are opposites. The healing work is, in part, the long accumulation of evidence that they are not.

WHAT HEALING LOOKS LIKE

How you'll know something is shifting.

Change in this pattern tends to be quiet at first. It shows up in small moments, often retrospectively. These are the signs worth attending to:

EARLY SIGNS

Noticing a preference,
even when you don't act
on it

A slight pause before
automatically agreeing

Irritation surfacing — and
staying rather than being
quickly managed

LATER SIGNS

Saying what you actually
think, in the moment

Asking for something
directly, without
extensive softening

Tolerating someone else's
disappointment without
collapsing

Checking in with yourself
before checking with the
room

Saying "I'm not sure"
instead of adapting
immediately

Small choices made on
your own terms

Less explaining and
justifying of ordinary
decisions

Initiating rather than
always adapting

Remaining emotionally
connected while being
distinctly yourself

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A NOTE ON FALSE PROGRESS

The pattern in disguise.

Some responses to the Pleasing pattern are still organised around others — just in opposition rather than compliance. These can feel like progress while actually being the same adaptation wearing different clothes.

- Becoming cold or withholding — "I don't care what anyone thinks" as performance
- Pseudo-independence — asserting self-sufficiency that is a different kind of invisibility
- Performative boundaries — announced loudly, often to the wrong people
- Intellectual confidence without embodied preference — knowing the theory without accessing the feeling

— "I'm fine with anything" — when you're not

True progress is quieter. It usually involves small, private moments of self-reference that nobody else notices. The practice of autonomy, rather than the performance of it.

WORKING WITH THE PATTERN

The gradient of practice.

What follows is a spectrum of experiences that tend to move the Pleasing pattern — from the smallest acts of self-reference, through to the more challenging moments of differentiation in real relationships.

Start wherever feels possible. The logic is the same as behavioural activation: the smallest act that moves in the right direction has value. The point is direction, not difficulty.

LEVEL ONE · THE SMALLEST POSSIBLE SELF-REFERENCE

Almost embarrassingly small. That's the point. These are the beginning of the habit of checking in with yourself.

- Say "I want" — about anything, however minor. Coffee or tea. This route or that one.
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- Before answering, pause. Notice if there's a preference before it gets managed away.
- Choose the music, without asking if everyone's happy with it.
- Pick a pace — walking, working, responding — that suits you, even briefly.
- Notice what drains you. Write it down. You don't have to act on it yet.
- When asked what you want for dinner, answer before considering others' preferences.

LEVEL TWO · PREFERENCE IN LOW-STAKES CONTEXTS

Acting on preference in situations where disagreement is possible but not catastrophic.

- Buy something purely because you like it, without justifying the choice.
- Suggest where to go or what to do, rather than deferring.
- When someone asks your opinion, give the actual one.
- Allow a reply to go unanswered longer than feels comfortable. Notice what holds.
- Say "I'd rather not" about something small, without explaining why.
- Disagree with something said in a group, mildly and clearly.

LEVEL THREE · DIFFERENTIATION IN REAL RELATIONSHIPS

Being visibly distinct in the relationships where it has felt most costly. Go slowly

here.

- Allow someone to be disappointed by your choice, and remain present rather than immediately repairing it.
- Ask for something directly, without first softening or minimising it.
- Say something honestly difficult to someone you care about — because it's true.
- Say no without over-explaining or offering a compensatory yes.
- Be in a relationship where reciprocity genuinely exists — and notice how it feels to be held as well as to hold.

SCHEMA THERAPY CONNECTIONS · JEFFREY YOUNG

If this pattern runs deep.

The Pleasing adaptation often overlaps with several schema patterns identified in Schema Therapy. Understanding these can point toward the relational and experiential work that moves things at depth.

- **Subjugation** — the belief that expressing your own needs is dangerous, that others will retaliate or withdraw. Healing involves learning that self-expression and connection can coexist.

→ **Approval-Seeking** — organising self-presentation around gaining others' recognition. Healing involves gradually discovering who you are beneath the adapted self — and tolerating moments of not being approved of.

→ **Self-Sacrifice** — giving disproportionately, from the belief that others' needs take precedence. Healing involves attending to the balance of giving and receiving — and learning to ask.

→ **Enmeshment** — identity shaped around others rather than discovered from within. Healing involves the slow work of identifying what you actually like, want, and feel — separate from anyone else's experience of you.

Many of the tasks in this guide can be practiced independently. Where the pattern runs very deep — where early experiences involved significant emotional unpredictability, criticism, or conditional love — working with a therapist allows access to the experiential level of the work, which moves things that cognitive understanding alone tends not to reach.

NERVOUS SYSTEM SUPPORT

Supporting the work with compassion.

The practices in this guide work best when the nervous system has some access to a sense of safety. The CFT Foundations companion guide —

available alongside this series — covers these practices in full. A brief summary follows.

COMPASSION-FOCUSED PRACTICES

Soothing Rhythm Breathing

A slower, slightly extended out-breath activates the body's settling response. Breathe in for a count of four, out for a count of six. Two to three minutes before any practice that feels activating. The point is to bring enough settledness that something other than automatic response becomes possible.

The Compassionate Self

A version of yourself that is wise, warm, and capable — not above struggle, but not undone by it. The part that is doing this work. Inhabiting that orientation briefly changes what's available.

The Warm Accepting Gaze

Being seen — fully, as you actually are — by someone who looks at you with warmth and no agenda. They are not evaluating. They simply see you. Hold that for a moment, even if it feels unfamiliar.

WEEKLY REFLECTION · USE AT THE END OF ANY WEEK YOU ENGAGE WITH THIS WORK

Did anything feel even slightly different this week?

A moment, a response, a sensation. It doesn't have to be significant.

Was there a moment you noticed the pattern?

Even after the fact. Noticing is already movement.

Was there a moment you moved against it — even a small one?

Any act of self-reference, however minor, counts here.

There is no scoring. There is no correct answer. These questions exist to keep you gently in contact with your own experience.

"You are allowed to take up space."

The work here is about becoming someone you can locate — someone with a shape, a preference, a distinct interior life that doesn't disappear when others enter the room.

That person has always been there. They learned, very early, to wait.

It is not too late to stop waiting.

THE ADAPTIVE PATTERN MODEL · CONNECTION PSYCHOTHERAPY
THIS GUIDE IS A COMPANION RESOURCE, NOT A SUBSTITUTE FOR THERAPEUTIC
SUPPORT.