



Understanding Imposter Syndrome & Steps to Breaking Its Cycle

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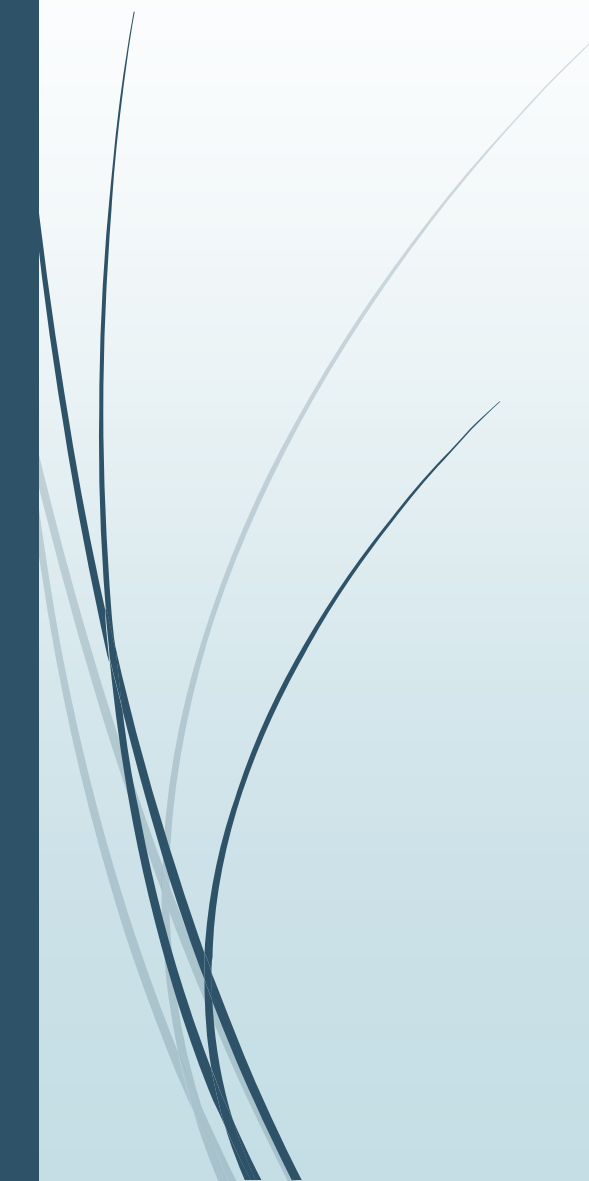
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Imposter Syndrome Defined

What Impostor Syndrome Feels Like



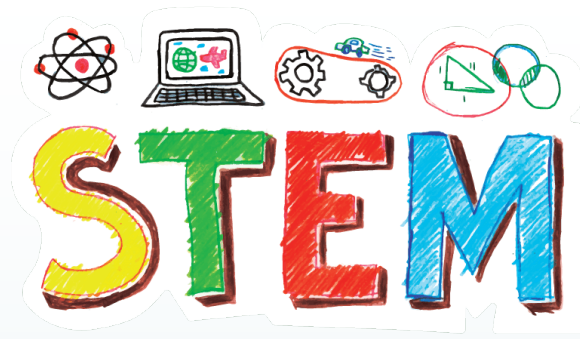
- ▶ Internalizing a belief that one's success is due to luck or something undeserving despite being accomplished, excelled, achieved and succeeded
- ▶ Not as competent or intelligent as others might think or perceive
- ▶ Soon enough others will discover the truth
- ▶ Poser, fraud, phony
- ▶ Manifests stress, anxiety, fear, negative self-talk/doubt, nervousness, depression, feelings of inadequacy



Signs you may be experiencing it...



- ▶ Not believing you have earned your success through your own efforts and instead attributing it to chance/luck or other outside variables
- ▶ Feeling inadequate in terms of intelligence, ability, education, experiences, achievements
- ▶ Unable to internalize accomplishments and be proud of ones own intelligence, abilities, competencies, and skills
- ▶ Exaggerating your flaws and failings
- ▶ Feeling that one has to be the best in order to be valued
- ▶ Feeling like you're not enough/qualified or have reached levels beyond your perceived abilities
- ▶ Avoiding new opportunities/challenges for fear that you won't be able to "measure up"
- ▶ Observing that you have a different background/gender than other people and you feel paralyzed by comparison



“In STEM, imposter syndrome is more common because the rate of change and advancement is so rapid, no human could ever keep up – but we feel we should.”

