

FROM SELF-DOUBT TO SELF-COMPASSION

CULTIVATING
MINDFUL
SELF-COMPASSION
TO COPE WITH
IMPOSTER SYNDROME



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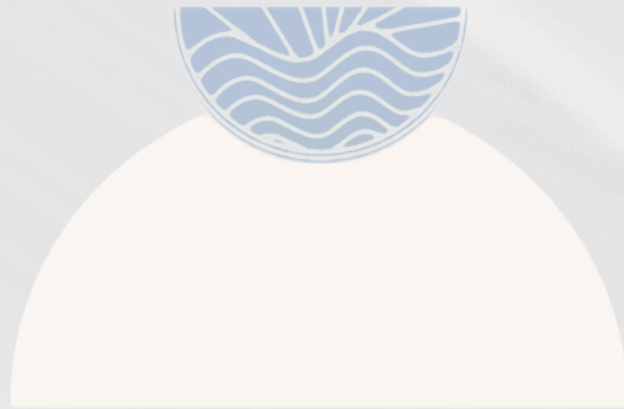
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IMPOSTER SYNDROME



WHAT IS IMPOSTER SYNDROME

Imposter phenomenon was first identified by Drs. Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes in 1978 and later came to be known in pop culture as “imposter syndrome.”

They described it as **“an internal experience of intellectual phoniness”** that persists despite objective evidence to the contrary.

People who have “imposter syndrome” are intelligent and successful but often doubt themselves and their legitimacy despite their accomplishments resulting in a fear of being “found out.”

Imposter Syndrome impacts 70% of people.



WHAT IS IMPOSTER SYNDROME

The Dunning-Kruger effect is a failure in self-awareness where people with limited competence wrongly overestimate their knowledge, skills, or abilities.

Because these individuals are lacking competence, they lack the ability to recognize their own deficiencies and don't question themselves whereas people who are self-aware doubt themselves even when they are competent.

Imposter syndrome is common among high-achievers and may even correlate with success.

Accomplishments don't disconfirm "imposter syndrome." In fact, the more we learn, the more we become aware of how little we know.

The more success people experience, the more fraudulent they can feel.

REFLECTING ON IMPOSTER SYNDROME

When does your imposter syndrome flare up?

What does your inner critic say?

REFLECTING ON IMPOSTER SYNDROME

If you look to the places where imposter syndrome shows up most, you'll find that it is the very same things that matter to you the most.

Where do you worry about being inadequate?

How does this relate to what deeply matters to you?

*THE 5 TYPES OF
IMPOSTERS*



5

TYPES OF IMPOSTERS

In the book *The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women*, Dr. Valerie Young suggests that there are five different types of imposters: The Expert, the Perfectionist, the Soloist, the Natural Genius, and the Superhuman.

1

THE EXPERT

Believes their competence is measured by how much knowledge, skill, expertise, and experience they have—and it never feels like enough.

2

THE PERFECTIONIST

Believes things must be done perfectly with anything falling short being unacceptable—and everything inevitably falls short.

5

TYPES OF IMPOSTERS

3

THE SOLOIST

Believes they must succeed without any help from others and that accomplishments only count if they're achieved on one's own—but nothing is achieved fully independently.

4

THE NATURAL GENIUS

Believes that competence means being able to excel without effort—but most things take effort.

5

THE SUPERHUMAN

Believes that competence means being able to perfectly manage everything on their own with ease—but no one manages everything on their own without ease.

**EACH TYPE RELIES ON A DIFFERENT
COMPENSATORY STRATEGY THAT ULTIMATELY
BACKFIRES.**

REFLECTING ON IMPOSTER SYNDROME

Some people respond to feelings of imposterism by achieving more. Others respond by avoiding challenges.

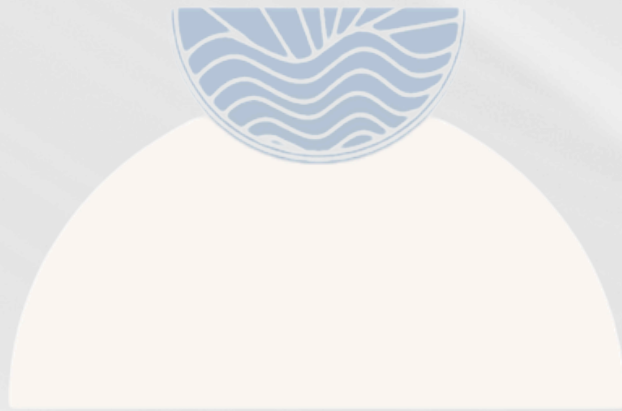
Either

The more we achieve the more we feel like an imposter and the more we need to achieve in order to ward off feelings of imposterism

or

We avoid challenging things as a way of avoiding confirming our fears of imposterism, but doing so reinforces feelings of failure and confirms our negative beliefs and assumptions about ourselves.

*THE 5 TYPES OF
AVOIDERS*



5

TYPES OF AVOIDERS

Psychologist, Dr. Jill Stoodard in her book, *Imposter No More* identifies five different types of avoiders: The Doers, the Hiders, the Puslives, the Otherer, and the Thinker.

1

THE DOER

Does constantly as a way of avoiding difficult thoughts and feelings for example, perusing endless knowledge, skills, certifications, degrees, etc as a way of running from feelings of inadequacy.

