



**A W A K E N**  
p s y c h o l o g y

healing  
through  
growth



## ARE YOU AN IMPOSTER?

This month's newsletter focusses on the 'Imposter Syndrome' ... yep, it's a thing. You're worried someone's going to find out you're not as good as they think you are, you keep yourself small and don't put yourself out there, and you think everyone else is better than you. This perfectly describes the 'Imposter Syndrome'.

Click [here](#) to read last month's newsletter, where we focussed on how to heal the damage of being in a relationship with someone who has Narcissistic Personality Disorder, and to access all our previous articles.

## When You Feel Like You Don't Deserve Your Success

**By Amanda Pulford**  
**Director and Clinical Psychologist**  
**BPpsych (Hons) MPsych (Clin) MAPS FCCLP MACPA**

Have you ever felt like everyone else knows what they're doing while you have no clue? Do you honestly believe your successes are about luck, and your failings all come down to you? Do you wonder when the fraud police will kick down the door and drag you from your desk?

If your answer is 'yes' to any of these questions, then "Hi, and welcome to the Impostors Club".

If you're interested in our previous articles, please click [here](#)

If you've got a suggestion for an article, or there's something more you would like to hear about, please send us an email - click [here](#)

**AWAKEN PSYCHOLOGY**  
*Healing Through Growth*  
21 Bath Street  
Glenelg South SA 5045

**e :** admin@awakenpsychology.com.au  
**w :** www.awakenpsychology.com.au  
**fb :** www.facebook.com/awakenpsychology

**p :** 0488 954 195  
**f :** 08 8294 3100

## What Is Impostor Syndrome?

Impostor Syndrome is a term to describe the psychological experience of feeling like you don't deserve your success. It's not a diagnosable mental health condition, but feeling like a fraud can be linked with anxiety and depression.

Impostor Syndrome tends to be more common in those who are high achievers – people who can't quite accept their achievements. You may logically know what you're capable of, but that doesn't stop the emotions of failure creeping up on you.

## What Are The Signs Of Impostor Syndrome?

Individuals experience Impostor Syndrome in varying ways, but some common signs are:

- perfectionism – not recognising a success because you can only focus on the flaws
- overworking – can also be connected with perfectionism, as well as a way of avoiding finishing a project or product that will be judged
- undermining your achievements – pointing out your mistakes before taking ownership of a success, procrastinating and leaving things to the last minute, and then having to rush to finish
- fear of failure – putting off starting something, avoiding taking on new challenges and reluctance to ask for feedback as you can't face potentially failing
- discounting praise – pointing out other people's contributions before your own, assuming praise given is faked or exaggerated

And while failure is part of life, people with Impostor Syndrome often feel their success will always end in failure, even if there's no evidence of it.

It can affect all people in all aspects of life, but most of the research into Impostor Syndrome has focused on the experience in relation to work and study. The Impostor Syndrome can be debilitating – causing stress, anxiety, low self-confidence, shame and in some cases, even depression. At its worst, the Impostor Syndrome completely derails your life.

## Why Do We Suffer From The Impostor Syndrome?

Unfortunately, as a human being our brains are hardwired to focus on negative things. We focus on negative things because negative things have the potential to hurt us. So, the thought that “I'll be found out” becomes a threat, and the threat takes our focus.

Threat based thinking is an age-old survival technique – and it sure is handy when we have to worry about sabre tooth tigers. However, in our modern day with no sabre tooth tigers, our mind-body will interpret mistakes, the perception of a lack of knowledge, or even pitching an idea in front of our colleagues or clients as a ‘threat’.

Impostor Syndrome tends to start in mid-to-late teens, and appears to be most common in younger adults. However, some individuals can experience Impostor Syndrome later in life, particularly if they rely on the opinion of others to shape their own sense of self and self-belief.

Further, Impostor Syndrome is fed by comments that are non-specific, such as “Great job” vs “That report you did was very thorough, and helped our Team to make a well informed decision”. Non-specific feedback leaves an individual wondering what was good about what they did, and can lead them to dismiss the positive and assume they got lucky.

## Women Impostors vs Men Impostors

While everyone can have the experience of feeling like an impostor or fraud, it can affect men and women differently.

Firstly, research has found that it affects women more than men, but it doesn't discriminate based on your position in an organisation.

Secondly, it is more common with individuals who feel they are operating outside of their comfort zone. So, if you're breaking new ground, or you're in a minority situation in an environment, you're more likely to feel these insecurities.

---

### **AWAKEN PSYCHOLOGY**

*Healing Through Growth*  
21 Bath Street  
Glenelg South SA 5045

**e :** [admin@awakenpsychology.com.au](mailto:admin@awakenpsychology.com.au)  
**w :** [www.awakenpsychology.com.au](http://www.awakenpsychology.com.au)  
**fb :** [www.facebook.com/awakenpsychology](http://www.facebook.com/awakenpsychology)

**p :** 0488 954 195  
**f :** 08 8294 3100

Further, early on in life men are taught to ‘fake it until you make it’, so they become more comfortable with the concept than women. Whereas women tend to be raised to be more aware, and to take care of other people, so they’re more likely to worry about how their actions affect other people. This can lead to more severe Imposter Syndrome symptoms in women.

### What Can You Do About It?

While the Imposter Syndrome tends to come and go throughout your life, there are some things that you can do about it. And a lot of this has to do with experience, as the best way to combat the Imposter Syndrome is to gather evidence. Secondly, training your brain to focus on the good over the bad also helps to quieten the Imposter Syndrome.

