

**How to Remove**  
**TOXIC**  
**PEOPLE**  
**From Your Life**

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LIFE EDITOR

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# Toxic People Are Contaminating Your Life

"You could get on a bus right now. I'll come with you."

I was 16 years old, and I was standing in the gift shop of Chicago's Field Museum with my best friend, J. She was visiting from out of state for the week, and we were making the rounds doing typical tourist stuff.

But her visit wasn't a happy one...because I wasn't happy. A year earlier, I had attempted suicide, and although I had lived, the biggest problem in my life hadn't gone anywhere.

My family.

J knew I was still depressed and hopeless. As we stood in the store surrounded by plastic dinosaur models and archeology books, she tried to convince me to run away. Right then. With just the clothes on my back.

But I didn't.

I didn't cut ties with my abusive family members until 7 years later. Why didn't I get out earlier?

## Well, that's complicated.

Sometimes people want to oversimplify these types of situations:

- "I would never stay with a man who cheated on me."
- "She's not your friend if she treats you that way."
- "Who cares if you're related? That behavior is unacceptable."

But these situations are never simple.

Toxic people make them difficult, and there's a good chance toxic people are contaminating your life right now.

Toxic people make every day a struggle. They rain on your parade, blow off your victories, cut you down, and let their negativity ooze over any bright and happy moment in your life. They may even physically or emotionally abuse you.

No one should have to put up with that kind of "pollution."

Grab your biohazard suit and get ready to clean up—it's time to remove the toxic people from your life! It's a dirty job, but so worth it in the end.

# WHAT ARE TOXIC PEOPLE?

The term "toxic people" covers all manner of bad people including:

- Abusers
- Bullies
- "Negative Nellies"
- Back-handed complimenters
- Two-faced people
- "One-Uppers"
- Liars
- Manipulators
- "Debby Downers"
- People who get off on being cruel
- Tormentors
- Underminers
- Frenemies

Toxic people are those individuals who poison your life with their negativity, gossip, abuse, selfishness, and other evil behavior.

And just like a real poison, after ingesting their "venom" you become sick and weak.

Toxic people are everywhere, so your task is to recognize them quickly so you can shut them out of your life or stop them from getting close to you in the first place.

# HOW TO RECOGNIZE TOXIC PEOPLE

The biggest sign that you've been in contact with a toxic person is how you feel immediately after the interaction.

Toxic people make you feel worse about yourself and your life so you're often left feeling angry, upset, depressed, hopeless, or generally frustrated.

And sometimes the toxic person poisons your life so gradually that you might not notice their bad effect on you until much later (sometimes years later!).

You might also feel an enormous sense of relief after your interaction, such as "Thank God that's over!" That reaction is your clue that this person is not adding value to your life.

## Easy Tips for Recognizing Toxic People

- **Evaluate how you feel before, during, and after being around someone.** How you feel is the biggest indicator as to whether this is a toxic person. Do you dread getting together? Do you look for excuses to leave when you're with this person? Do you feel relieved when your time together is over and/or angry that you met with them in the first place?
- **Ask yourself, "Is this person adding or subtracting happiness in my life?"** The people you spend your time with should make you feel happy and give you a positive feeling. Toxic people drag your mood down and do not positively enhance your life.
- **Do you feel forced to be around this person because of some kind of obligation?** Perhaps you can't stand this person, but you feel like you must be around them because he or she is a family member or spouse, a manager or coworker, a longtime friend, an authority figure, or a "gatekeeper" like the only person who answers the phone at a company. This person is considered toxic if you would never interact with them unless you had no other choice.
- **Is this person abusing you in some way?** You might not have bruises and black eyes, but this person could still be abusing you by calling you names and demeaning you, manipulating you with fear or guilt, or cutting off your options like insisting that you quit your job or stop seeing your friends. And if this person is physically abusing you, then they are certainly toxic!

Once you know how to recognize toxic people, you might start to notice them all around you.

- Your husband who calls you fat and pokes your belly in front of guests.
- Your coworker who takes credit for your ideas or "misplaces" that important file you need so you end up looking incompetent.

- That cute guy you're seeing who never takes you someplace nice and only seems to call you when he wants you-know-what.
- Your local auto mechanic who charged you double than what he charged your brother for the exact same part or service.
- That sort-of friend who hangs out with your group and constantly criticizes your parenting style.
- Your best friend who only calls you to complain about her marriage, her job, her weight, her dog, her financial woes...
- Your grown son who refuses to get a job, and you let him stay in your home rent-free and eat all your groceries.

It may feel like an impossible task to try to remove all these negative people from your life. They're EVERYWHERE! You might as well hole up in your house and never come out again.

