



EMPLOYEE

ASSISTANCE NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2022

PROVIDED BY SAINT ALPHONSUS EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

HOW TO EFFECTIVELY INTERACT WITH MANIPULATIVE PEOPLE



Most of us have had the unfortunate luck of encountering a manipulative person or two (or more) in our life.

We may have encountered them at work, in our family, or in our social circle. We may have even dated or married one. Manipulators can make us feel exhausted and frustrated because of their constant manipulative, selfish, and confusing behavior. Manipulators are solely focused on making sure everything in life goes their way to ensure they get the attention and adulation they think they deserve. Manipulators use a variety of tactics to try to make things go their way. They will gaslight us (convince us that we are remembering things incorrectly), blame us for making them feel a certain way, blame us for mistakes they make, never apologize for their wrongdoings, and can twist our words to make it sound like we meant something completely different than what we said. Manipulators can make us feel like we're going crazy because they make us question ourselves and our reality.

If you are dealing with a manipulator, it's important to know how to effectively interact with them. The most important thing that's needed is to set firm and healthy boundaries. The boundaries you set depend on the severity of the manipulative behavior and can range from limiting how often you talk with them to cutting them out of your life entirely.

Set Firm Boundaries

Manipulators can cause such havoc in our lives it's important to set firm and healthy boundaries with them. Setting a boundary with someone is like having an imaginary bubble around you. We can limit who can come into the bubble physically, verbally, and emotionally. When we're interacting with manipulators, we need to make sure our "bubble" is thicker than normal so that we keep them at a healthy distance physically, verbally, and emotionally. If we don't set a firm enough boundary with a manipulator, they'll take advantage of the weakness in the bubble and attempt to manipulate us. It's important to avoid purposeful provocations and disclosing too much to the manipulative person. If you give manipulators an inch, they will take a mile. You have to limit what you share with the manipulator to only the necessary details. This is important because manipulators can take the information you give them (a job change, a large purchase, etc.) and use it against you. To set a healthy boundary, we must determine how much and how often we speak to and interact with the manipulator. If the manipulator is a coworker or friend, it may be easier to set a boundary and avoid the person. When the manipulator is a

family member, it can be more difficult to set a firm boundary but it's just as important to do so.

Often times, the most difficult interactions occur when there is a divorce from a manipulator and custody of children is involved. Strict limits must be set on what you will be communicating with the manipulative ex-spouse and what you won't be communicating with them. For example, communication with the ex-spouse should only involve communication about the children. If the manipulative ex-spouse brings up any other topic, it's important to not address that topic and remind them that you will only be talking about the children. If the communication is too strained between you and the ex-spouse, you may need to request that communication only go through an email system that is monitored by the courts.

Use the Grey Rock Method

One way to set a firm boundary with a manipulator is the Grey Rock Method. The theory behind this method is that manipulators thrive on drama and getting emotional reactions out of people. In order to deprive them of the emotional reactions they crave (their "narcissistic supply") we have to avoid reacting and engaging with them. We need to act

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EAP MISSION Saint Alphonus Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a voluntary, confidential counseling service that assists employees and their families with issues that affect their quality of life at home and work.



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boring and dull, like a grey rock. The more you act like a “grey rock” the less interested they will be in you. Some examples of “going grey rock” include: Shrugging and nodding, avoiding eye contact, responding briefly to questions without elaborating, and ending or leaving interactions as quickly as possible.

Go “No Contact”

In extreme cases, especially when the manipulator is verbally, emotionally, and physically abusive, and setting firm boundaries or going grey rock is not successful, it may be necessary to cut off all contact with the manipulator. This is called “Going No Contact.” No Contact is often the best way to deal with a manipulator, but it’s sometimes not possible when a parent is the manipulator or when child custody is involved. When you go No Contact, you cut off all communication with the manipulator, which includes stopping all calling, texting, and social media connections, and blocking their phone number and emails. In extreme cases, when a manipulator refuses to respect the boundaries you set, a restraining order may be needed, and law enforcement may need to be involved.

Seek Professional Help

In addition to setting firm boundaries, it can be very helpful to get professional help from a mental health professional who is knowledgeable in the behavior of manipulators and experienced in treating the victims of manipulators. Having an objective counselor listen to your experiences with the manipulator can help you to clarify what you need to do to effectively interact with them.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HOPE

“It sprouts in each occluded eye of the many-eyed potato, it lives in each earth worm segment surviving cruelty, it is the motion that runs from the eyes to the tail of a dog, it is the mouth that inflates the lungs of a child that has just been born. It is the singular gift we can not destroy in ourselves, the argument that refutes death, the genius that invents the future, all we know of God.” – *Lisel Mueller*

Hope has certainly been challenged for many of us particularly over the past two years. The pandemic, political divisions and unrest, losses have been felt on so many fronts, from employment, security of basic structure and daily routine, financial stability and illness and even death of loved ones. Somehow though, we continue. I believe hope helps us to get through hardship, doubt, loss and devastation. Hope is difficult to define, or see, but we know when it’s with us.