Results in...

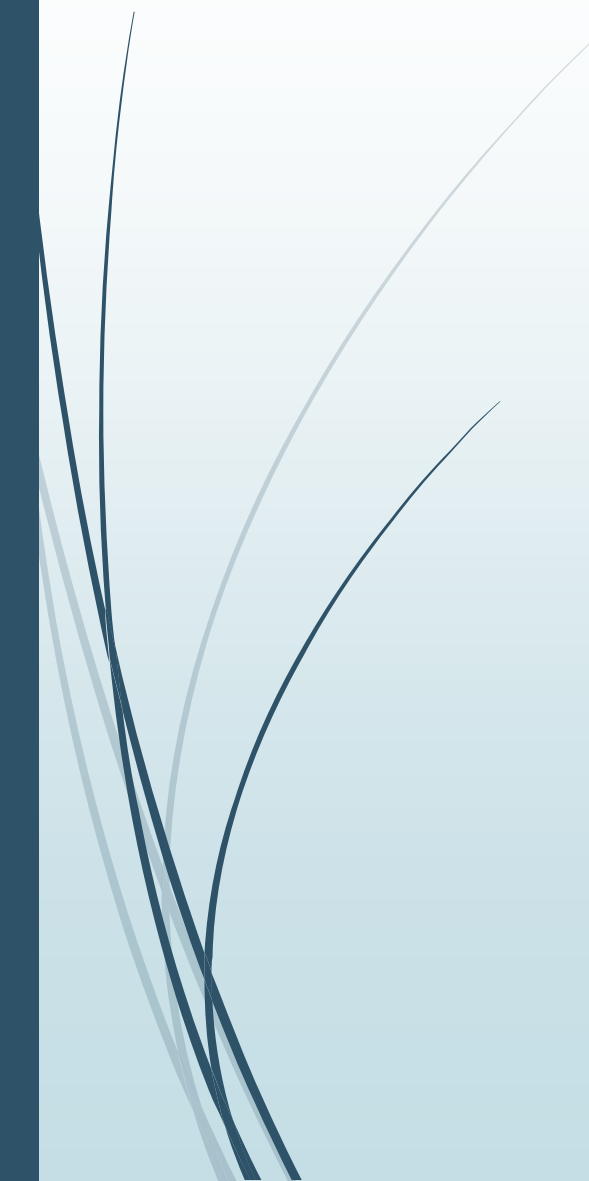
- ▶ Overwhelmed with self-doubt
- ▶ Believing failure won't be accepted
- ▶ Losing faith in your abilities
- ▶ Comparing yourself to others and self-sabotaging
- ▶ Losing sight that competency comes from learning from others rather than competing
- ▶ Not asking for help or sharing workload/working as a team - isolating
- ▶ Internal struggle that causes a feeling of being trapped or stuck
- ▶ Procrastination or over-preparing to the point of stress



70% of adults experience feeling like an imposter at least once in their lifetime

Imposter Syndrome makes you feel like you aren't good at what you are doing. But oftentimes, these feelings are based on fear, not reality

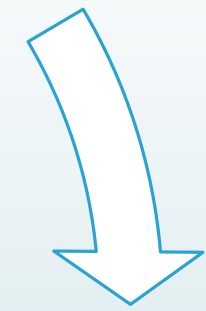




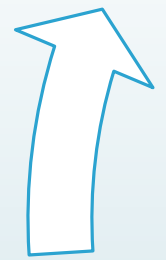
**new
project**

Increased self
doubt, anxiety,
feeling like a
fraud

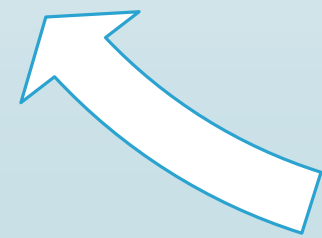
Imposter Syndrome Cycle



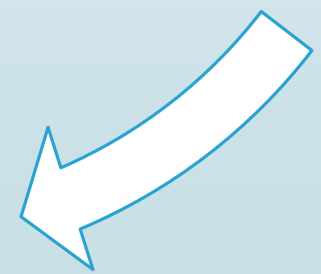
Anxiety, procrastination,
over-preparation