### **Don't get discouraged!**

By doing some hard work now, you're ensuring that your future will be happier and brighter with far fewer negative people and experiences.

# REMOVING TOXIC PEOPLE FROM YOUR LIFE

If you've ever had to deal with a toxic person, you understand that removing them from your life is easier said than done.

That said, it CAN be done.

Here are some steps to help you break free. Obviously, if you are in a truly dangerous situation, please get professional help.

## First, are you the problem?

I know, I know. How could I say this? So-and-so in your life is the problem, not you. They're the terrible ones! I get it, and I believe you, but sometimes we can think that people are being hurtful when really it's just our misperception.

I tried to fix myself first. I acted kinder to my family members and treated them how I wanted to be treated. I focused on living a happier future together with mutual respect and love. I did this for YEARS, even after they continued to hurt me. I made an effort, and I realized that I was not the problem.

Then I knew I could continue without hesitation.

Make sure you've exhausted every way of "making it work" so you know you're not the problem. Of course, some toxic behaviors like physical abuse are clear indicators that the other person is the problem.

## Choose your time

Timing can be important. Me running away with J with no money, no food, and no place to stay would have been really stupid. I didn't want to live on the street. I knew I needed more resources, so I waited.

Because I waited, I was able to finish high school and then graduate college without any student loans. I gained a lot of strength by living on my own in college; strength that I would need later.

Some people may think it was cruel of me to bide my time and have my parents pay for my college in full, and then cut them out of my life. Well, I would gladly return their tuition money...as soon as they return my childhood.

Perhaps you need to wait until you're financially ready, such as when you want to divorce your spouse or leave a bad job. Take action now to save money so you can leave sooner.

What time is best for you to say goodbye to the toxic people you know?

Do you want to avoid spending time with them at an upcoming event?

Do you need them out of the way before you can move on to your next goal?

### Get as much support as possible

I relied on my husband, Chris, A LOT after I decided never to see my family again. He was a rock of strength in my life. He knew what I had been going through, and he made it much easier for me to pull myself together and create a happier future for myself.

**Warning: there will be people who won't agree with your choice to remove the toxic person from your life. Expect this to happen and plan for many sources of support.**

Do you have support in your life? If you're ditching a toxic friend, do you have more loving friends to turn to?

If you're removing yourself from a toxic work environment, do you have a support network of friends and family members to help you look for another job?

Are you seeing a therapist?

If you think you have no one to support you, remember that you always have me. Send me an email at [sage@sagegrayson.com](mailto:sage@sagegrayson.com) if you want to talk.

### Decide how you want your life to be now

You could run into other problems once the toxic people are out of your life. You might need to find new friends or activities. You might need to get a job to support yourself. You might need to do some serious soul searching to figure out how you can avoid letting other toxic people into your life.

Take as much time as you need to figure out how you want to feel every day. Do you want to feel happy and respected? Seek out people who make you feel that way.

It's easy to judge people in a bad situation and say that they should just get out. I hope you can understand why people need to remove toxic people from their lives at their own pace.



## CLEANING UP YOUR SELF-ESTEEM

Even after you've removed the toxic people from your life, you may still be feeling the effects of their emotional poison.

It's important for you to use this time to be good to yourself. Cleaning up your self-esteem is the first step to creating a new life for yourself without all that negativity.

### What are you feeling now?

Are you relieved? Happy? Feeling like a weight has been lifted off your shoulders?

Are you feeling empty? Do you have a vague sense of sadness but you're not sure why?

Are you angry? Do you feel like the time you spent with that person was wasted and you'll never get it back? Do you want to punch something (or someone!)?

It's perfectly normal to have a whole array of feelings at this point. Taking the time to shift through your emotions and rebuild your self-esteem is hugely important.

By reframing your role in the toxic situation, getting help, and perhaps choosing to forgive, you can start to design a life that supports you and your happiness.

# YOU ARE NOT A VICTIM

We've all had bad things happen to us. It's part of the human experience.

- Maybe you've experienced the death of a loved one.
- Maybe you've suffered a violent attack or accident.
- Maybe you've been accused of something you did not do.
- Maybe you've had your heart broken too many times to count.
- Maybe you were humiliated at work and subsequently fired.

It's a wonder we even get out of bed in the mornings!

With all the hurt, anger, helplessness, hopelessness, and despair we face in our lives, it's easy to feel sorry for ourselves.

I hate to break it to you, but I'm serving up a big ol' bowl of tough love.

Here's the truth: you are not a victim.

Did you get that? How 'bout one more time?

