

Is it Imposter Syndrome or an Inferiority Complex?

4 Ways to Overcome Self-Doubt As You Begin Your Career

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The sound of birds returning home signals that springtime is here. And then, before you know it—*it's graduation time*.

While crossing that figurative finish line brings feelings of relief and joy for most—for many of us about to begin an internship or a new career, just the thought can send us spiraling into self-doubt. No matter your GPA, no one is immune to laying awake at night.

But whether you're hastily sending out applications or counting down to your start date—we can all use this grace period to prepare a little emotionally.

But first, let's name it.

Everyone experiences **self-doubt** sometimes. We question how true or valid our own opinions, decisions, thoughts, beliefs, or emotions are¹. But if a negative self-image affects your daily life, you may have imposter syndrome or an inferiority complex.

Those with **imposter syndrome** are weighed down by personal expectations. They attribute their success to luck or effort they can't regularly expend². They also struggle to accept compliments, or believe they aren't as smart or competent as others might think—it's just a matter of time before someone finds out³.

Those with an **inferiority complex** often compare themselves to others or believe that nothing they do is ever good enough. They can feel hostile or nervous, and have trouble admitting to mistakes because what's left of their self-worth hangs in the balance. Some are highly competitive, an effort to hide an overwhelming sense of inadequacy.

1. Ditch the self-deprecation

Not taking ourselves too seriously or laughing at our own mistakes can increase our wellbeing. But self-deprecation becomes an issue when we constantly undervalue ourselves and our efforts. Left unchecked, it can erode our self-esteem and impact our success.

¹ <https://www.berkeleywellbeing.com/self-doubt.html>

² <https://www.verywellmind.com/imposter-syndrome-and-social-anxiety-disorder-4156469>

³ <https://www.verywellmind.com/imposter-syndrome-and-social-anxiety-disorder-4156469>

Instead, we can break the cycle by intentionally noticing our accomplishments, big or small. We can also practice self-compassion when things don't go as planned, and reframe it as part of our overall learning experience.

2. Find your people

Pick and choose your support system wisely. Make sure they share your values, have experiences in common with you, and are invested in seeing you succeed on your own terms. They should be people who you can count on to provide honest feedback, in a kind and non-judgemental way.

These can be your former classmates, any friends or family who are also forging their own path, mentors or former instructors who are real-life examples of where you'd like to be.

3. Make a hype folder

Create a new folder on your device and fill it with positive feedback, words of encouragement, or compliments you receive. These can be emails from colleagues, an instructor's comments on an assignment you nailed, a screenshot of that time your classmate praised you—you get the idea.

Anytime you doubt your abilities, open it up for real-life reminders of the impact you have in the world. At first glance, it might feel self-indulgent, but it isn't when you consider how destructive and unfair your inner voice can be. A hype folder is the reality-check we all need to recentre ourselves.

4. Expand your support system

If you keep struggling despite your efforts, talking to someone who is professionally trained in life transitions or self-esteem issues can help. Reaching out early in your career can set you up for an easier time and prevent it from negatively impacting your life.

Interns can contact Humber College's [Counselling Services](#), free of charge. *Psychology Today* has a [search tool](#) that alumni can use to filter by location, needs, and areas of concern. Ask your therapist for their sliding scale or a receipt for insurance coverage.

As you navigate this next chapter, know that you belong and have made it this far because of all your efforts. Working hard to achieve your goals while battling your inner critic at every turn is exhausting and distracts from what you're trying to do. Planting seeds early will help—you've got this.