

The Attention Seeking Mode

When the Attention-Seeking mode is activated within our personality system, we find ourselves behaving in ways that have the specific intention of being recognized by the people around us for the things we've done or the things we've achieved. This can show up in a single area, or in multiple areas of life, including what we do in our home, our work, how we behave at school, or in our general social interactions. This Mode can often show up in an aggressive way when we have been taking care of other people's needs. In fact, in many cases, it's possible for us to build significant resentment toward people we have been taking care of if they don't acknowledge the things we have previously done or are still currently doing for them. If you carry a Schema of Self Sacrifice in your system, this will usually lead to an internalization of the resentment, causing an angry reaction aimed completely at ourselves for doing these things in the first place.

The Attention Seeking Mode is strongly linked to the Schema of Approval and Recognition Seeking and is often seen by others as a way to seek approval in an "over the top" or exaggerated way. In its extreme, when we are blended with a part that's using an attention seeking mode of behaviour, we are the loudest and most noticeable person in the room. However, it doesn't always show up this way, as sometimes it can be a lot harder to spot. The Attention Seeker can show up when we decline invites to social gatherings at work or within our circle of family and friends. While on the surface this doesn't seem to be seeking attention, it's designed to draw people in to asking us why we aren't going, and pushing us to attend because, at some level, we need this attention and if we don't get it we build resentment for the people who didn't push us to go.

“Even at my lowest moments, there was a level of ego that was attached to my own self-pity. I was constantly looking for someone to pay attention to me by wallowing in a space of woe is me.”

~Steven Morris RP

Ego is a word that gets bandied about in the recovery world on a regular basis. However, it is often overlooked that ego doesn't only show its face in times when we're behaving egotistically. For me, there were times in my own personal journey when I developed a victim mentality as a means to draw attention to the plight of my vulnerable child. This self-defeating behaviour pattern had the intention of controlling other people in an attempt to have them meet my unmet needs by paying attention to me when I felt I needed it most. I would continuously point out all the hardships I had experienced, voicing my problems to all who would listen, but failing to be accountable for any role I played in the problems I was having.

This Attention-Seeking mode of behaviour can present in a multitude of ways that all have the same intention and usually the same outcome. You may be someone who presents as the life and soul of the party, drawing others into conversations that start out as enjoyable and reciprocal but usually shift to a display of your own successful exploits. This part of our personality may conceal itself covertly,

by masquerading as a people pleaser, but underneath it creates situations that draw attention to us, and us alone. Over time, this part has the opposite result than originally intended, in that it pushes people away because the conversation inevitably ends up revolving around us, or the people we're talking to begin to realize that we aren't actually listening to them and disengage from the interaction.

You may have an Attention-Seeking part that presents by acting out. Using inappropriate humour, language that is shocking, or pushing subject matter that is designed to have you stand out from the crowd, drawing attention once again to the plight of your own vulnerabilities. One of the ways that this showed up for me, in the early part of my recovery journey, was having all the answers in a social situation. I was the expert on whatever subject we were discussing, offering insight and clichés designed to have others pay attention to my wisdom and expertise. I have also seen it present for my clients on social media, and other public outlets, by posting pictures or articles that draw attention to them in ways that may not be obvious at first.

The only problem with this part of our personality is that it usually has the opposite effect than originally intended, and as a result, you may begin to build resentment and anger toward the people in our environment who are not recognizing or paying attention to the things that we're expecting them to. The only way to work with this part of our own unique personality system is to build our awareness for its presence and practice the skills of unblending from its behaviour. This will allow us to work with the emotion activating the behaviour and unburden the Vulnerable Child at our core.

Next, let's check in to see how you relate to this Mode in your own behaviours. Answer the questions below based on your personal experiences and the rating scale provided.

| Never 0 | Sometimes 1 | 50/50 2 | Often 3 | Always 4 |
|---|----------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Description | | | | Score |
| Sometimes, I don't feel comfortable or confident in situations at work, school, or home if I am not recognised, or acknowledged for the things I have done. | | | | |
| In social situations, I find myself seeking the approval of others in order to feel confident in my ability to fit in, to feel like I belong with people around me. | | | | |

Based on the scores you gave for the questions above, and the way you relate to the description provided on the previous pages, how Relevant is the Attention Seeking Mode to you in your life? Add the two scores together to calculate your prevalence score. On a scale of 0 – 8, 0 being not present at all, and 8 being present in my life every day, rate your experience of the Attention Seeking Mode.

My Attention Seeking Mode has a prevalence score of ___/8.

On the next page, take the time to explore your experience of the Attention Seeking Mode, see if you can identify how you feel when this Mode is active, how you are thinking when this Mode is active, what you do when this Mode is active, and what situations you might need to be aware of that can activate this way of thinking in your personality system.

- a. When I am in the Attention Seeking Mode, I experience the following feelings (List the emotions you experience in the Attention Seeking Mode, focus on the feelings in your system when you find yourself trying to be the loudest most popular person in the room, or when you find yourself falling into a possible false victim mentality).

- b. When I am in the Attention Seeking Mode, I am having the following thoughts (List the thoughts you are having when you're in the Attention Seeking Mode, be specific, focus on thoughts that point out how the story in your system is an accurate one, how the narrative has to be true, and how there is no alternative to what you are hearing).

- c. When I am in the Attention Seeking Mode, I behave in the following ways (List the things you do, the way you act, and how you react when you're in the Attention Seeking Mode).

- d. The following situations are likely to be involved in triggering my Attention Seeking Mode (List the situations you are aware of that have activated this mode of behaviour in the past).

- e. When I am in the Attention Seeking Mode, I can use the following skills to support me with the emotional distress I am experiencing in my personality system. List the different skills of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy you can use to manage the emotions being held by the Attention Seeking Mode. Try to list the skills in the order they will be effective for you to use. Start with Mindfulness, then focus on Distress Tolerance, and then look at Emotion Regulation.

- f. The ways I can practice these skills to develop them as part of my ability to cope with the emotional experience of my own Attention Seeking Mode are as follows: Describe the way you can practice these skills, what would it take to implement them into your daily routines?