## **You are not a victim.**

It doesn't matter what's happened to you. You could be sitting on the witness stand right now pointing to the person who hurt you, and I'd still say the same thing—you are not a victim!

The problem with people who have been hurt (and that's everyone on the planet) is that we think we're special. We think our hurt is bigger than everyone else's hurt.

*They didn't go through what I've been through! They have no idea how it feels!*

And you're right, of course. No one knows exactly how you're feeling...the exact level of betrayal, anger, or misery.

But we all ARE hurting, just in our own way.

It's easier to go through life holding on to our hurt like a security blanket. We wrap ourselves with the label "VICTIM" and go to great lengths to make sure everyone else knows it.

But you're not a victim.

Victims are weak.

Victims have given up.

Victims relive the hurt over and over again like a broken record.

Victims let the hurt define them for the rest of their lives.

That's no way to live—fuck, that's not even living!

You've got to erase the term *victim* from your vocabulary. It's time to choose a new label; something empowering and strong!

Think about it. What's a better label? Keep saying it until it sounds true.

**You are a survivor! You are a thriver!**

You are a fighter, and you need to fight for the person you were before you labeled yourself as a victim.

Who was she? What did she believe in? Was she hopeful? Was there a light inside her?

Hell yes!

And I bet she'd be disappointed in how you're behaving now. Who do you think you are?

Only you can decide that, but one thing is certain:

You are not a victim. So stop acting like one.

# HONOR YOURSELF BY CHOOSING TO FORGIVE

I'd like to start this chapter by asking you to think about something that happened to you that you feel is completely unforgivable.

What was the situation? Who was involved? How did you feel afterwards?

Perhaps someone stole from you, or destroyed a priceless possession, or spread vicious rumors about you.

Maybe you suffered emotional cruelty, physical abuse, or rape.

It might not seem like it now, but choosing to forgive the person who did that deplorable thing to you is one of the most loving things you can do for yourself.

**Forgiveness is not about changing the other person, getting them to apologize, or making them feel as terrible as they made you feel.**

It is about honoring yourself and choosing love and compassion over hate and anger.

## Excuses We Use to Avoid Forgiveness

- **They were wrong.** This might be true. The other person might have done something truly horrific to you. Forgiveness doesn't mean that you condone what they have done; it means that you will not continue to be the victim long after the actual event.
- **They don't deserve it.** They probably don't deserve your forgiveness, but being forgiving isn't about them. By choosing to forgive, you are doing something kind for yourself.
- **I don't want to let go of my anger.** I really get this. Sometimes it feels like our anger and hurt is the only thing we can hold on to. The Buddha said, "Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned." Let it go.
- **They're dead or I don't know where they are.** The person who wronged you doesn't have to be close by or alive for you to forgive them. Even if they are still in the picture, I urge you NOT to go up to them and say, "I forgive you for [lying to me, burning down my house, etc.]." Forgiveness is personal and should be experienced by yourself.
- **They wouldn't forgive me.** Maybe you both were wrong. Friendships can end when both parties feel like the other person is to blame. Even if they won't forgive you for your part of the mess, you can still focus your energy on forgiving them.

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## Benefits of Forgiveness

- **Less stress.** You might actually feel your chest open up when you forgive someone. It may feel like you can take a full breath for the first time in years. Imagine how much less stressed you'll be when you stop reliving the other person's transgression in your mind over and over again.
- **More happiness.** This should be obvious, but when you remove hatred and anger from your life, you create an open space where happiness can come in. Perhaps you never enjoyed your job because you couldn't forgive a coworker for stealing a promotion you wanted. When you let go and forgive, you can experience all the good things about your current job and be happy with where you are right now.
- **Peace to move on.** Whenever I forgive someone, I feel at peace. This serenity allows me to leave that unfortunate experience behind me and move on to better things.
- **Learning a life lesson.** No one wants to experience hurt, but by choosing forgiveness, you can see it as an opportunity to learn. For instance, if you are forgiving an abusive ex-spouse, you are also learning to trust your instincts and be aware of "red flags" in future relationships.
- **Growing and being the bigger person.** OK, this is the self-righteous reason to forgive someone. When you are forgiving, you can feel good with the knowledge that you are the bigger person by being open to love and forgiveness. Many people refuse to forgive, so be proud that you've made this choice.

There's no right or wrong way to forgive someone, but I caution you against confronting the person you want to forgive. It doesn't matter if that person wants your forgiveness or if they think they've done nothing wrong.

In my experience, forgiveness is more meaningful when you go through the process on your own.

Forgiveness might not be easy, but you are worthy of a life without anger, grudges, and resentment.

