

Imposter Phenomenon

When are they going to find me out?



**RAISE resources for
Professional Wellness**



RAISE
PROFESSIONAL WELLNESS

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Why should you care?	4
Core aspects of Imposter Phenomenon	5
Take Action	8
Further Information	9
Find Out More	10

Introduction

Imposter Phenomenon (IP) is a psychological presentation cluster that affects many individuals, causing them to doubt their abilities and feel like a fraud despite evidence of their accomplishments.

It is characterized by feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and fear of being exposed as a fraud in professional settings.

People experiencing IP often attribute their success to luck or external factors rather than acknowledging their own skills and hard work. This can lead to feelings of anxiety, stress, and a constant fear of being discovered as an imposter.

IP can affect anyone regardless of their level of expertise or achievements. It is commonly found among high achievers, perfectionists, and individuals in competitive environments where there is constant pressure to succeed.

Recognizing IP is the first step towards overcoming it. By understanding that these feelings are common and not indicative of one's true abilities, individuals can develop strategies to combat self-doubt and build confidence in their skills.

Why should you care?

It's important to remember that everyone experiences moments of self-doubt from time to time. However, imposter phenomenon is related to a chronic lack of belief in one's own abilities .

IP can have a significant impact on one's self-esteem, confidence, and overall well-being. It can hinder personal growth and professional development, as individuals may shy away from new opportunities or hesitate to take on challenges due to fear of failure or being discovered as an imposter.

IP is not based on reality but rather on distorted perceptions of oneself. By acknowledging these feelings and reframing negative thoughts, individuals can begin to overcome IP and embrace their true capabilities.

Remember, you are not alone in experiencing IP. Many successful individuals have dealt with it at some point in their lives. It's essential to seek support if needed. With time and effort, it is possible to overcome IP and build confidence in your abilities.

Core aspects of Imposter Phenomenon

There are 6 common features that are normally discussed as being indicative of the IP cluster.

Imposter Cycle

The key to understanding the Imposter Cycle is that it is an example of double-bind thinking, through drawing faulty conclusions from behavioural over-preparation and procrastination.

The thinking goes something like this, *'I must prepare more than everyone else because I am an imposter. Because I prepare more than everyone else, I am an imposter.'*

This is a very neat piece of circular thinking – the proof of identity makes an individual work in a certain way, which therefore proves they are that identity.

Perfectionism

This describes the *'need to be the best'*. It is the mindset of the pathologically competitive, leading them to create standards and goal setting which are beyond attainable. Essentially, an individual whips themselves to a level of professional martyrdom, chasing an ideal of excellence which is well-beyond the healthy.

Super heroism

Merge the two features above and you get a super-hero. Someone who is over preparing and ready to meet unattainable requests with little concern for their wellbeing. Unable to accept that being '*just average*' is a perfectly good way to live, they regularly and quite happily throw themselves under the bus.



Fear of failure

No-one enjoys failing, but in this case, failure is pathologically understood. This fear is well beyond being concerned about making a mistake or getting something wrong, but reaches almost phobic levels. Making a mistake can be equated to a life or death experience in an individual's head. Worse, when aligned to their hyper-competitiveness, i.e., being the best, anything less than being the '*elite*', means that they perceive themselves as being failures in life.

Denial of competency and capability

This provides an important means to differentiate the IP from the uber competitiveness of the Narcissist or the Machiavellian. In the case of the last two, they have zero doubt that they are capable and competent.



Fear of Success

The reasoning is: *'if I am an Imposter, I'd better not be visible, or I'll get caught out'.*

However, it can also be linked to not wanting to be a leader or responsible for project management.

When someone steps into their own professional self, they must also accept that they are going to be vulnerable to criticism and yet, still have to be ok with that. For someone with IP, that can be a very daunting experience.

Take Action

Recognizing the symptoms of IP early is essential for taking action towards preventing career progression issues and burnout.

It's important if you are experiencing the types of behaviours and thoughts above, that you seek professional help.

Often these limiting self-beliefs have developed over along period of time and will require support to make sense of and replace.

A good therapist will work with you on issues such as:

- the physiological symptoms of anxiety
- beliefs about perfectionism
- role-play alternative strategies
- reality testing about success

The good news is if dealt with in a structured way, IP can be overcome and new habits embedded which will grant you the freedom to enjoy your professional life and success.

Why Imposter Phenomenon?

You've probably heard the term Imposter Syndrome.

This term suggests this is an official diagnosis and something a person '*has*'. This isn't the case. We use

Imposter Phenomenon because it is only a handy shorthand to describe certain common work-related beliefs and behaviours which are always ready to be changed!

Further information

Dr Pauline Rose Clance's [website](#)

Dr. Clance was the one of the original researchers, along with Dr. Suzanne Imes, who in 1978 identified the cluster of thinking which they titled 'Imposter Phenomenon'.

On her website, you will find the most current research on Imposter Phenomenon and links to her many books on Amazon.

Need a Confidence Boost?

Get a quick confidence reset by checking out our short reframe video [here](#).

Part of our RAISE Professional Wellness program.



Find Out More

My Freedom To Thrive is committed to helping professionals reclaim their work and personal lives by supporting them during their career journey.



We develop a range of educational informational to encourage personal, professional and organisational health.

Our belief is that when professionals have access to the right resources and the right support, they can achieve professional health and happiness.

Our aim is to help every professional and organisation learn how to prioritise well-being, nurture resilience and take personal control of wellness by simply following easy, everyday steps.

My Freedom To Thrive would like to invite you to **join us in our mission.**

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Dr Anne".

AFBPSS,
Chartered Psychologist

