

HOW NOT TO FEEL GUILTY ABOUT FEELING GOOD

Dear Dr. K.,

I tend to be a people pleaser and put other people's wants ahead of mine, especially family. Many times, I've been taken advantage of but I still do it. If I try to stick up for myself, I feel guilty and selfish yet I know my giving in all the time isn't healthy for me. What should I do?

Lois.

Dear Lois,

You may look around you and think, "Everybody seems happy and does what they want except me," but don't believe it. It's human nature to want to be liked because if we're liked that means we're a good person so most of us try to be pleasing to others. We all fall prey to being afraid that someone else will judge us badly. But, like most things, it's how much you do something that can be good or bad for you. Clearly, if you have lost your sense of what you want to do, how you want to act and things you want and get pushed around by others, this is a big problem. We usually get into that bind of behavior in our early lives as we try to be the good child for many reasons (for example, a sibling who's bad or a bad family situation that we hope to 'fix' by being the good child or living in a violent situation where we're very afraid of doing things wrong) with the fantasy that if you're good, it will make things better. Well, life usually doesn't work that way and little kids and even little kids who have grown up can't make other people change. But, since you've done it for a long time, your changing is hard especially if you're not used to it.

Being assertive doesn't mean you're a bad person. Making your wants, needs and desires known doesn't mean you're a bad person...it means you're human like everyone else. What gets in the way frequently is that someone else may not agree with you and not like what you want to do. Sometimes you compromise, sometimes you don't. Sometimes you see the movie you want, sometimes you don't but the point is that you assert yourself and express your wish. A harder thing is when someone wants something from us (time, emotional support, money, whatever) and we know we should say "No" but we waver because the other person will be upset. Being able

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to say “No” is equally as important (and maybe more) than saying yes. If you have kids, I’m sure you have encouraged them to speak up and express themselves and say no when appropriate. This shows a healthy sense of self, that you are deserving and that your judgment is OK. So, it’s definitely not selfish to speak up for yourself nor is it wrong to feel good even though someone else may not (you can’t stop suffering in the world). It’s not easy changing from being a people pleaser to asserting yourself and it does take baby steps, like asking for fries instead of mashed even though it might be a little imposition for the waiter.

There is a wonderful book, *Your Perfect Right, A Guide to Assertive Living* by Alberti and Emmons. It explains in detail how to be assertive without feeling guilty.

Dr. K.

Dr. K is Stan Kapuchinski, M.D., a board-certified psychiatrist still practicing in Punta Gorda, FL. For an appointment or if you have questions, please email him at DrK@StopYourMisery.com. Dr. K.’s book, ***Say Goodbye To Your PDI (Personality Disordered Individual), Recognize People Who Make You Miserable and Eliminate Them From Your Life for Good!*** is available at Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble Booksellers, and HCI Books. Visit his website: www.StopYourMisery.com
