

**Name of Program:**

Battling Imposter Phenomenon

**Target Audience:**

All classes

**Strategy for Implementation:**

Large and small group discussion and activity + pre-work

**Time of Year to Implement:**

November

**Relevant Learning Goal:**

Goal 4: Intrapersonal Intelligence

**Specific Lesson Outcomes:**

- Students will set health and wellness goals that are reasonable, achievable, and sustainable.
- Students will identify ways to support their emotional wellness

**Purpose:**

Through this program, students will learn what Imposter Syndrome is, and develop tools for overcoming Imposter Syndrome.

# Planning and Preparation

## Preparation

Give students an overview of the program and inform them that they ought to come to the program ready to discuss. See the [Reframing Activity](#) below. Students should have the following questions in mind (note that the reframing part of the question is not listed here):

- When was the last time you tried to perfect your work to make it "good enough?"
- When was the last time you felt anxiety walking into a high-powered classroom? What thoughts were you thinking?
- When was the last time fear of failure drove your work ethic, or prevented you from chasing new opportunities?
- Think of the last time you doubted your work.

Answering these questions in advance will cut down on time during the program.

## Program Agenda

### Introduction

Ask students, "What do you already know about Imposter Syndrome?" This can be an open-ended question posed to the group for group discussion, or it can be a slido poll where students enter in their thoughts. Whichever option gets the most involvement from your students.

After some thoughts, share the proper definition of Imposter Syndrome: "The psychological experience of believing that one's accomplishments came about not through genuine ability, but as a result of having been lucky, having worked harder than others, or having manipulated other people's impressions, has been labeled the impostor phenomenon" (Clance & Imes, 1978)

# Body of Program

## Watch Video

Watch this 10 minute TED Talk--"[How students of color confront impostor syndrome](#)" by Dena Simmons"

After watching the video, take 1 minute for students to reflect and gather their thoughts. After one minute, engage in group discussion:

- What parts resonated with you? What are some imposter moments you've experienced?
- How has feeling like an imposter held you back? What would you find the courage to do if you did not feel like an imposter?
- What would you stop doing if you knew that despite your shortcomings, you are on your own good enough?

## Reframing Activity

Following the discussion, lead students into this Reframing Activity. Inform students that while this activity may be helpful for some, for others, it may require a bit more work with the help of a licensed counselor or therapist. According to research: "The central task of psychotherapy with impostors is to lessen the client's dependence on others' positive evaluations for his or her self-esteem and to build a more internalized sense of self-worth" (Clance & Langford, 1993). If students feel as though they may be struggling with finding their own self-worth, they are encouraged to reach out to help.

Valerie Young states in her [TEDNYC Idea Search Talk](#) that, "It's important to pay attention to the thoughts in our head so that we can reframe them to think like a non-imposter". Let's begin battling imposter phenomenon by "taking on" our thoughts!

Students will write down negative thoughts they've experienced in the past, and practice changing their mindset/their view of themselves through reframing negative thoughts into positive thoughts. Use the following as guiding questions:

- When was the last time you tried to perfect your work to make it "good enough?" How would you reframe those thoughts?
- When was the last time you felt anxiety walking into a high-powered classroom? What thoughts were you thinking? How would you turn those negative thoughts into positive thoughts?

- When was the last time fear of failure drove your work ethic, or prevented you from chasing new opportunities? How would you reframe those negative thoughts?
- Think of the last time you doubted your work. How would you reframe that thought?

**To cut down on time, send out these questions to students a week in advance so they may come to the program ready to discuss.** Putting students into breakout rooms may be more effective for having a quality discussion among students.

Here are some guiding questions students can use to help reframe their negative thoughts into positive ones (Borges, 2020):

- Fact check yourself. Ask yourself, "what is the proof I have for this thought?"
- Begin to ask yourself, "Is this thought helpful?"
- Think about what you would say to a friend with the same thought.

Reframing Example #1:

- Imposter Thought: I only got into this school because of my race, gender, or family connections.
- Reframed Thought: I have no evidence of this statement being true. This statement is neither helpful to me. I deserve to be in this position regardless of the different aspects of my identity, and I will succeed here due to my own genuine capabilities.

Reframing Example #2:

- Imposter Thought: I am not as smart as my classmates and therefore should not have been admitted to this school.
- Reframed Thought: I deserve to be in this position just as much as the next person due to my own unique ability. I will continue to shine in my own uniqueness to learn the material in this class and become knowledgeable in it. If I make mistakes along the way, that only means I am learning and therefore progressing in my goals. Whether I make mistakes or not, it is not indicative of my intelligence, potential, or worth.

## Conclusion:

Ask if students would like to share what was discussed in their small group.

Remind students that battling imposter phenomenon is a process, and won't be accomplished overnight. Feelings are often the last to change, so even if you may not *feel* different after this program, you are certainly making progress by changing your thoughts first. You won't feel confident 24/7, nor do you have to. But you can think confidently and thus change the view you have of yourself by first changing your mindset toward yourself. The goal isn't to have an inflated sense of self-esteem-- believing that you are the best in all aspects and areas; rather, the goal is to show up (to those high-powered classrooms, meetings, and interviews) and chase your dreams simply because they are important to you, while also knowing that they do not define you. When in doubt, remind yourself of the reframed thoughts you created to turn an imposter life, into an imposter moment (Young, 00:06:13 - 00:06:17).


Use this time to also remind students of the counseling services if they feel they may need additional support.

## Assessment

- What is one thing you learned from watching the TED Talk "How students of color confront impostor syndrome" by Dena Simmons?
- Were you able to identify with some of the things Dena was saying in the video? If so, how?
- What are some of the reframed thoughts you created during the Reframing Activity?

## Example A:

Active poll



Join at  
**slido.com**  
**#5243**

**What do you already know about Imposter Syndrome?** 0 0 1

Perfectionism is often an associated symptom of imposter syndrome

In the late 90's, it was first believed to only be exhibited in women, but further studies proved that it is commonplace among men as well.

It's when people feel they don't deserve to be in the places they are at

## References

Borges, A. (2020, May 4). 9 ways to reframe Your Anxious Existential Thoughts, according to therapists. Retrieved February 25, 2021, from <https://www.self.com/story/reframing-existential-anxiety>

Langford, J., & Clance, P. R. (1993). The imposter phenomenon: Recent research findings regarding dynamics, personality and family patterns and their implications for treatment. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 30(3), 495–501.  
<https://paulinerooseclance.com/pdf/-Langford.pdf>

Mcalpine, Lauren. How students of color confront impostor syndrome - Dena Simmons. TED-Ed Lesson Plan. <https://ed.ted.com/lessons/Av9dyPkO#watch>

“Thinking your way out of imposter syndrome | Valerie Young” YouTube, uploaded by TED Archive June 5th, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h7v-GG3SEWQ>