Toxic Positivity

The downside to always looking on the bright side

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Better wellbeing should not focus only on being happy, because it denies resilience-building experiences.

Noel McDermott, clinical psychotherapist

https://www.refinery29.com/en-gb/what-is-toxic-positivity
Objectives

1. Learn what Toxic Positivity is and how to recognize it

2. Learn alternative ways to talk to self and others with warmth and compassion without using toxic positivity
Definition of Toxic Positivity

“The excessive and ineffective overgeneralization of a happy and optimistic state at the expense of negative emotions and states that are part of our genuine human emotional experience.”

Anne Silva, CEO & Founder, Tanglaw Mental Health
2 Types of Toxic Positivity

TO OTHERS

JUST CHEER UP!

TO YOURSELF

JUST CHEER UP!

SCIENCE OF PEOPLE
Chris Traeger from Parks and Rec clip here
Examples of Toxic Positivity

- You’ll get over it
- Good vibes only
- Don’t think about it
- Just smile
- It could be worse / But at least you...
- [This person] has it worse / It’s not that bad
- Stop being so negative
- Just be happy
- See the good in everything
- Never give up
- Failure is not an option
- Find the silver lining
- Look at the bright side
- There’s a reason for everything / Everything happens for a reason
How this affects the self

- Hiding/Masking your true feelings
- Trying to “just get on with it” by stuffing/dismissing an emotion(s)
- Feeling guilty for feeling what you feel
- Brushing off things that are bothering you with a “It is what it is”
How this affects the self

➢ Connection to Productivity
  ○ Reinforced by schools

➢ Toxic positivity contradicts self care
  ○ Example: I went for a walk so I should be fine now

➢ Can lead to compassion fatigue
How this affects others

- Trying to give someone perspective (e.g., “it could be worse”) instead of validating their emotional experience
- Shaming or chastising others for expressing frustration or anything other than positivity
- Minimizing other people’s experiences with “feel good” quotes or statements
- Reinforces the status quo
Let’s change what we say

▸ Whether you say it to yourself or to others, toxic positivity is ineffective and can lead to a person feeling worse, despite your best intentions.

▸ The response to negativity should not be positivity. It should be warmth and understanding.

▸ Instead of positivity, try for validation and hope
Break Out Group

Identify examples you’ve seen of toxic positivity and try to come up with other ways to respond
Want to talk about it? I’m here with a listening ear.

I see how that can be overwhelming. Anything I can do?

I’m here for you

It’s okay to feel bad sometimes

It’s natural to feel that way

What do you need right now?

Everyone’s journey is different. There is no comparison.

You are allowed to feel that way. It’s completely valid.

You are human and that is a natural human emotion

That really sucks. Sorry you’re going through this.

Sometimes giving up is okay. What is your ideal outcome?
Please take a quick survey:
References and additional readings

- Tanglaw Mental Health: https://www.facebook.com/tanglawmentalhealth/
- https://thetab.com/uk/2020/02/19/toxic-positivity-culture-meaning-140567
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