I wonder how each of you restore hope for yourself and others? Can you think of a time when hope has carried you through a difficult time? Sometimes what we hope for changes, can you recall a time when that happened to you? How would you describe what hope is? Have you ever lost hope

and how did you get it back? Can you use any of your answers to these questions to help yourself or someone else find hope to get you through whatever you may be currently facing in your life?

I know for me, as well as for the people I get to work with in counseling, hope is often restored by the little things. Things like a kind word from someone, witnessing a client work through what seems like a truly hopeless situation, Christmas lights, and the sky. Years ago, when I was in graduate school, one of my supervisors said, the most important thing you can give someone is hope. Here at the EAP we would love to partner with you to find hope to face and get through whatever challenges you might be facing. It would be our honor to join you in that quest.



CRANBERRY AND BRIE FLATBREAD

The perfect appetizer for any fall or winter meal.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 flatbread
I used Stonefire brand square flatbread
- 1/4 cup whipped cream cheese
- 3 ounces brie cheese diced
- 1/3 cup fresh cranberries
- salt and pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon rosemary
if using dried, smash it in your palm with your thumb to break it apart, if using fresh, chop it very fine

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 425°
2. Take the cream cheese and spread it evenly over the entire top of the flatbread
3. Evenly distribute the diced up brie over the cream cheese
4. Place the cranberries on the flatbread in the areas with no brie
5. Season generously with salt and pepper
6. Bake directly on the oven rack for 10 minutes or until the brie is bubbly and the crust is golden at the edges
7. Carefully remove to a cutting board and let it rest for a few minutes, top with the rosemary
8. Using a pizza cutter or large knife slice in half lengthwise and then crosswise to make 16 slices



PREP 5 m	COOK 10 m	SLICES 16
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THE PROBLEM WITH TOXIC POSITIVITY



What is it?

Toxic positivity is defined as: “the excessive and ineffective overgeneralization of a happy, optimistic state across all situations.”

How do I know if I am engaging in Toxic Positivity?

There are several signs of toxic positivity. Below you will find a non-comprehensive list of traits to be aware of:

- Hiding/masking your true feelings
- Feeling guilty or badly about your genuine feelings
- Stuffing/dismissing/minimizing emotions (yours or others)
- Comments/thoughts “it could be worse” or “others are so much worse off than me” or “it is what it is” or “everything happens for a reason”
- Shaming/chastising/being critical of self or others for expressing any emotion that is not considered “positive”

Why is this important?

When we engage in toxic positivity we deny, minimize, and invalidate not only an authentic emotional response of another but also rob ourselves of this emotional experience as well. We don’t engage in toxic positivity with the intention of hurting ourselves or others but that is the result.

As beautifully, complex, flawed humans we’re gifted a full set of emotions. These emotions are simply what we feel or experience, they are not positive or negative. They simply are. We experience feelings of joy, excitement, happiness, and contentment. We also experience feelings of jealousy, anger, bitterness, resentment, sadness, greed, discouragement, anxiety, shame, and guilt.

Sometimes life can be really hard and it’s ok that we feel like it “just sucks.” By pretending “this is the best day ever” or “everything is great” we completely and totally invalidate both our and others’ genuine human emotional experience. As a result, we either experience or create feelings of shame, isolation and increased risk for major mental health symptoms such as depression and anxiety. Unexpressed and/or unmanaged emotions may also lead to physical illness as well.

The most important relationship you have is the one with yourself. If you aren’t able to be honest with yourself about your own feelings how do you hold space for someone else who is expressing their genuine feelings in your presence? The risk in doing so is creating a world of fake emotions leading to superficial relationships and lack of emotional intimacy. Emotional intimacy is something we all need and crave. By engaging in toxic positivity, we not only prevent others from having this experience but ourselves as well.

What do we do about it?

It’s human nature to want to be supportive in some form or fashion. Consider the table below:

When someone asks how you are doing, be brave. It’s not always appropriate to download all that you are experiencing but it is completely acceptable and honest to say “it’s been a tough day” or “I am looking forward to a new day tomorrow” or “I am struggling right now” or “I don’t want to be dishonest but don’t have the time to get into things right now.”

If you find yourself in a situation or environment where toxic positivity is occurring, consider setting healthy boundaries, speaking your truth, and addressing it pointedly but compassionately. Try saying a simple statement such as “that is really invalidating, it would be more helpful if you said something like…”

Also be mindful of when you are asking someone else “how are you?” Are you prepared to be supportive and provide some form of acceptance or validation? If someone shares they are having a hard time and you don’t know what to say, know that the individual would likely appreciate hearing something like “I am sorry things feel hard” or “I don’t know what to say but I am here to listen if you want to talk later” or “Who do you have to help support you? Do they know you are hurting?”.

Please consider watching the following video by Brené Brown on sympathy vs empathy: <https://youtu.be/1Ewngu369Jw>. Brené Brown is an expert in vulnerability and has a multitude of video clips on YouTube about courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy. The video may further assist you in deepening your understanding of Toxic Positivity.

