

# MIND BREW

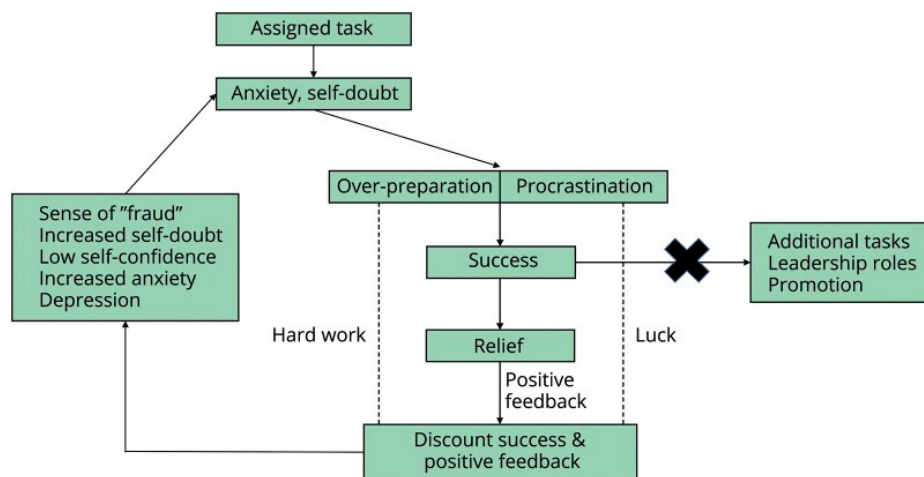
Office of Student Success

## The insidious nature of imposter phenomena

THE LEARNING SPECIALIST TEAM

Imposter is defined as a person who pretends to be someone else in order to deceive others, especially for fraudulent gain. When it comes to our own personal accomplishments, we can sometimes feel like frauds despite knowing the time and effort we have put into achieving our goals. We can feel paranoid, unworthy, or dissonance.

This feeling known as the imposter phenomenon, is a common recurrence amongst first year medical students. Rather than believing that success relates to self-competence and accepting additional workload to achieve their goal of being admitted into medical school, medical students often discount the success as secondary to external factors such as being lucky. Students with imposter phenomenon have fixed beliefs that success does not reflect true abilities, so they disregard positive feedback about their accomplishments demonstrated in the chart below (Armstrong and Shulman, 2019).



## Cognitive Science in Media



NPR's Life Kit: How to Shake that Feeling of Being an Impostor



APA's Speaking of Psychology: How To Overcome Feeling Like an Imposter



Imposter phenomenon is known to be associated with higher anxiety, depression, and insomnia (Kananifar et al., 2015). Those with imposter phenomenon also have higher fear of failure, are more likely to burnout, and tend to be hypercompetitive with their peers (Ross et al., 2001). More importantly, it has the potential to affect everyone regardless of age, gender, or intelligence.

While this may seem daunting, know you are not alone in feeling imposter phenomenon. Many students struggle with this feeling when they first enter medical school. However, coping with feelings of imposter phenomenon can be easier said than done.

So here are some things you can do to help yourself when feeling like an imposter:

- Acknowledge your emotions: acknowledging that you are having these feelings is important in not producing cognitive dissonance.
- Practice mindfulness: Self-affirmations about your qualifications may help you feel more objective about your competence and standing.
- Seek outside perspectives: Find mentors or people you trust to be objective about your performance to help contextualize your qualifications.
- When that doesn't work: Seek counseling or professional guidance. Imposter phenomenon can contribute to decreased mental health so it is important that you address it early. The mental health team and the Office of Student Success at the College of Medicine is here to help.

### College of Medicine Mental Health Services

<https://mentalhealthservices.medicine.arizona.edu/>

### Book an appointment with your assigned learning specialist

<https://outlook.office365.com/owa/calendar/LearningSpecialistBookingPage@emailarizona.onmicrosoft.com/bookings/>

#### References

- Armstrong, M. J., & Shulman, L. M. (2019). Tackling the imposter phenomenon to advance women in neurology. *Neurology: Clinical Practice*, 9(2), 155-159.
- Kananifar, N., Seghatoleslam, T., Atashpour, S. H., Hoseini, M., Habil, M. H. B., & Danaee, M. (2015). The relationships between imposter phenomenon and mental health in Isfahan universities students. *International Medical Journal*, 22(3), 144-146.
- Ross, S. R., Stewart, J., Mugge, M., & Fultz, B. (2001). The imposter phenomenon, achievement dispositions, and the five factor model. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 31(8), 1347-1355.

"Any work looks wonderful to me except the one in which I can do."

RALPH WALDO EMERSON