

# THOUGHTS & MOTIVATION



## The Danger of Toxic Positivity



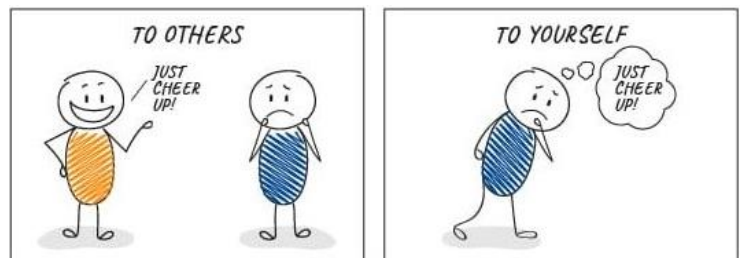
Positive thinking can actually create real value in your life and help you build skills that last much longer than a smile. The impact of positivity on your work, your health, and your life can be significant and the benefits have been the subject of much research. Positive thinking, however, doesn't mean that you keep your head in the sand and ignore life's less pleasant situations. It simply means that you approach these difficult situations more positively and productively.

While being positive is definitely good, there is a destructive downside to thinking positively 100% of the time. There is a big difference between being negative and being honest, so it's important that we are aware of when we're being *overly positive*. The practice of consciously pushing yourself to think positive, happy thoughts – even in difficult situations – to minimize genuine pain, sadness, or fear is *toxic positivity*.

### Why Toxic Positivity is Dangerous

Toxic positivity is when you act happy or cheerful when you're really not. Statements like "Cheer up!" or "Don't worry... things will get better!" when something negative has happened can be examples of toxic positivity. You can experience it from someone else or give it to someone. You can also inflict toxic positivity on yourself. Ultimately, this inauthentic happiness can harm personal and professional relationships.

Two Types of Toxic Positivity...



Toxic positivity can actually make you more unhappy. A 10-year study found that denying negative feelings as a coping mechanism was linked to higher levels of depression. Another study found that people actually felt *more sad* when others expected them not to feel negative emotions. Constantly trying to be positive can also lead to burnout – it's exhausting to fight very real and valid feelings all the time!

Negative feelings can also build up if you constantly avoid them. We may think that facing difficulties with a smile on our face is the best approach, but eventually, the negativity that you're trying to suppress WILL find a way into your life. The more you avoid your negative thoughts and feelings, the bigger they grow and the more you reinforce the tendency to ignore negativity – even when it's an acceptable response.

### TOXIC POSITIVITY LOOKS LIKE



### EMOTIONAL SUPPORT LOOKS LIKE

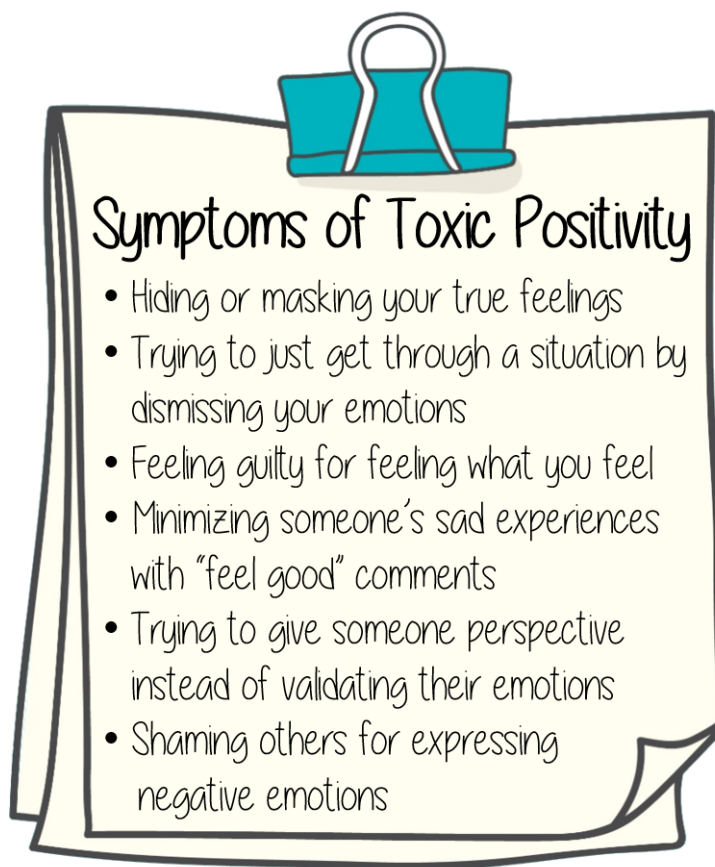


## Four Ways to Overcome Toxic Positivity

Whether it's your own toxic positivity or that of others, there are things that we can do to help.

- 1 Don't be the expert.** Most of the time, when people share something or express how they feel about a situation, they simply want to be heard. They aren't looking for opinions or advice, so don't offer any – unless they ask. Just listen and sympathize – that's really enough!
- 2 Pause.** Thinking before you speak is a very good habit to develop. Stop the optimistic autopilot from kicking in when presented with a situation. Instead, engage your *active listening* skills by fully understanding the situation before you react. This will help you choose appropriate words.
- 3 Do a digital detox.** Taking life offline helps reset your level of dopamine (your pleasure hormone), which is damaged by repetitive social media use. Social media in particular is a dangerous source of toxic positivity. Everybody LOVES to post their happy moments and avoid their sad or even normal ones.
- 4 Focus on meaning – not just happiness.** Studies have shown that the more we pursue happiness, the harder it is to achieve, but those who had meaning in their lives also lived happier and healthier. Focus on meaningful activities: develop healthy habits, build stronger relationships, try productive past-times.

INSTEAD OF SAYING... ✗	SAY... ✓
"It will all work out."	"How can I help you?"
"Just keep smiling."	"It's ok to be upset. You're human."
"It could be worse."	"This is tough. Can I do anything?"
"Don't be so negative."	"It must be hard. Tell me about it."
"Everything happens for a reason."	"It's ok to feel bad sometimes."
"Look on the bright side!"	This must be difficult. I'm thinking of you."
"Failure is not an option."	"Failure is part of growth."



### Symptoms of Toxic Positivity

- Hiding or masking your true feelings
- Trying to just get through a situation by dismissing your emotions
- Feeling guilty for feeling what you feel
- Minimizing someone's sad experiences with "feel good" comments
- Trying to give someone perspective instead of validating their emotions
- Shaming others for expressing negative emotions

Sources [www.healthshots.com/mind/happiness-hacks/being-too-positive-can-actually-be-toxic-heres-why-its-dangerous](http://www.healthshots.com/mind/happiness-hacks/being-too-positive-can-actually-be-toxic-heres-why-its-dangerous)  
[www.scienceofpeople.com/toxic-positivity](http://www.scienceofpeople.com/toxic-positivity) | <https://biglifejournal.com> | Images from Freepik.com