2

THE HIDER

Hides and avoids uncomfortable thoughts and feelings by distract themselves with things like social media, binge watching tv, playing video games, sleeping, etc.

5

TYPES OF AVOIDERS

3

THE PULSIVES

Seeks relief from difficult thoughts and feelings through impulsive behavior like addiction (substances, binge eating, compulsive shopping, gambling, sex), body-focused repetitive behaviors (skin picking, hair pulling, nail biting), obsessive-compulsive behaviors (counting, checking or other rituals), and self-harm (cutting).

4

THE OTHERER

Relies on others to avoid uncomfortable thoughts and feelings by constantly seeking reassurance and people-pleasing.

5

THE THINKER

Avoids uncomfortable thoughts and feelings by worrying, ruminating and overanalyzing everything, which gives a sense of preparation, problem-solving, or control that is largely an illusion.

MINDFULNESS



MINDFULNESS

Jon Kabat-Zinn defines mindfulness as
“awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.”

Put more succinctly, I have heard it described by my most admired psychologists and mindfulness teachers Jack Kornfield and Tara Brach simply as loving awareness.

Other misconceptions are that it is about clearing your mind or feeling a certain way—relaxed, for example.
It is not.

Mindfulness is simply about being aware, or present, with our experience as it is, without judgment—including difficult thoughts and feelings related to imposterism.



SELF-COMPASSION



SELF-COMPASSION

In Buddhist Psychology, there is a metaphor about mindfulness being the first wing of the bird and compassion as the second. **We need both to fly.** I see mindfulness, or awareness, as the first wing, and compassion as the second.

Sharon Salzberg, another beloved mindfulness teacher of mine, suggests that compassion is the “trembling or quivering of the heart in response to seeing pain or suffering.”

She shares that when we sympathize with or feel the pain of another and wish to alleviate the suffering of another, that is compassion—and when that suffering is in oneself, it is self-compassion.

“As long as we judge ourselves harshly, it can feel as if we're making progress against our many flaws. But in reality, we're only reinforcing our sense of unworthiness.”

— Sharon Salzberg

COMPONENTS OF SELF-COMPASSION

Psychologists, researchers, and co-founders of the Center for Mindful Self-Compassion, Drs. Kristin Neff and Christopher Germer, suggest that self-compassion consists of three parts:

Mindfulness of suffering

Common humanity

Self-kindness

CRITICISM VS. MOTIVATION

People often worry that in practicing self-compassion they will “let themselves off the hook” or relax their standard, making it important for them to continue to rely on criticism as a way to stay motivated and excel—
but research shows that the opposite is true.

Criticism often demotivates people and negatively impacts performance, whereas self-compassion helps people work towards their goals—especially when they encounter setbacks.



SELF-ESTEEM VS. SELF-COMPASSION

Self-esteem fluctuates constantly and relies on social comparison, either upwards or downwards, meaning that we are either worse or better than others.

Even when we come out on top, it is at a loss—the comparison never ends.

Self-compassion doesn't rely on comparison; it focuses on connection—recognizing that we suffer together.

In fact, the root of the word compassion is
“to suffer with.”



REFLECTING ON SELF-COMPASSION

Can you bring to mind a time of suffering related to imposterism?

What thoughts and feelings arose?

REFLECTING ON SELF-COMPASSION

Can you hold these experiences in loving awareness?

Can you connect with the common humanity in these thoughts and feelings?

*ACCEPTANCE &
COMMITMENT
THERAPY*



ACCEPTANCE & COMMITMENT THERAPY

As a psychologist who utilizes acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), I see the goal in coping with imposterism as psychological flexibility, which is our ability to show up to each moment fully aware of and open to our thoughts, emotions, sensations, and to engage in value-aligned action, rather than being inhibited by self-limiting beliefs.

**THIS MEANS DOING THE THINGS THAT
MATTER MOST TO YOU EVEN IF YOU
FEEL LIKE A FRAUD AND BEING OPEN TO
EXPERIENCES LIKE FAILURE AND
REJECTION IN THE SERVICE OF YOUR
VALUES.**



ACCEPTANCE & COMMITMENT THERAPY

It means relating to our thoughts of inadequacy and our fears of failure and rejection with compassion while doing what matters to us.

It means doing what matters because it matters to you rather than either:

Trying to prove something to yourself or others

Turning away from opportunity or risk due to fear

**WE DON'T NEED TO GET RID OF FEAR
OR SELF-DOUBT; WE NEED TO CHANGE
THE WAY WE RELATE TO IT—WITH
ACCEPTANCE, MINDFULNESS, AND
COMPASSION.**



REFLECTING ON IMPOSTER SYNDROME

To succeed is to risk failure.

What do you need to be willing to risk in order to succeed?

What do you need to be willing to feel?

The more it matters to you, the harder it will feel.

*COMPASSIONATE
ACTION PLAN*



COMPASSIONATE ACTION PLAN

Identify a professional goal, big or small.

Why does it matter to you?

COMPASSIONATE ACTION PLAN

Can you be open to failure and rejection in the service of your values?

Outcomes are largely outside of our control, but our ACTIONS are.

Can you redefine success as focusing on your ACTIONS rather than the outcome?