Rationalization: "I
was lucky;"
"somebody else
would have
done a better
job"



Project
completed -
relief, sense of
accomplishment



The Real Deal – You BELONG!



- Failure is a key component of learning – especially in STEM
- Some students have never experienced failure/low grades before – college may be the first time
- More of your peers are experiencing failure than you think – you are not alone
- Imposter Syndrome is mindset cycle – literally psych ourselves out of what we are perfectly capable of learning/performing
- The cycle gets re-enforced and proves itself because of the mindset
- Very prominent in women in engineering/computer science and other students who don't see others similar to themselves in the peers, co-workers, instructors, etc.
- We are in control of our thoughts and beliefs
- STEM is challenging; coursework is hard; instructors aloof at times; peers not all alike; bigger bridges to cross;
- You are capable! You belong! You are not a poser!
- Don't let anything convince you otherwise – especially yourself

Breaking the Cycle – Six STEPS

- ▶ STEP 1 – Focus on the Facts
 - ▶ Recognize the feelings associated with Imposter Syndrome as rooted in fear, not fact
 - ▶ Focus on your strengths and recognize failure is a fact of learning
 - ▶ Do not compare yourself to others and find fault with yourself, fueling feeling not good enough or not belonging
 - ▶ Focus on what others are saying/doing and learning from them, not what you don't know compared to them
- ▶ STEP 2 – Acknowledge, Validate and Let Go
 - ▶ Don't dismiss/ignore your feelings; acknowledge and honor them; feeling unqualified doesn't mean you are
 - ▶ It is OK to acknowledge your feeling inadequate and validate that is OK, and then let go of them
 - ▶ Minimize social media – these images are most times exaggerated, unrealistic
 - ▶ Don't fight the feels of not belonging; lean into them, accept them, and grow through them



Breaking the Cycle – Six STEPS

- ▶ STEP 3 – Reframe your Thoughts
 - ▶ Recognize how powerful thoughts are; they shape our reality – positively and negatively; reshape them and change your reality
 - ▶ Write out your accomplishments, abilities, skills, successes – post them somewhere you see everyday; honor them within yourself
 - ▶ Take baby steps; don't focus on perfection; do things reasonably well and reward your reasonable successes
 - ▶ Turn thoughts of attributing success to luck into feelings of gratitude
- ▶ STEP 4 – Share How You're Feeling (sometimes easier said than done)
 - ▶ Talk to others you trust, irrational beliefs fester when they are hidden/not talked about
 - ▶ Seek out a mentor; someone in STEM and who you can look up to and talk openly with
 - ▶ Seek out resources at your college such as the Health Center



Breaking the Cycle – Six STEPS

- STEP 5 – Learn from Your Peers and Help Others
 - “No one is a master of everything, but everyone is a master of something.”
 - When working with your peers, exchange knowledge while mastering new skills
 - Honor the value you add while learning new things from your peers
 - Work together to expand knowledge; not as a measure of yourself and your abilities
 - Helps others with feelings of “not belonging” or inferiority; reach out to others who seem alone and bring them into the fold of others
- STEP 6 – Pat Yourself on the Back
 - Celebrate your achievements and sink yourself into feeling good about yourself, even if it feels awkward; practice kudos to yourself
 - Share these successes with people who will re-enforce good feelings surrounding these successes – trade kudos for one another
 - Use these feelings of pride in yourself as a source of empowerment and confidence to propel you forward
 - Never let feelings of inferiority or not belonging stop you from pursuing your goals; keep your inner critic at bay; refuse to be stopped and maintain a mindset that supports that drive