**Journal** – on one page write down “What my Imposter Syndrome Is Telling Me”, and list everything that your internal voice is saying (regardless of how ridiculous it might seem).

**Achievements** – on another page write down your achievements, your skills and your successes to demonstrate that you really do have value to share with the world.

**Notice** – when your Imposter shows up. Is it in meetings with your peers or seniors, is it when you’re called upon to share your expertise, is it when you hand up an assignment?

**Gather Evidence** – on another page when your Imposter is noisy, ask yourself, “Where is the proof that this was purely due to luck?” “What are some other reasons that could explain why this happened?” “What is the evidence I have that what my Imposter is saying is true?”.

**Voice Your Fears** – engage with a professional, a mentor, or a safe peer group and express what you’re thinking and feeling as it helps to normalise your thoughts and feelings, and ensures that you’re not alone.

**Name Your Imposter** – when you notice the harsh words of your Imposter, say “That’s my Imposter speaking” or “I notice that’s my

Imposter speaking”, as a way of creating distance between you and your thoughts and feelings.

**Let It Go** – have a practice of ‘letting go’ of those critical thoughts and unhelpful feelings. You may wish to repeat to yourself that “Thoughts are just thoughts, not truths ... and feelings are just feelings, not facts”. You may wish to practice mindfulness to distance yourself from your thoughts and feelings. You could try meditation. Or you could try grounding yourself and noticing your ‘here and now’ by noticing 5 things that you can see, hear, touch, smell and taste.

**Have a Strong Support Network** – to express what you’re thinking and feeling, and to gain ongoing feedback that validates your efforts and outcomes

And if you’re willing to dive a little deeper :

**Find Out Where This Came From** – take some time to consider your childhood and where your Imposter came from, who might have contributed to it, and what might have contributed to it.

**Heal The Wound** – if your Imposter was born out of a traumatic incident or incidents, take the time to work with a professional to heal this wound.

### The Take Away

At the end of the day, remember this : you are here for a reason. In this job, your business, your studies, your life ... you are worthy. You are better than you think you are. You are smarter than you believe you are. You know more than you give yourself credit for.

Remember that.

And remind yourself as often as you need to.

---

## **AWAKEN PSYCHOLOGY**

*Healing Through Growth*  
21 Bath Street  
Glenelg South SA 5045

**e** : [admin@awakenpsychology.com.au](mailto:admin@awakenpsychology.com.au)  
**w** : [www.awakenpsychology.com.au](http://www.awakenpsychology.com.au)  
**fb** : [www.facebook.com/awakenpsychology](http://www.facebook.com/awakenpsychology)

**p** : 0488 954 195  
**f** : 08 8294 3100

## Talks

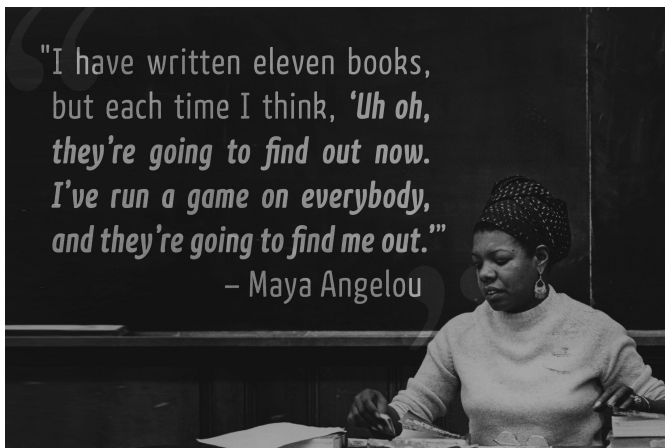
**Imposter Syndrome** by Mike Cannon-Brookes  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNBmHXS3A6I>

Mike Cannon-Brookes, co-founder of software company Atlassian, is an Australian business success story. In this surprisingly personal talk, he reveals how he constantly feels like an imposter, but how he's learned to harness those feelings for his benefit.

**What Is Imposter Syndrome And How Can You Combat It** by Elizabeth Cox  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth\\_cox\\_what\\_is\\_imposter\\_syndrome\\_and\\_how\\_can\\_you\\_combat\\_it?language=en#t-6222](https://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_cox_what_is_imposter_syndrome_and_how_can_you_combat_it?language=en#t-6222)

This feeling of fraudulence is extremely common. Why can't so many of us shake feelings that our ideas and skills aren't worthy of others' attention? Elizabeth Cox describes the psychology behind the imposter syndrome, and what you can do to combat it.

As always, if you would like some help, please feel free to contact us on 0488 954 195, [admin@awakenpsychology.com.au](mailto:admin@awakenpsychology.com.au) or [click here](#)



If at any stage, you find you need urgent assistance – go to your closest **Emergency Department**, call the **Mental Health Emergency Line** on 13 14 65, or call **Lifeline** on 13 11 14.

---

### AWAKEN PSYCHOLOGY

Healing Through Growth  
21 Bath Street  
Glenelg South SA 5045

e : [admin@awakenpsychology.com.au](mailto:admin@awakenpsychology.com.au)  
w : [www.awakenpsychology.com.au](http://www.awakenpsychology.com.au)  
fb : [www.facebook.com/awakenpsychology](http://www.facebook.com/awakenpsychology)

p : 0488 954 195  
f : 08 8294 3100