

Imposter Syndrome Sources and Solutions

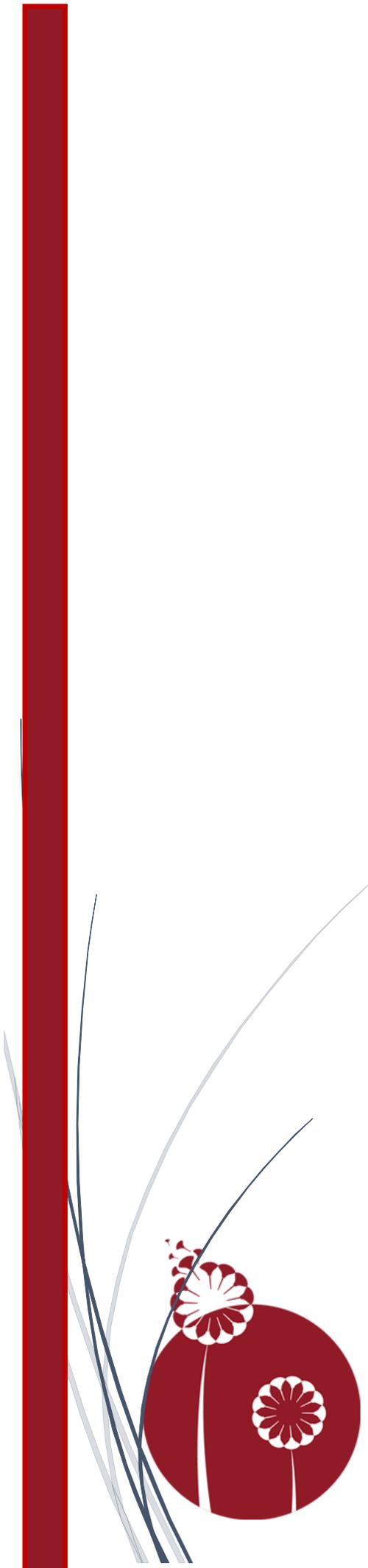
© All Rights Reserved

info@MargaretCollins.com

Also visit <https://MargaretCollins.com/ISSS>

Do follow me: [Facebook.com/MargaretCollinsPhD](https://www.facebook.com/MargaretCollinsPhD)

[LinkedIn.com/in/DrMargaretCollins](https://www.linkedin.com/in/DrMargaretCollins)



**MARGARET
COLLINS**

CONFIDENCE | CLARITY | COURAGE
VISIT [MARGARETCOLLINS.COM](https://MargaretCollins.com)

Do you feel as good as they think you are?

This secret fear that we're not really good enough is surprisingly widespread.

In the face of tangible evidence of their success, many women, some men, people who are genuine high-achievers, are often wracked by self-doubt and the fear of being found out.

You might recognise this Imposter Syndrome when you realise you're thinking or feeling:

- that you don't put yourself forward because you fear you'll fail
- you don't contribute in meetings because you don't want to look a fool
- you've done pretty well so far but it feels you were really lucky
- other people doing similar jobs seem to be more "grown up" than you feel
- your "good enough" for yourself is "achieving perfection without breaking sweat"!

If not addressed Imposter Syndrome feelings can cause individuals to experience significant stress, anxiety and fear. It can drive them to burn-out or inhibit them from achieving their full potential, prevent them from making valuable contributions to projects or meetings and deprive an organisation or a business from seeing the very best that their people can give.

But the secret is now out. The Imposter Syndrome can be sorted!!

During this programme "Imposters" will explore:

- What Imposter Syndrome is...
- The consequences of Imposter Syndrome and why it matters
- How our thinking makes it worse
- Tools for long term change



Today I give myself permission to....

What permission do you need right now?

- Be brave, be honest
- Take a stretch if I'm feeling tired
- Share my opinions out loud
- Enjoy being fully present here and not multitasking!

Take a minute to write down what you need to allow yourself to experience the full benefits of participation in this programme.



Module 1:

What is “Imposter Syndrome”?

You might be here because you feel very familiar with Imposter Syndrome.

Experiencing Imposter Syndrome doesn't mean there's something wrong with you at all, it certainly doesn't mean you “need fixing” in any way.

This programme isn't about counselling or therapy, rather it is designed to give you insights into what you are experiencing and practical suggestions about some things you can do about it!

Please do take part in all or as many of the exercises and activities that you feel comfortable with. There is no requirement at any stage to do or to share more than you , simply an invitation so that you get the best experience of the programme.

If you have further questions to ask, please do contact me directly.

Some background:

Academically speaking, the Imposter Phenomenon was first described by Prof Pauline Clance and Dr Suzanne Imes in 1978. They were working with very talented, high-achieving women who felt unable to properly accept or own their achievements.

