



Impostor Syndrome

every connection matters™



What is Impostor Syndrome?

Impostor syndrome, also referred to as perceived fraudulence, describes an internal struggle within an individual who believes that they are not as competent as others perceive them. Individuals experiencing impostor syndrome may feel that one day they will be caught out for being a fraud, as they believe that they have only made it to where they are through luck or chance.

Impostor syndrome is widely recognised as an experience that can impact anyone, regardless of their age, accomplishments, social status, or skill level.

Impostor syndrome is a common and frequently occurring behavioural health condition. The implications of such a condition may include adverse impacts on the individual's professional performance and wellbeing, contributing to experiences of anxiety, depression, and burnout.

Studies have found approximately 70 percent of people will experience an episode of impostor syndrome at one point in their lives. This experience is commonly found in both men and women, from adolescents to late-stage professionals, and is more often experienced within ethnic minorities.

Recognising Signs of Impostor Syndrome

Impostor syndrome is experienced as the feeling of conflict between the way others perceive you and the way you perceive yourself. This may express itself or be felt in many ways, such as:

- Self-doubting or self-sabotage
- Placing unrealistic expectations on yourself
- Being overly critical of small mistakes
- Assigning personal success to external factors or luck
- Playing down or minimising your work and achievements
- Reacting excessively emotional to forms of constructive criticism

In line with these experiences, it is also acknowledged that there are five different ways that impostor syndrome may present itself in an individual. These include:

1. **The Perfectionist:** individuals that are never satisfied with their work and constantly feel as though it could be better
2. **The Superhero:** individuals that experience feelings of great inadequacy, which push them to work as hard as they possibly can
3. **The Expert:** individuals that feel confident in their level of understanding, and will often strive to learn more whilst constantly underrating their level of competence
4. **The Natural Genius:** individuals that often set goals well above the expectations of those around them and heavily criticise themselves when they do not succeed
5. **The Soloist:** individuals that prefer to work in isolation; they will likely reject offers of assistance as they believe accepting such offers would be seen as a sign of incompetence or weakness.

CALL 1300 364 273 SMS 0401 33 77 11

www.acaciaconnection.com
info@acaciaconnection.com



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Responding to Symptoms Within Yourself

When we are experiencing impostor syndrome, we often default to working harder to try and combat feelings of inadequacy; however, this often adds fuel to an already growing fire. Instead, you may find it more effective to consider the following approaches.

Acknowledge Feelings

Identifying these difficult feelings and bringing them into a more conscious space can help in many ways. It can create an opportunity to discuss your experience with colleagues or mentors who can provide an external perspective on the situation. Sharing such thoughts may also help to reduce any overwhelming feelings and open up the opportunity for a shared experience with others.

Challenge Doubts

When negative thoughts begin to arise, challenge them with the perspective of being fact or being a personal belief. Often looking at the clear evidence of success, hard work, and praise of others can help combat internal thoughts which have very little support to them. Think of how hard it would be to trick all of your co-workers for such long periods of time and have them give you false praise.

Form Connections

Going against the urge to do things by yourself allows you to access a supportive network of people. This can reduce pressure, bring guidance opportunities, and lighten the load of tasks.

Self-Compassion

Each person's experience of work is unique and different, just like life outside of work. For this reason, people will be better at some tasks than others and vice-versa.

It's important that you practice self-compassion when negative self-talk arises. Imagine what you would say to a colleague who had struggled with a task; very rarely would we greet them with the same harsh criticism that we show to ourselves, but instead with compassion and care. One strategy is imagining what you would say to this colleague, then see if you can turn that around and say it back to yourself.

Supporting Someone Experiencing Impostor Syndrome Normalise Impostor Feelings

As discussed above, the experience of impostor syndrome is one that most people will encounter at some point in their lives. Sharing this information with someone can help them not feel as isolated or as though there is something wrong with them.

Share Your Own Experience

A way to follow up with the previous suggestion is sharing personal stories of impostor syndrome, which, once again, can help normalise their experience.

Challenge Negative Self-Talk With Evidence

Provide the individual with clear examples to challenge and counteract their negative views of themselves. These may include their strong characteristics, their moments of success, and commonly held positive perspectives of them.

Encourage Accessing Support

If the individual is struggling with the burden of impostor syndrome, you can suggest they access support from a professional who can help to work with them on these difficult thought processes. They can access 24/7 support through their EAP.

