

Fold me

*"When we push aside normal emotions to embrace false positivity, we lose our capacity to develop skills to deal with the world as it is. Not as we want it to be."  
-Susan David, Ph.D.*



positivity.project@oregon.gov

Fold me

# TOXIC POSITIVITY

 Varies

 1 Day

 Varies

## TOXIC POSITIVITY DEFINED

Relationships in the workplace and in our personal life that don't make room for people to be human—and deal with the sorts of struggles that come with being human—it quickly becomes a toxic place. Bianca L. Rodriguez, a licensed psychotherapist in California, points out that feelings don't have a negative or a positive, they are just what they are. Listening and empathizing with people in the workplace creates a supportive environment where people can personally and professionally thrive. Without a doubt, there's a strong case for intentionally practicing positivity and having a positive mindset. But not if it leads to blind optimism and a lack of listening and caring about people's real emotions. According to the Science of People Lab, toxic positivity is an invisible force that causes people to be less successful, more selfish and even more gullible. Given the damage toxic positivity can do in the workplace, it's crucial to be able to recognize it and address it, or ideally, avoid it completely.

## HOW TO IDENTIFY IT

Toxic positivity tends to be pretty easy to spot. It's usually overly simple, doesn't acknowledge pain, and uses all or nothing language. It looks like, "Just be happy!" "Look on the bright side!" "Good vibes only!" Toxic positivity is inauthentic happiness and can cause damage to personal and professional relationships.

## WHAT TO SAY INSTEAD

Practicing statements of validation are a good first step. Reflective listening, where you use the words you hear the person say and repeat them back, can also help. Here are some statements to practice on your own:

- This is hard. You've done hard things before and I believe in you.
- It's pretty normal to have some negative feelings in this situation. I'm here for you as you work through them.
- It's probably pretty hard to be positive right now. What is this telling us about ourselves or our situation that can help us?
- It must be difficult for you. Do you want to talk about it?
- It's never fun to feel like that. Is there something I can do to help?
- It's probably really hard to see any good in this situation. I'm here with you. We'll make sense of it all later.