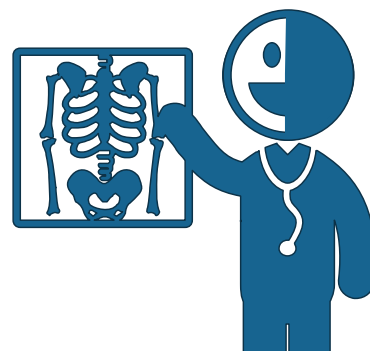


# Imposter Syndrome: Implications for the PA

Stephen Lewia Jr., DMSc, MPAM, PA-C



# Disclosures

No relevant commercial relationships to disclose.



# Learning Objectives

**At the conclusion of this session, participants should be able to:**

- Summarize the history of imposter phenomenon (IP) discovery and how it has evolved over time
- Discuss the spectrum of IP, including common cognitive distortions and symptomatology
- Analyze both the micro and macro solutions presented and how they can be applied to better a practitioner/student's life and prevent burnout



# Who is this for?

PAs

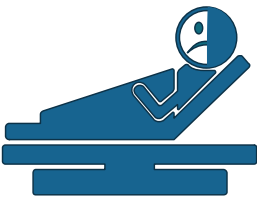
PA Students

Pre-PAs

Supervisors/Managers

Educators

Leaders



# About Me

**PA School: University of Lynchburg (2018)**

**Emergency Medicine PA Fellowship: Arrowhead Med. Center (2018-2020)**

**Doctor of Medical Science (DMSc): University of Lynchburg (2020)**

**Currently: EM/FM/IM PA at CAH in Meade, KS  
and Flight Paramedic for LifeSave**

# Definitions

**Imposter Phenomenon:** describes highly skilled/achieved individuals attribute their success to luck, or circumstances beyond their control, causing them distress with the belief that they may be found to be 'found out.'

**Imposter Syndrome** - commonly used in lay literature<sup>1</sup>

**Imposter Phenomenon** - commonly used in academic literature<sup>1</sup>



# History

“...**despite** their earned degrees, scholastic honors, high achievement on standardized tests, praise and professional recognition from colleagues and respected authorities, these women **do not experience an internal sense of success**. They consider themselves to be **‘impostors.’**”<sup>2</sup>

## Definitions: Why IP vs IS?

“In an interview, Clance reports that from the outset that she and Imes were concerned not to have IP be taken as another ‘defect’ in women or a pathologizing of women...In fact, this reason is why they were deliberate in calling this experience a **phenomenon** rather than a **syndrome** since the latter can connote defect or disease.”<sup>3</sup>