Saint Alphonsus Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Regular Appointment Hours:

8:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m., Monday-Friday
(special appointment hours by request)

Phone: (208) 367-3300

Locations:

6140 W. Emerald St., Boise, ID 83704
3025 W. Cherry Ln, Ste 205
Meridian, ID 83642

Counselors:

Jared Belsher, MA, LCPC, NCC
Jenny Lee Doty, MSW, LCSW
Stephanie Hadley, MSW, LCSW
Melissa Young, MSW, LCSW



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TOXIC POSITIVITY	ACCEPTANCE AND VALIDATION
“Everything will work out”	“Sounds like things are really hard. I’m thinking of you”
“Stop being so negative”	“I am sorry to know you are suffering/hurting. Know you are not alone”
“Where is the silver lining?”	“I can see you are hurting. I am here for you”
“Everything happens for a reason”	“Sometimes things happen in life that just don’t make sense. I am sorry. What do you need from me?”
“It could be worse”/ “Others have it way worse”	“It sucks that you are going through this right now. How can I support you?”

PARENTING IN BLENDED FAMILIES



Growing up in a blended family and being the parent in a blended family gives me the experienced perspective to write about from a clinician's standpoint and as a participant in various roles. I use the word "experienced" because when you meet one blended family, you just meet one blended family. They are all different and unique. I am not an expert in treating all blended families, but certainly knowledgeable in understanding some of the normal (and oftentimes very difficult) dynamics that occur. Reflecting on the past, there are principles I wish I had known that would have helped me with being a more effective parent in the process.

I remember my now 27-year-old daughter telling me how hard it was to go back and forth from her father's house to my house every week. Years ago, I heard about a family judge in another state that made the parents go from one house to the other instead of the children. That really puts it into perspective how difficult transitioning might be, especially for a child that does not have the emotional means to manage such transition and change each week. Expecting our children to be able to transition and adjust to the differences in rules, roles and other variances is extremely unrealistic.

Over the years, I have developed some principles to follow for the parents in a blended family.

- The divorce rate is 40-50%. In blended families, it is 60-70%. Blending a family is very difficult. Prepare and educate yourself.
- Grief is part of every divorce. Talk about it with your children.
- An average plan supported by both sets of parents is more effective than an excellent plan supported by one. Work together in the best interest of the children.
- Never, under any circumstances, bad mouth the other parent(s).
- The children are going back and forth and having to re-adjust each time. Put yourself in their shoes and be empathetic to their behaviors. Imagine yourself going back and forth. Create a plan for the transition.
- Model a United Front with children. It gives them security and safety.
- Somebody else will be raising your kids. You will get jealous. You will feel grief. Work as a team with the other parents, not against them.
- Spend individual time with each child. Go on "dates" to establish trust and communication.
- There will be issues with things feeling unfair! "You treat them better than me. You are taking their side. You love them more than me..." Realize that this is evident in all families, but much more so in blended/stepfamilies.

- There will be feelings of resentment, anger, and grief. Your spouse's children might seem to get in the middle or treat you negatively. Validate and use understanding.
- Have open communication/family meetings on a regular basis. Don't judge other's feelings or tell your children how they should feel.
- Discuss/explain general issues, but keep your kids out of the parent problems. Don't "parentify" or use your kids to communicate.
- Use the problem-solving process to address issues. Try to find a win-win solution for all.
- Don't push your children into creating a relationship with your spouse. Give your children the time, space and flexibility to adjust to the new situation.
- Don't forget your marriage by focusing exclusively on the family. Make alone time with your spouse consistently, and nurture your marital relationship.
- Never allow conflict to arise between adults in front of the kids.
- Devote time to develop traditions and rituals. In the process, the children acquire the security, self-esteem and strength to enjoy the challenges that lie ahead.
- Show unconditional love!

Blended families can be highly enjoyable. You have the opportunity to let your children see a loving and healthy relationship between two adults. Another recommendation I have is for you and your spouse to create a marital mission statement and family mission statement. There will be more on that topic in my next newsletter article.

If you are in a blended family and would like to seek individual, marital or family counseling, please call our EAP office to schedule an appointment.

Here are some helpful developmental guidelines from the National Stepfamily Resource Center:

- Young children under 10**
- Find the adjustment easier because they thrive on close, cohesive family relationships.
 - Are more accepting of a new adult in the family, especially when the adult is a positive influence.
 - Feel a sense of abandonment or competition if they think their parent is devoting more time and energy to the new spouse than to them.

- Adolescents aged 10-14**
- May have the most difficult time adjusting to a stepfamily.
 - Because of their sensitivity, stepparents need to be especially aware of having time to bond with them before stepping in as a disciplinarian or authority figure.

- Teenagers 15 or older**
- Need less parenting and may have less involvement in stepfamily life.
 - Prefer to separate from the family as they form their own identities.
 - Are less interested in closeness and bonding but may be disturbed by an active romance in their family.

It might be time to seek outside help for the entire family if:

- A child directs her anger upon a particular family member or openly resents a stepparent or parent
- One of the parents suffers from great stress and is unable to cope with a child's increased need for attention
- A stepparent or parent openly favors one of the children
- Members of the family derive no pleasure from usually enjoyable activities such as learning, going to school, working, playing, or being with friends and family.