

## Chapter 11

### Expressing Your Preferences

For many people who have spent years adapting their emotional truth to maintain harmony, expressing personal preferences can feel surprisingly difficult. You may say things like:

- "Whatever you prefer."
- "I don't mind."
- "I'm happy with anything."

At first glance these responses appear flexible and accommodating but when they become a repeating pattern, your preferences slowly disappear from the conversation.

When someone has spent years focusing on what *other people* want, asking themselves what *they* want can feel strange, like another language you're not versed in. Small decisions may feel surprisingly difficult:

- Where would you like to go?
- What would you prefer to do?
- How do you feel about this plan?

Instead of answering directly, you may instinctively look to the other person for guidance.

Expressing preferences is one of the simplest ways to begin reconnecting with yourself. It doesn't require confrontation or extreme changes. It simply means allowing your voice to be included in the conversation. It can be helpful to begin with small preferences:

- choosing a restaurant
- suggesting an activity
- sharing your opinion about a film or book

These moments may seem minor, but they're important. Each time you express a preference, you practise listening to your own internal signals; you also allow others to see more of who you really are. Relationships become more balanced when both people are equally visible.

If expressing preferences feels uncomfortable, remember that this feeling is normal - your nervous system has learned that expressing yourself could create tension or disagreement that leads to exclusion, criticism, and shame.

But in healthy relationships, differences do not destroy connection. They simply reveal the presence of two individuals with their own thoughts, feelings, and desires.

Expressing preferences is not about insisting on getting your own way. It's simply about allowing your perspective to exist alongside the perspectives of others. Those small moments of self-expression help rebuild a sense of internal clarity:

- you begin recognising what you enjoy
- what interests you
- what feels comfortable
- what does not

As your voice gradually becomes more present in your relationships, you're no longer disappearing from the interaction. You're participating in it.

## **Reflection Exercise**

### **Noticing Your Preferences**

Take a few moments to reflect on situations where you tend to defer to other people's choices.

**Situations where I usually say "I don't mind" include...**

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**In these situations, what might your actual preference be?**

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**How comfortable do you currently feel expressing your preferences?**

- Very uncomfortable
- Somewhat uncomfortable
- Neutral

- Somewhat comfortable
- Very comfortable

## **Practice Exercise**

### **Expressing Small Preferences**

Choose three simple situations where you could practise expressing a preference this week.

Examples might include:

- suggesting a place to eat
- choosing an activity
- sharing an opinion about something

Write your examples below:

Situation 1

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Preference I could express:

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Situation 2

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Preference I could express:

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Situation 3

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Preference I could express:

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## **Final Reflection**

How do you imagine it might feel to express your preferences more often?

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Each time you allow your voice to be heard, you strengthen your connection with yourself. Your presence in relationships becomes more visible, you're no longer quietly adapting to everyone else, you're participating as yourself.