



Impostor Syndrome

Impostor syndrome also referred to as perceived fraudulence, describes an internal struggle within an individual who believes 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 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. It is commonly found in both men and women, from adolescents to late-stage professionals, and is more often experienced within ethnic minorities.

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.

Types of Impostor Syndrome

There are five different ways impostor syndrome may present itself in an individual. These include:

The Expert:

Individuals who feel confident in their level of understanding, and will often strive to learn more whilst constantly underrating their level of competence.

The Superhero:

Individuals who experience feelings of great inadequacy, which push them to work as hard as they possibly can.

The Perfectionist:

Individuals who are never satisfied with their work and constantly feel as though it could be better.

The Natural Genius:

Individuals who often set goals well above the expectations of those around them and heavily criticise themselves when they do not succeed.

The Soloist:

Individuals who prefer to work in isolation. They likely reject offers of assistance as they believe it would be seen as a sign of incompetence or weakness.

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 success to external factors or luck
- Playing down or minimising your achievements
- Reacting excessively emotionally to forms of constructive criticism.





Responding to Symptoms Within Yourself

When 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 and acknowledging difficult feelings can help in many ways. It can create an opportunity to discuss your experience with colleagues who can provide an external perspective. Sharing such thoughts also helps reduce overwhelming feelings and allows for a shared experience with others.

Challenge Doubts

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

Form Connections

Going against the urge to do things 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 work experience is unique and different, just like life outside work. For this reason, people are better at some tasks than others and vice-versa. It's important that you practice self-compassion when negative self-talk arises.

70%

of people will experience an episode of impostor syndrome.

Imagine what you would say to a colleague who had struggled with a task; very rarely do we greet them with the same harsh criticism that we show ourselves, but instead with compassion and care.

Supporting Someone Experiencing Impostor Syndrome

Normalise Impostor Feelings

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

Share Your Own Experience

A way to follow up with the previous suggestion is to share personal stories of impostor syndrome to help normalise their experience.

Challenge Negative Self-Talk With Evidence

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

Encourage Accessing Support

Remind them that they can access support from a mental health professional who can help to work with them on these difficult thought processes. Acacia can provide 24/7 support through their EAP.