

Worksheet Based on TED-Ed Video

Imposter Syndrome

1. Setting the Mood

- Would you say you're a confident person? What gives you confidence?
- Are you good at handling criticism? What about giving feedback?
- Can you think of some things you're very good at?

2. Tricky Words

These words from the video might be tricky – can you match them with their definitions?

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| come from, originate in | pervasive | unwarranted | expressions of approval, praise, or honors |
| lacking good reason or justification; not appropriate or necessary | accolades | alleviate | persistent and annoying |
| something that spreads and is hard to escape or ignore | fraudulence | nagging (adj.) | the act of cheating, lying, or deceiving for personal gain |
| likely to be influenced, harmed, or affected by something | stem from | susceptible to | to make pain, stress, or a problem less severe or more bearable |

3. Watch and Learn

Read the questions, watch the video carefully, and then answer the questions:

1. How did Albert Einstein describe himself?
2. Who was Pauline Rose Clance and what did she discover about her students?
3. Is imposter syndrome exclusive to a specific group of people?
4. Why do skilled people tend to have feelings of fraudulence?
5. What is pluralistic ignorance?
6. In what ways can imposter syndrome negatively impact people's careers and opportunities?
7. How can we combat imposter syndrome?

4. Let's Talk

1. Do you have personal experience with imposter syndrome?
2. How do social media and comparing ourselves to others impact our self-esteem?
3. What strategies can people use to build confidence and combat imposter syndrome?
4. Can too much confidence be a bad thing?
5. What role do childhood experiences play in shaping self-esteem and confidence?

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZQUxL4Jm1Lo>

Transcript

Even after writing eleven books and winning several prestigious awards, Maya Angelou couldn't escape the **nagging** doubt that she hadn't really earned her accomplishments. Albert Einstein experienced something similar—he described himself as an “involuntary swindler” whose work didn't deserve as much attention as it had received. Accomplishments at the level of Angelou's or Einstein's are rare, but their feeling of **fraudulence** is extremely common.

Why do so many of us struggle with the belief that we haven't earned our accomplishments, or that our ideas and skills aren't worthy of others' attention? Psychologist Pauline Rose Clance was the first to study this **unwarranted** sense of insecurity. In her work as a therapist, she noticed that many of her undergraduate patients, despite earning high grades, doubted whether they truly deserved their spots at the university. Some even believed their acceptance had been an admissions error. While Clance knew these fears were unfounded, she also remembered feeling the exact same way in graduate school. She and her patients were experiencing something known by several names: imposter phenomenon, imposter experience, or imposter syndrome.

Together with colleague Suzanne Imes, Clance first studied imposterism in female college students and faculty. Their research revealed **pervasive** feelings of **fraudulence** among this group. Since that first study, similar findings have been reported across gender, race, age, and a wide range of occupations. However, imposter syndrome may be more prevalent in and disproportionately affect the experiences of underrepresented or disadvantaged groups. Calling it a “syndrome” can be misleading—it is not a disease or an abnormality, nor is it necessarily tied to depression, anxiety, or self-esteem.

Where do these feelings of **fraudulence** come from? People who are highly skilled or accomplished tend to assume that others are just as skilled. This can spiral into a belief that they don't deserve **accolades** and opportunities over their peers. And as Angelou and Einstein experienced, no amount of success seems to put these feelings to rest.

Imposter syndrome isn't limited to highly skilled individuals. Everyone is **susceptible to** a psychological phenomenon known as pluralistic ignorance, where people privately doubt themselves but assume they are alone in feeling that way—because no one else voices their insecurities. Since it's difficult to know how hard our peers work, how much they struggle, or how often they question themselves, it's easy to assume that we are less capable than those around us.

Intense feelings of imposterism can hold people back from sharing their ideas or pursuing jobs and opportunities where they would thrive. The most effective way to combat imposter syndrome, at least so far, is to talk about it. Many people suffering from it fear that asking for feedback will confirm their worst doubts. Even when they receive positive reinforcement, they may struggle to internalize it. However, hearing that a mentor or advisor has experienced similar feelings can help **alleviate** these doubts. The same goes for conversations with peers. Simply learning that imposter syndrome exists can be a tremendous relief.

Once you recognize this phenomenon, you can take steps to counter it. One scientist who blamed herself for every problem in her lab began documenting the actual causes of mistakes. Over time, she realized that most of the issues **stemmed from** equipment failure, not her own incompetence. This helped her recognize her true abilities.

We may never completely eliminate feelings of imposterism, but we can foster open conversations about academic and professional challenges. By acknowledging how common these experiences are, we can become more comfortable discussing them and gain confidence in a simple truth: you have talent, you are capable, and you belong.