-Shannon Slank





# Evolution

**WHAT IS  
IMPOSTER  
SYNDROME**  
AND HOW CAN YOU  
COMBAT IT?



**WHY  
DO I  
FEEL  
LIKE AN  
IMPOSTER?**

HOW TO  
UNDERSTAND  
AND COPE  
WITH IMPOSTER  
SYNDROME

DR SANDI MANN



**Forbes**

Jan 4, 2021, 09:20am EST | 818 views

## How To Overcome Imposter Syndrome And Silence The Oppressive Player

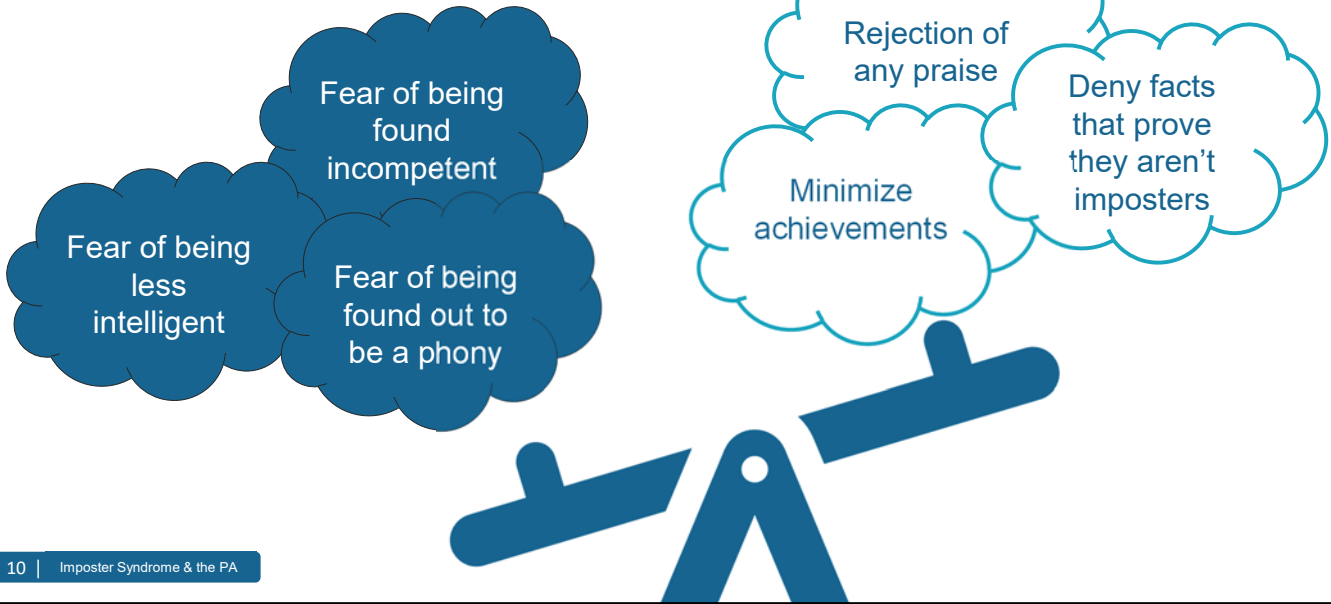


Melinda Fouts, Ph.D., Forbes Councils Member  
Forbes Coaches Council COUNCIL POST | Membership (fee-based)  
Leadership

*Melinda Fouts, Ph.D., of Success Starts With You, is author of Cognitive Enlightenment and an international executive coach.*



# IP Paradox



## Measurement: Clance Imposter Phenomenon Score<sup>4</sup>

---

- Remember times in their life when they didn't do their best MORE than when they did
- Compare their skills to those around them
- Think everyone around them is more intelligent than they are
- Receive great feedback, but don't believe it
- HATE evaluations of themselves
- Always thinking they could have done more/better
- Afraid of being 'found out.'
- Belief that their success is due to luck.

# Spectrum of Imposter Phenomena

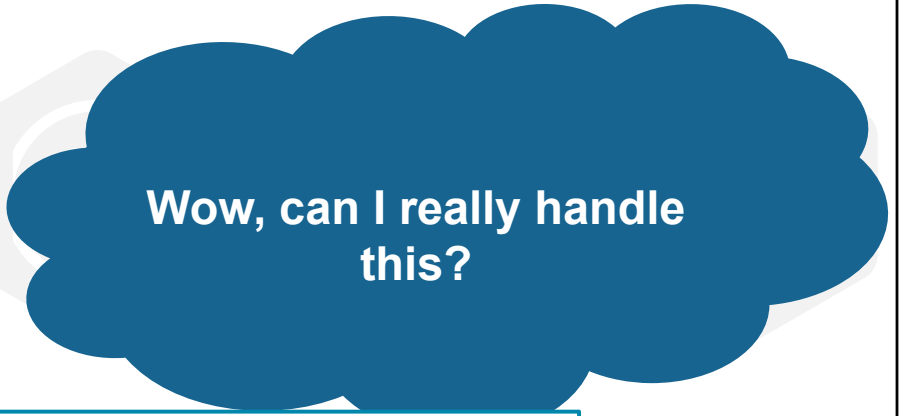


**Imposter Thoughts**

**Functional Imposter**

**Imposter Complex**

# Spectrum of Imposter Phenomena



Wow, can I really handle this?