You may have Imposter Syndrome if:

- in the face of evidence of achievement
- despite repeatedly showing obvious ability
- you feel you don't really deserve this
- emotionally you don't own your success
- you have a deep sense of "one day I'll be found out".

Initial surveys have shown that many, maybe over 70% of high achieving women, experience the Imposter Syndrome at some time in their lives or careers.

Subsequent research has revealed that men are also familiar with feelings of being the Imposter... while men certainly do experience this uncertainty and anxiety, studies suggest that the effect is frequently more significant and more persistent for women than for many men.

Research also shows that there continue to be real differences between men and women in the workplace but the strategies suggested in this workshop can be applied by anyone, male or female and all are welcome to participate fully.



What is “Imposter Syndrome”?

Many studies have investigated people who report experiencing Imposter Syndrome feelings.

Many people who are obviously very capable and talented report feeling like a fraud. They

- Undervalue their achievements
- Believe others overestimated their abilities
- Feel they don't deserve their success.

This matters because, if you feel like a fraud you are less likely to:

- Choose to appear vulnerable (especially in public)
- Take risks
- Put creative ideas “out there”
- Volunteer for “stretch positions” ...



Who is likely to feel like an Imposter?

It is important to understand that “Imposter Syndrome” isn’t a medically diagnosable condition, so there are no real “tests”, just a collection of feelings that people experience. Similarly, people who have these feelings often have common experiences in their backgrounds.

Several different things might contribute to these feelings including:

- Being or feeling different to your peers
- Experiencing unconscious or implicit bias in the workplace/at home
- Imposters may “think” differently, particularly
 - Attitudes to success, failure or competence
 - Possibly perfectionists or with highly active self-critical voices

Being or feeling different

There are many ways of being different:

People who are the first or in a minority

- the first professional in their family
- the first to go to university
- the first "whatever" in their workplace

People who are atypical in their field, for example

- a female engineer or a male midwife

People with high achieving/outstanding parents

- always feel under pressure to achieve
- living up to the expectations of others – parents or older siblings
- they may feel uncertain whether their achievements are theirs or due to their parents/family/connection

People who achieved success

- early in life
- with apparent ease... after all, if it came so easily first time, can you ever repeat it?

People who

- work alone – entrepreneurs,
- work in creative industries or professions
- work in professions where expertise or intelligence is highly valued



Who is likely to feel like an Imposter?

Possible origins are many and complex. Researchers and writers suggest that the following may contribute:

Family dynamics:

- Mixed messages about your abilities
- Be smart – make something of yourself
- You're different – a square peg – odd one out - eg the scientist in a musical family
- Lack of praise

Early Messages and expectations:

- Falling short, exceeding expectations or doing something totally different ...

What were your/your family's expectations for you?

- Follow in the "family footsteps"?
- Marriage and children?
- A "proper job"?
- A typical woman's/man's role?

Which of these experiences of being different do you recognise in your life?

You can now choose to re-interpret or even ignore those messages...!

Take a few moments to share this part of your story in the Facebook group: are you the first, in a minority, somehow different, living up to great expectations or in a creative or isolated position? You might tick several or maybe none but we would love to hear from you!



Implicit or Unconscious Bias

The concept of implicit bias is well established by a large body of research. It is, as the name suggests, often unconscious, something we are unaware of but shapes a significant part of our social identity for both men and women.

This programme is not meant to be a treatise on unconscious bias, simply to highlight aspects that may contribute to our feeling like an imposter.

Social stereotypes about groups of people - help us make quick decisions. They are:

- Learned
- Unconscious
- Unintentional
- Affect our behaviour...

Implicit bias affects everyone, both men and women, in a wide range of circumstances around gender, race, colour, even size – height or weight.

The impact of implicit bias can be seen in poor/faulty decision-making by individuals, groups or organisations. It can be institutionalised, a part of the way we do things here and is too often, unquestioned.

Where implicit bias may lead to discrimination against women or people of colour for example, because the stereotype is socially held, women or people of colour may also be biased. We can unconsciously internalise the bias that disadvantages ourselves.

It doesn't automatically mean we do discriminate against people who are different. When we are aware of our potential for bias we can consciously correct our choices. If we deny or fail to recognise our bias, it is more likely to affect our choices.

One of the more obvious examples of the effects of implicit bias was documented when researchers asked why so many members of professional orchestras were male. The first and obvious answer was “...because the men were better musicians/players”. Changing to a system where auditions were carried out “blind” with the interviewees playing behind a screen, resulted in many more women being appointed to the orchestra. (Goldin, C. and Rouse, C. (2000) ‘Orchestrating impartiality: the impact of ‘blind’ auditions on female musicians’, *American Economic Review*, Vol. 90, No. 4, pp. 715-741.)

This bias almost certainly wasn't intentional. The interviewers wanted the best players in the orchestra but their interpretation of “best” was flawed, influenced by deeply unconscious beliefs that men were good musicians and probably better musicians than women. Practically it may have simply been that men were more mobile in their ability to travel for work.

