



# ADHD & IMPOSTER SYNDROME

Understanding IS/IPS Info Sheet

## WHAT IS IMPOSTER SYNDROME?



Imposter syndrome (IS/IPS) is the persistent belief that you are not as competent or capable as others think you are, often attributing your own success to luck rather than skill. Many people with ADHD experience this internal struggle, despite all of the clear evidence of their abilities.

## WHY IS IS/IPS COMMON IN ADHD?



The following information is a brief outline of the neuroscience behind IS/IPS.

### **Executive Function & Working Memory Challenges:**

ADHD affects planning, organisation, and memory—skills often used as measures of competence. Frequent struggles in these areas can erode confidence, even in the face of real achievements (Barkley, 1997).

### **Emotional Dysregulation & Self-Criticism:**

The ADHD brain is more prone to emotional intensity and negative self-appraisal. These patterns can lead to feelings of fraudulence and fear of being “found out” (Shaw et al., 2014).

### **Delayed Recognition of Achievement:**

ADHD often involves difficulty with delayed gratification and internalising past success. This can result in feeling “unqualified”, even after repeated accomplishments prove otherwise (Brown, 2006).

### **Masking & Overcompensation:**

People with ADHD may become skilled at masking their difficulties, performing well under pressure while inwardly feeling chaotic. This “performance gap” reinforces the feeling that their competence is an illusion (Wilcutt et al., 2005).

## COMMON EXPERIENCES OF IS/IPS IN ADHD



Some of the signs of Imposter Syndrome are as follows:

- Believing your success is due to luck, not skill
- Worrying you'll be "exposed" as a fraud
- Avoiding opportunities due to fear of not being good enough
- Feeling undeserving of praise, awards, or recognition
- Overworking to "prove" your worth
- Comparing yourself unfavourably to others
- Minimising your accomplishments or brushing them off

## COMMON IMPACTS OF IS/IPS IN ADHD



Some of the impacts of Imposter Syndrome are as follows:

- Chronic anxiety and self-doubt
- Fear of failure and fear of success
- Reluctance to seek promotions or new challenges
- Perfectionism and burnout
- Strained self-esteem and identity confusion



If you experience Imposter Syndrome, it is recommended that you:

### **Reality Test:**

Keep a record of your achievements and positive feedback. Revisit them whenever self-doubt arises.

### **Reframe Mistakes:**

View mistakes as part of growth, not as evidence of inadequacy.

### **Separate Feeling from Fact:**

Recognise that feeling like a fraud is not the same as being one.

### **Speak to Others:**

Share your experiences. You're not alone; many people feel the same way as you do—especially those with ADHD.

### **Coaching or Therapy:**

Working with an ADHD-informed coach or therapist can help develop confidence, and interrupt negative internal narratives.

### **References:**

Barkley, R. A. (1997). *ADHD and the Nature of Self-Control*. New York: Guilford Press.

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Wilcutt, E. G., Doyle, A. E., Nigg, J. T., et al. (2005). *Validity of the executive function theory of ADHD: A meta-analytic review*. *Biological Psychiatry*, 57(11), 1336–1346. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biopsych.2005.02.006>