**Imposter Thoughts**

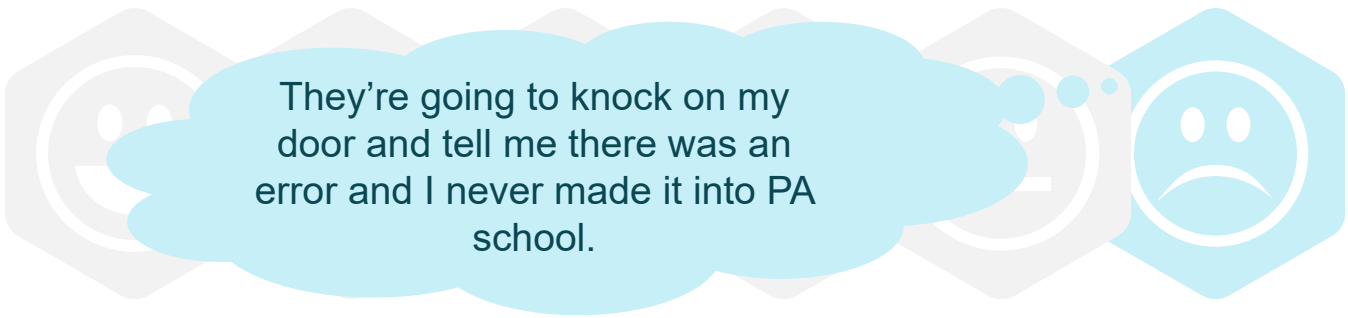
# Spectrum of Imposter Phenomena



Today was a bad day. Why does everybody say I'm doing alright when I really don't know what I'm doing?

**Functional Imposter**

# Spectrum of Imposter Phenomena



They're going to knock on my door and tell me there was an error and I never made it into PA school.

**Imposter  
Complex**

# Imposter Types

“True” Imposters	“Strategic” Imposters
Fits the common definition of IP	Shares common beliefs of IP
High level of emotional distress secondary to IP	Do not report high levels of anxiety, mood instability
Negative self-evaluation	Have normal self-evaluation
High stress/strain at work	Lower stress/strain at work

All Impostors Aren't Alike –  
Differentiating the Impostor  
Phenomenon

Mona Leonhardt, Myriam N. Bechtoldt, and Sonja Rohrmann



# Competence Types



**The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women**  
Why Capable People Suffer from the IMPOSTOR SYNDROME and How to Thrive in Spite of It.  
**Valerie Young, Ed.D.**

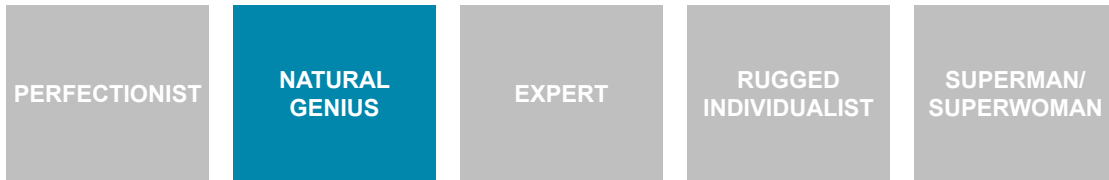
# Competence Types



## Focus: **HOW** something is done

- How will you do this? PERFECTLY
- Can't do it PERFECT...must be an imposter
- Self imposed vs Imposed on Others

# Competence Types



## Focus: HOW and WHEN accomplishments happen

- Judgment on: level of difficulty and speed of completion
  - Have to pick it up the first time
  - Everything has to be easy...or I'm an Imposter
    - Fixed vs Growth mindset

# Competence Types



## Focus: **AMOUNT** of knowledge and/or skill

- Emphasize: experience, credentials, letters next to your name  
“If I were really competent, I would know everything there is to know”<sup>10</sup>
  - Need validation from others on knowledge

# Competence Types

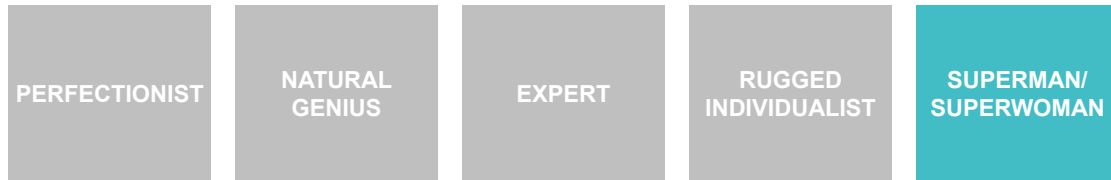


## Focus: WHO does it?

...the answer: YOU!