Similar bias is at work in many different areas of society, personal and professional.



Implicit or Unconscious Bias

Generally, according to stereotypes, men are believed to be better leaders, authoritative, decisive and strong. These stereotypes often act against men who are collaborative, supportive or consult before taking decisions. They penalise any show of weakness, encourage aggression and competition between men and exclude women.

Women on the other hand, are stereotypically perceived as followers, nurturing, supporting, women are emotional... This penalises women who are decisive or want leadership roles. Women with families are often seen as less credible workers. (For example, see “Is there a Motherhood penalty? Correll et al, Am J Sociology 112: 1297 (2007)”)

As adults we often **know** these stereotypes are not true but they may still unconsciously affect our decisions and our choices unless we make a conscious effort to eliminate bias.

This unconscious knowledge often affects how we feel about ourselves and our roles, whether we are “playing according to type” or doing something which is somehow different from what is expected by ourselves, our families, colleagues or society.

When men are engaging in negotiations or team projects at work it is often interpreted as “playing the game” and in these circumstances, men often respond by bluffing, taking chances and being rewarded for risk-taking.

In similar situations, women often don't realise there is a “game” and the “rules” of such games often penalise women.

At some level, consciously or unconsciously, many women are also aware that negative penalties are associated with being successful or playing the game according to the “men’s rules”.



Implicit or Unconscious Bias

The negative consequences of unconscious bias are often greatest for minorities and, in the context of Imposter Syndrome feelings, for high achieving women:

- Standards are set higher
- Achievements systematically undervalued
- Always need to prove it again
- Not liked for their achievements
- Penalised when they behave against stereotype.

Are you aware of unconscious bias?

Does unconscious bias create barriers for you?

Does unconscious bias contribute to your Imposter Syndrome feelings?

How can you reduce the impact of unconscious bias?

Now take a few moments to share your thoughts, your insights and experience with others in the Facebook group.



Your life map

This exercise is designed to allow you to reflect upon your life so far and to identify the events and experiences that made you who you now are. This is not meant to be an exercise in "therapy".

If you have experiences of trauma in your past, do make sure you have access to appropriate emotional or psychological support, if necessary.

This is intended to be an opportunity to look for the patterns which may accompany the good and the bad times in your life. If you have traumatic events, you don't need to "dig deep", you don't need to look to accept blame which may not be yours to own at all, simply look for patterns. Remember, you are still here, you found a way forward. You can learn what you did and do it better. This information can be invaluable as you understand where your Imposter feelings may have come from and empower you to choose to shape your present and your future.

Drawing a lifeline

On the next page, turn it to "landscape" to give yourself plenty of space.

On the (now horizontal line) mark off the years or decade of your life.

Now, draw a wavy line from left to right across the page to represent the story of your life, from your birth to the present. Let the 'ups' stand for the good times and the 'downs' for the bad times.

You may find it useful to add important dates, your age or key events such as leaving school, exams, key jobs, moving house, getting married, children arriving, even failures or loss.

Think about the ups and the downs that you have marked and add a few notes... What are they associated with - what made them good or bad experiences?

Think about whether the good experiences share anything in common: what do they tell you about the kinds of things that make you happy? Similarly, see if you can see any pattern in the bad experiences. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves to do more of the good stuff!

Look back over your lifeline. Draw vertical lines to mark the beginning and end of important or key phases or periods. These may or may not be the same as the high and low points. Try to come up with a heading for each phase: e.g. 'Young and carefree', 'Climbing the career ladder', 'At home looking after the kids', 'Working for Bloggs'.

How would you describe the phase you're in now: what heading do you give it?

Look back over your lifeline again and try to identify the events which were turning points for you, experiences that led to a significant change in your life.

Did any events contribute to your experience of Imposter Syndrome feelings?

Then take one or two of these turning points and make a note of:

What happened?

What changed?

What did you learn?



Draw your life map



Reflecting on your life map

If your life map represents the unfolding story of your life, how would you sum up 'the story so far'?

What have been the main themes in the story, or lessons you have learned?

And what do you think the next stage in the story might be?

I hope you've found this activity helpful. Do take a moment to share your thoughts and insights in the Facebook group. That way we can learn from and be inspired by each other!



Going forward...

Notice how your past experiences contribute to your experience of Imposter Syndrome feelings.

- Be aware of unconscious bias
- Check whether you have internalised unhelpful messages
- Learn the lessons of your life
- Choose, positive and empowering versions of your story to support your new vision

What new messages can you choose? For example:

- My past doesn't define my future...
- Being different isn't better or worse...
- Diversity can bring greater creativity...
- I have new insights to share...
- I'm in the perfect place to start!

Keep note of the stories you choose to believe!

