

## Ruthlessly “Nice” People

I come from a family that puts the “dis” in dysfunctional. There’s a lot of talking, not a lot of doing in my family. There are considerable issues with addiction, alcoholism, and codependency in the family. There has also been a lot of abuse to go around. The abusers in the family are master gaslighters, liars and manipulators. They do the “dissing.” However, they are like rattlesnakes or weasels. A person knows what they are dealing with when you deal directly with them. Pretty much, you know exactly what to expect.

Where I run into difficulty in my family relationships, now, is dealing with the ruthlessly “nice” members. The ones handy with endless platitudes when I try to talk about abuse. The ones that shove aside any talk of emotional upset with their denials. The ones who’s implications that I should “put up and shut up” is clear without them ever losing their smiling demeanor and “cheerful” attitudes.

My introduction to toxic positivity began in my family, of course. Terms like passive aggression, denial and manipulation come to mind when dealing with ruthlessly “nice” people. I started out calling these people the “forgiveness police,” but was introduced, rather recently, to the term by accident in a discussion on Discord.

Platitudes are, by no means, a substitute for intimacy, or even communication. It seems like toxic positivity spread as fast as the coronavirus during the pandemic, to me. We weren’t allowed to touch each other physically, so it seems we became reluctant to touch each other emotionally as well. What is given as “encouragement” is a complete failure to listen and engage in what someone else is saying. Its an attempt to field off the negative feelings someone else is feeling, and a total lack of empathy for the other person.

Positive thinking becomes toxic when people expect it to eliminate negative feelings like grief, anxiety, fear and loss. It is toxic when we expect it to eliminate the blow of real hardships in life. It can create unrealistic expectations of ourselves and others that lead to anxiety, guilt, shame and even depression. There is nothing wrong with optimism, but it is toxic positivity when it is forced, insincere or delegitimizes real sorrow and loss.

Shame can be very unhealthy, especially when it comes to healthy responses to life’s low points, tragedies, and disasters. There is a ton of information out there on how unhealthy it is to “beat oneself up.” Shame is the “parasite” of the emotional realm and can be a very draining form of self-conscious self-hatred that accomplishes nothing helpful at all.

Some ways that ruthlessly “nice” people try to express “support” often take the form of “look on the bright side,” “be grateful for what you do have,” “try changing your outlook,” “failure is not an option,” “everything will work out in the end,” “everything happens for a reason,” “things could be worse,” and (one of my least favorite platitudes)

“yeah, but at least they’re in a better place.” These things all seem to be an effective way to shut down further discussion. They seem to slam the door shut on honest communication. They minimize and invalidate experiences.

Toxic positivity is an extreme position in life. It is not good to be on the fringes of life like that. It’s not good to participate in extremism, elitism, or really any “ism” for that matter. It’s important to know that its OK not to be OK. You have the right to feel what you feel and to take the time and space to process and accept your feelings. So, too do others.

There is much pressure on people, especially now, through social media, to be “productive.” It seems we are really not healing. It seems we are not taking time to heal or giving ourselves permission to do so.

I’m not sure I have found effective ways to deal with people who are ruthlessly “nice,” but seeing as how I cannot change anyone else, perhaps the most effective thing is to lay down boundaries. I must deal with my feelings. I try to be realistic and balanced in my outlook. I have ambivalence about much in life, and that is ok. I spend a lot of time writing about how I feel.

Other suggestions I have found are to challenge the person/people being toxically positive. Perhaps you will tell them something they need to hear. Also try to avoid judging yourself for pain, sadness and jealousy. They don’t mean you’re a failure or defective in any way. If we fail to process our strong emotions in a timely and effective way, it can lead to a plethora of psychological and physical problems.

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing." - Edmund Burke

That is what the ruthlessly “nice” do in life.

Nothing.

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