- It only counts if you did it yourself
  - Never delegate!

# Competence Types



## Focus: HOW MANY things can I do?

Perfectionist + Natural Genius + Expert + Rugged Individualist

- Do it all, and do it flawlessly
- Relates to all aspects of life  
(work/home/etc)

# Competence Types



**The Secret Thoughts of Successful Women**  
Why Capable People Suffer from the IMPOSTOR SYNDROME and How to Thrive in Spite of It.  
**Valerie Young, Ed.D.**

# Internal Dialogue





# Classic Cognitive Distortions

“Who is that girl I see  
staring straight back at me?  
Why is my reflection  
someone I don’t know?”

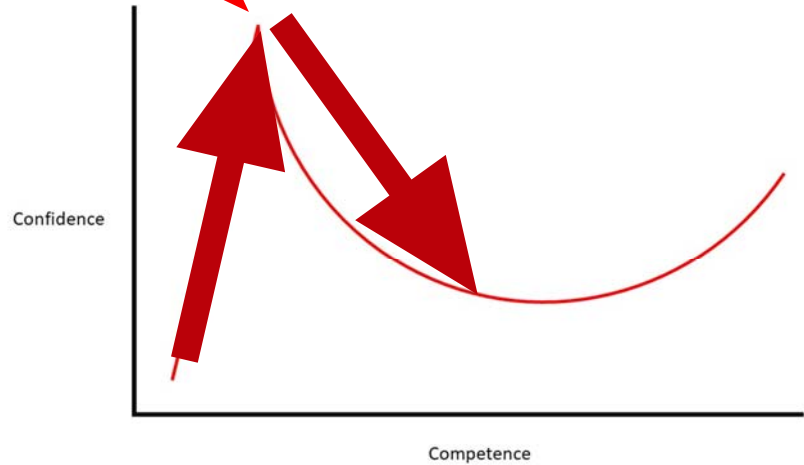
“Look at me  
I will never pass for a perfect bride,  
or a perfect daughter  
Can it be  
I'm not meant to play this part...”

# Classic Cognitive Distortions

“I'll be there someday, I  
can go the distance  
I will find my way if I can  
be strong  
I know every mile would  
be worth my while  
When I go the distance, I'll  
be right where I belong”

# Opposite Side of the Spectrum

Dunning-Kruger Effect



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# Opposite Side of the Spectrum

**Unskilled and Unaware of It: How  
Difficulties in Recognizing One's Own  
Incompetence Lead to Inflated Self-  
Assessments**

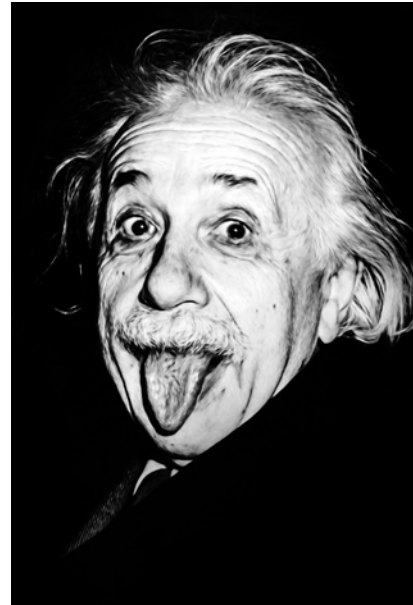
Justin Kruger and David Dunning

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,  
1999, Vol 77, No. 6

" More the knowledge lesser the ego,  
lesser the knowledge more the ego."  
-Albert Einstein

$$\text{Ego} = \frac{1}{\text{Knowledge}}$$

"...I must confess that the exaggerated esteem in which my lifework is held makes me feel very ill at ease. I feel compelled to think of myself as an **involuntary swindler**. If one attempts to do anything about this, one succeeds only in making matters worse..."



Author: George Hodan / publicdomainpictures.net

“I have written eleven books, but each time I think, ‘Uh oh, they’re going to find out now. I’ve run a game on everybody and they’re going to find me out.’”