What's stopping you from forgiving someone?

# FORGIVENESS EXERCISES

## Write a Letter

Write a letter to the person you want to forgive. Be as detailed as you want. Get all of your anger and hurt feelings out of you and onto the paper. When you are finished, fold up the paper and write "I forgive you" on the outside.

Then burn the letter, shred it, bury it in the backyard, or otherwise dispose of it. You are, in fact, disposing of the burden that has been holding you down.

## Perform a Ritual

You might already know a forgiveness ritual or practice from your own religion. If not, here's a simple one. Sit at a table and put a candle in the center of the table. Light the candle and look at the flame while saying, "[Person's name], I forgive you for [blank]. I let go of my [anger, sadness, whatever emotions you are feeling]. I wish you peace, and I release you."

Say as much as you need to say until you feel calm and content. Then blow out the flame. Imaging your bad feelings leaving your life as the smoke blows away.

## Meditate

Sit somewhere quiet and focus on the bad situation. Take a long, slow breath in through your nose, then exhale through your mouth. On the exhale, visualize the bad memories/feelings flowing out of you. Imagine the picture in your mind getting smaller and dimmer with each exhale until you feel ready to forgive and let go.

Sit and focus on opening your heart and mind to forgiveness and filling the space inside you where the bad memories once were.

## ASK FOR HELP AND SUPPORT

As I mentioned before, not everyone will be happy with your choice to remove the toxic person from your life or limit your time with them.

But it is essential that you find people who do love and support you in your pursuit to live a life without negativity.

Spend more time with friends and family members you make you feel good about yourself. Don't use this time to trash-talk the toxic person. Instead, focus on creating new happy memories and focus on the things that bring you joy.

If you've been abused, search for support groups or counselors online who specialize in your type of trauma. There's no shame in seeing professionals who are trained to help you recover from your ordeal.

**Consider hiring a coach if you need to find direction or motivation after removing the toxic person from your life.**

I've helped women just like you get motivated to become the type of people they've only imagined. For more information, please visit <http://sagegrayson.com>.

## STOP POLLUTING OTHER PEOPLE'S LIVES

This section of the book is one you might be reluctant to read, but it is something I felt was vitally important so I included it.

I want you to spend most of your time recognizing and removing toxic people from your life, but when you get a quiet moment alone with your thoughts, I want you to consider if you might be a toxic person yourself.

### Ouch!

That's a tough idea to consider. Isn't it everyone else who's making your life miserable? Since you know how damaging toxic people can be, there's no way you could secretly be one, right?

Well, maybe you're not a full-blown toxic person who is destroying people's lives and spewing hatred and negativity over the world.

But you might have some toxic tendencies that need to be dealt with so you won't hurt those around you.



# NO DUMPING: WHY NO ONE BENEFITS FROM COMPLAINING

I've lived in San Francisco for a few years now, but it still feels like another world to me. Take for instance the blue signs on the ground with a picture of a crab that read, "No Dumping."

It's not clear to me what the crab is supposed to convey. Do some inconsiderate people throw live or eaten crabs down the drain? Is it a reminder that our pollution affects our animal neighbors?

I think the most likely reason is it's a warning that there are monster crabs living in the sewers who will scuttle out of their murky lairs to pinch us to death if we dump our garbage on them.

That vision of our crab overlords got me thinking of other ways people dump their garbage on us. Does this sound familiar?

- You come home from work exhausted and your wife greets you not with a hug and a kiss, but with a rant about how awful her day was.
- Your best friend calls you during lunch not to talk about last night's game, but to list all the reasons his new boss is an SOB and didn't deserve that promotion.
- Your sister and her boyfriend broke up (again) but instead of a pep talk and night out with you, she'd rather cry on your shoulder about how all men are jerks, she'll never get married, and she's doomed to become a crazy cat lady.

## These people are dumping on you.

They are focused on all the problems (real or imagined) in their lives, and they let their toxic rantings spew out of them and all over you.

These dumpers are not looking for advice or a 2-way conversation—it's just an opportunity for them to vent to an audience (you). In their minds, they are right and everyone else is wrong.

The dumpers may feel better "getting it all out," but I guarantee you won't.

## You'll feel like a big crab.

I'm not saying you should avoid people who genuinely want to have a conversation with you or who are asking for advice. But you should limit your time spent with chronic dumpers. Their bad moods will rub off on you, and you might even become a dumper to someone else.

The next time you're overwhelmed and feel like dumping on someone, try one of these tricks.

## Breathe

No, really. Take a few deep breaths to calm down. Count to 10 slowly and deliberately. Having a short break to breathe could stop you from firing off a nasty e-mail or saying something you'll regret later. If you need to, get out of there and give yourself some physical breathing space.

