Tackling Your Dire Need for Approval

Irrational Belief #1: The idea that you must have love or approval from all the significant people in your life.
People strongly desire approval and would be much less happy if they received none. Nonetheless, adults do not *need* approval. The word "need" derives from the Middle English work nede, the Anglo-Saxon nead, and the Indo-European term nauto, which mean to collapse with weariness. In English it mainly means necessity; compulsion; obligation; something utterly required for life and happiness.

Wants, preferences, and desires are not needs or necessities. When you insist that you absolutely must have approval, you self-sabotage yourself for several reasons:

Your demand that every important person love you creates a perfectionistic, unattainable goal. If you could get ninety-nine people to love you, you will always encounter the hundredth that doesn't.

Even if you demand love from a limited number of people, you cannot usually win the approval of all of them. Some, because of their own limitations, will have little ability to love anyone. Others will disapprove of you for reasons entirely beyond your control. Still others will despise you forever because of some prejudice against you.

Once you absolutely "need" love, you will worry how much and how long you will be approved. Do others really care enough? And if they do, will they continue to care tomorrow and the year after? With thoughts like these, you will feel endless panic.

If you always need love, you must always be distinctly lovable. But who is? Even when you have lovable traits, how can you display them at all times for all people?

If you could always win the approval of those you “need” you would have to spend so much time and energy doing so that you would have no time for other pursuits. Constantly striving for approval means living mainly for what others want you to do rather than for your own goals. It often means playing the patsy and buying others’ approval.

Ironically enough, the greater your need for love, the less people will tend to respect and care for you. Even though they like your catering to them, they may despise your neediness and see you as a weak person. Also, by desperately trying to win people’s approval, you may easily annoy them, bore them to distractions, and again be less desirable.

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Feeling loved, once you achieve it, may be boring and bothersome, as people who love you often make inroads on your time and energy. Actively loving someone else is a creative and absorbing act. But the dire need for love easily blocks ardor. Perversely, it sabotages loving, because when you demand intense affection, you have little time and energy to devote to the growth and development of those on whom you make your demands.

The dire need for love frequently encourages your own feelings of worthlessness: “I must have love, because I am a lowly incompetent individual who cannot possibly get along without it. Therefore, I must have, I need, devotion from others.” By desperately seeking love in this manner, you

frequently cover up your own feelings of worthlessness and thereby do nothing to tackle them and overcome them. The more you "succeed" in being greatly loved, the more you may inflate this goal and continue to indoctrinate yourself with the idea that you cannot regulate your own life.

For these reasons, you can rationally forgo the goal of gaining undying love. Instead, you'd better accept yourself and remain vitally absorbed in people, things and ideas outside yourself. For paradoxically, you usually find yourself by losing yourself in outside pursuits and not be merely contemplating your own navel.

If you actually have a dire need for love; if you accept the fact that you have it; and if you keep challenging, questioning, and disputing it, it will ultimately and often quickly, decrease. For remember: It is your need; and you keep sustaining it. Other methods to combat and minimize your overwhelming love needs include:

Ask yourself what you really want to do, rather than what others would like you to do. And keep asking yourself, from time to time: "Do I keep doing this or refusing to do that because I really want it that way? Or do I, once again, unthinkingly insist on trying to please others?"

In going after what you really want, take risks, commit yourself, and don't desperately avoid making mistakes. Do not be needlessly foolhardy. But convince yourself that if you fail to get something you want and people laugh at or criticize you, and not merely show you how you failed, they may have a problem. As long as you learn by your errors, does it make that much difference what they think?

Focus on loving more than on winning love. Realize that vital living hardly consists of passive receiving but of doing, acting, reaching out. And just as you can force yourself to play the piano, do yoga exercises, or go to work every day, you can also often commit yourself to loving others. In so doing, your dire needs for their love will probably decrease.

Above all, don't confuse getting love with having personal worth. If you rate yourself as having intrinsic worth or value as a human, you'd better claim to have it by virtue of your mere existence, your aliveness- and not because of anything you do to "earn" it. No matter how much others approve you, or how much they may value you for their own benefit, they can only give you extrinsic value or worth to them. They cannot, by loving you, give you intrinsic value- or self- worth. If intrinsic value exits at all (which we seriously doubt, since it seems an undefinable thing in itself), you get it because you choose, you decide to have it. It exists because of your own definitions. You are "good" or "deserving" because you think you are and not because anyone awards you this kind of an "inherent value".

If you can really believe these very important points- that you need not rate yourself, your essence at all, and that you can choose to call yourself "worthwhile" just because you decide to do so- you will tend to lose your desperate need for others' approval. For you need- or think you need- their acceptance not because of the practical advantages it may bring, but because you foolishly define your worth as a human in terms of receiving it. Once you stop this kind of self- defeating defining, your dire need for their approval tends to diminish. Similarly, if you reduce your dire need for others' esteem, you will find it relatively easy to stop rating yourself as a person, even though you continue to rate many of your traits. You will create unconditional self- acceptance (USA)- will value

yourself merely because you are alive and kicking, and for that reason alone “deserve” to have an enjoyable life.

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