-Maya Angelou



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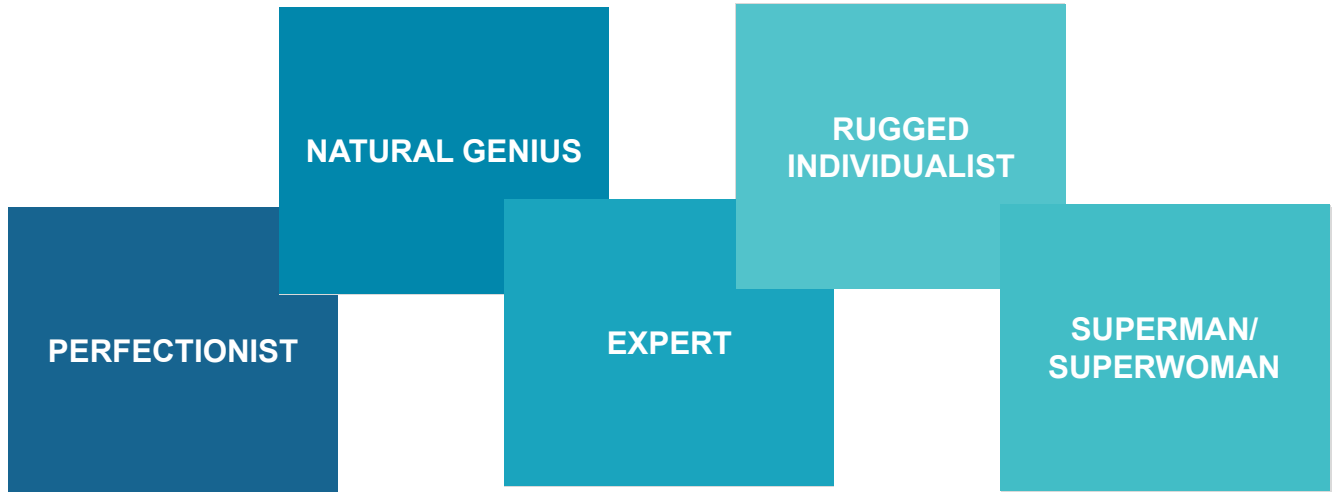
# IP in Medicine

Current setup of medical community potentiates IP:



“the volume and complexity of what we know has exceeded our individual ability to deliver its benefits correctly, safely, or reliably.” -Dr. Atul Gawande

# Competence Types

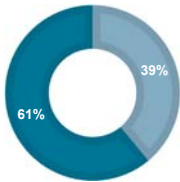




# IP and the PA Profession

## IP INCIDENCE

■ With IP ■ Without IP



### **The Imposter Phenomenon: Self-Assessment And Competency to Perform as a Physician Assistant in the United States<sup>6</sup>**

Cora Mattie, MS, PA-C; Jonathon Gietzen, MS, PA-C;  
Shawn Davis, PhD; John Prata, MS, PA-C

### **The Imposter Phenomenon in Physician Assistant Graduates<sup>7</sup>**

John Prata, MS, PA-C; Jonathon W. Gietzen, MS, PA-C

### **Imposter Phenomenon and Underrepresented Minorities: What Physician Assistant Educators Need to Know**

Daytheon Sturges, MPAS, PA-C

ALTHOUGH YOU MIGHT FEEL THAT HAPPINESS IS THE RESULT OF WHAT HAPPENS TO US, RESEARCH PROVES THAT AS MUCH AS 40 PER CENT IS LINKED TO OUR INTENTIONAL DAILY ACTIVITIES AND THE CHOICES WE MAKE. ONLY 10 PER CENT OF OUR HAPPINESS IS AFFECTED BY EXTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND THE OTHER 50 PER CENT IS THOUGHT TO COME FROM OUR GENES. THIS MEANS THAT YOU CAN ACTIVELY WORK TO KEEP YOUR MIND STRONG, WHICH NOT ONLY MAKES YOU HAPPIER, BUT ALSO PROTECTS AGAINST THE IMPOSTER VOICE.