## Think About What You Love

When I need a positive boost, I list in my mind all the things I love or am thankful for (or list them in my gratitude journal). It could be anything—the clothes I'm wearing, being able to see, having access to healthy food, my favorite pen, being loved by the people in my life. This exercise makes me realize how good my life is.

## Focus on the Other Person

Instead of dumping your problems on your friend, ask her about her day. Where did she get those shoes? Did she have fun on her vacation? Would she like to catch a movie this weekend? By focusing on the other person, you can stop yourself from selfishly hogging the conversation.

These tricks work if you're the victim of a dumper too. To get over a bad mood caused by someone dumping on you, remember to breathe, think about the things you love, and focus on the other person by leading the conversation to a happier topic. Maybe your friend hates her job, but how was that date she went on?

## 5 SNEAKY WAYS TO STOP JUDGING OTHERS

Sometimes when I'm running errands or walking around town, I'll catch myself being really hard on the people around me:

- She's too fat.
- His clothes are ugly.
- That mom doesn't know how to raise her kids.
- Only a jerk would park his car like that.
- Who does that bitch think she is?

Wow, I'm quite a charmer, right?

Of course, I never say those mean things out loud, but I feel ashamed when I think bad thoughts about other people.

**It's easy to judge people, but we need to remember that although passing judgment is a human trait, we don't need to give in to it as much as we do.**

And by taking a step back and observing our actions, we can become better versions of ourselves. Let's try to be more monk-like and less asshole-like.

Here are some sneaky ways to shift your perception and stop judging others.

### Give Them the Benefit of the Doubt

Let's say you're driving down the highway and another driver speeds up and cuts you off. You might think that the other driver is completely inconsiderate, but try giving him the benefit of the doubt.

Honestly, you don't know him, what his life is like, or the circumstances that led him to cut you off. Maybe he's desperately trying to get his pregnant wife to the hospital. Admitting that you don't know the other person or his situation might stop you from passing judgment. The next time someone cuts you off, say a little prayer and wish them well.

### Use Mirroring

Often times, we'll judge other people because we're the ones feeling insecure. If you're out in public and you see a morbidly obese woman, you might make a snap judgment that she's lazy or a slob. When you start to feel that way, try the mirroring trick. Pretend that you're not looking at another person, but instead you're looking into a mirror.

How does that change how you feel? Would you hope that people would show you compassion despite your size? If you're ashamed of the weight you've gained, you

might be prone to judging other overweight people because you don't want to look like them. Think about it—is your criticism about them or you?

### Pretend They're Your Best Friend

We're can be very judgmental inside our own minds. I bet the voices in your head say some nasty comments about the people around you (or even yourself!). But would you ever say those mean things to your best friend? No way!

You love and care about your best friend, so you would show her compassion and empathy instead of insulting her. When you feel like judging others, pretend that the other person is your best friend. This simple idea will instantly shift your perception.

### Find a Million Things to Love

What if the person you're judging is making it really, really, really hard for you to not judge her? Perhaps she's an annoying coworker or a person on the other end of the political spectrum. If you're being immersed in negativity, flip the switch in your mind over to extreme positivity.

Find something to love about that person, no matter how small or insignificant. Maybe that annoying coworker has a great wardrobe, or is good to her kids, or never leaves a mess in the break room. Try as hard as you can to come up with things to love about her, and soon your negative thoughts will disappear.

### Get to Know Them

Have you ever taken a self-defense class? Besides teaching you how to protect yourself from an attacker, the self-defense instructor will teach you about what to do if you're kidnapped or held hostage. One way to stay alive in a dangerous situation is to tell your captor your name and other details about your life. By doing so, you'll force your attacker to acknowledge that you're a real person with feelings, a family, a life...and you'll be more likely to survive your ordeal.

Now, judging strangers is no hostage situation, but if you make the effort to get to know the person you're criticizing, you'll see that you probably have something in common. And it might just be that you're both human beings who don't deserve to be judged or bullied.

I admit that it's impossible to completely stop judging other people, but these tips have helped me become more mindful and aware of my thoughts.

# Thank You!

Thank you for downloading How to Remove Toxic People From Your Life. I'm sending you love and positivity as you break free from your abusers.

If you need someone to talk to, you can reach me at [sage@sagegrayson.com](mailto:sage@sagegrayson.com).

Sage Grayson, Life Editor



## Who's Sage?

Hey there! I'm Sage Grayson, a former book editor turned life and business coach. I'm a Life Editor . . . and so are you!

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