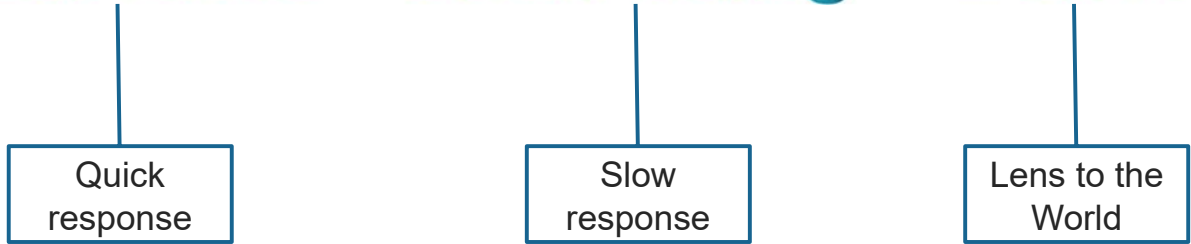
**Dr Jessamy Hibberd**

*The Imposter Cure: How to stop feeling like a fraud and escape the mind-trap of imposter syndrome*

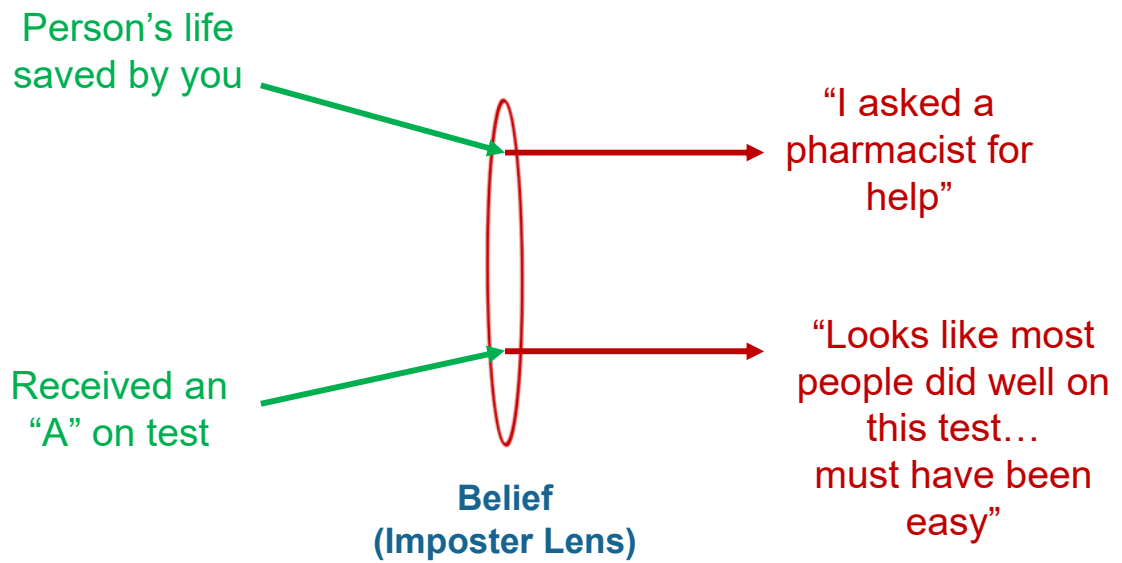
#kindlequotes

# Restructuring Beliefs

**Emotion + Reasoning = Belief**

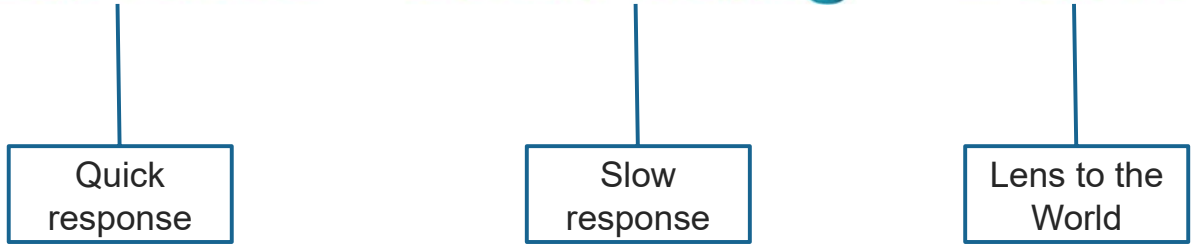


# Restructuring Beliefs



# Restructuring Beliefs

**Emotion + Reasoning = Belief**

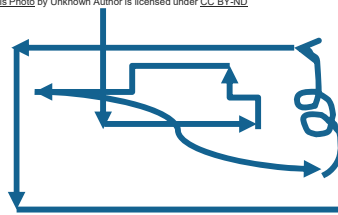


# Wire Analogy



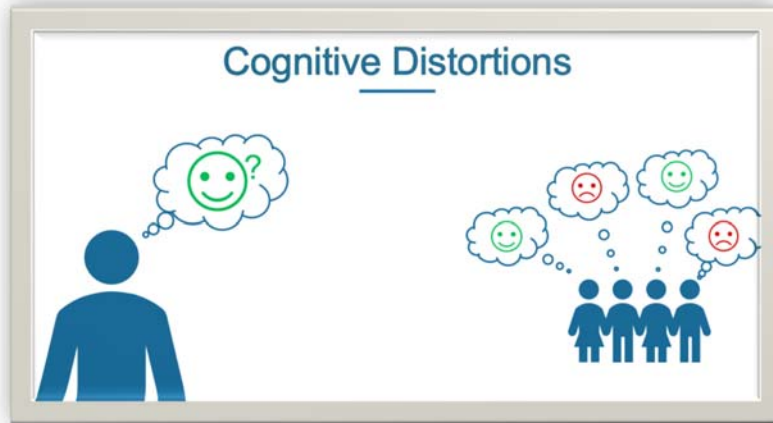
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→ Emotion



→ Reasoning

# Restructuring Beliefs: Imposter Thoughts



Recognize:

- Competency involves recognizing fear of doing something new
- Anxiety is not all bad!
  - Goal: learn to harness anxiety so that it doesn't cause MAJOR fight/flight response
- Life requires a healthy among of fake it till you make it

# Restructuring Beliefs: **Functional Imposter**



Turn that voice in your head into a bully.

Remember: Thoughts are NOT FACTS

You will slip up...remember to treat your mind like a puppy.

You don't yell at a puppy that is trying to learn a new skill.

Antidote to IP:

**Confidence**

Turn self-criticism into self-compassion

Create a positive mindset through challenging your self-critical thoughts

Reward your success

Talk about your success with those you trust.  
In fact, talk more about life with those who you trust



# Restructuring Beliefs: **Imposter Complex**



## Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Wk r x j k w v



E h k d y l r u v

I h h d q j v

## Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)



## Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy



# Mindfulness



<https://libreshot.com/light-trails-on-the-highway/>

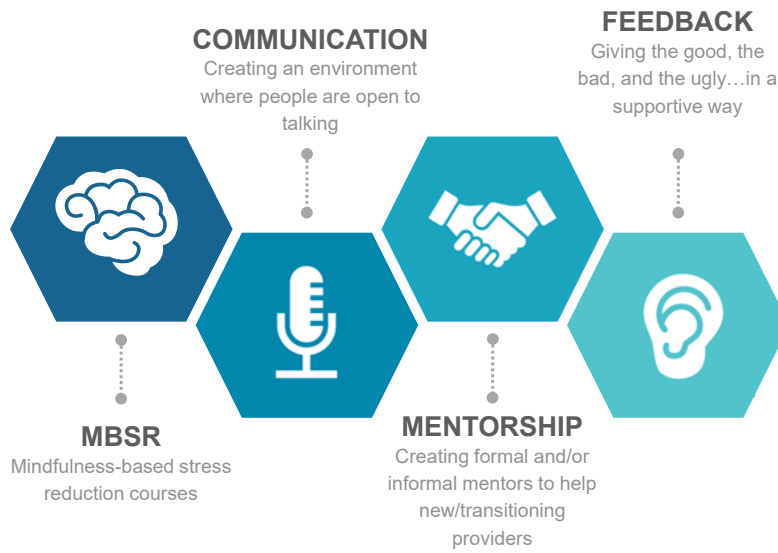


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<https://pixy.org/5978559/>

# Macro-solutions



## Conclusion – Take Home Points

Email:  
LewiaSD@gmail.com

- We all have IP at some point in our life, but it exists on a spectrum
- Not all IP exists consciously
- Solutions also exist on a spectrum
- Approximately 1/3 of PAs report some level of IP
- IP is linked to burnout

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