Staying well in research

Managing mental health: dealing with imposter syndrome and more

Hugh Kearns: www.ithinkwell.com.au

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Hugh Kearns

Thinkwell
www.ithinkwell.com.au

Flinders University,
Adelaide, Australia
@ithinkwellHugh

Hugh Kearns
@ithinkwellHugh

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Mental Health Warning

WARNING: A RESEARCH DEGREE CAN SERIOUSLY DAMAGE YOUR MENTAL HEALTH
Mental illness
Mental health
Staying well
The Secret Life of the Researcher
Diminishing Returns
Diminishing Returns

Work late
Diminishing Returns

Work late

Less sleep
Diminishing Returns

- Work late
- Less sleep
- Get run down
Diminishing Returns

Less productive → Work late → Less sleep → Get run down → Less productive
Diminishing returns

"The hurrier I go, the behinder I get."
-Lewis Carroll
“When we are tired, we are attacked by ideas we conquered long ago.”

Friedrich Nietzsche, German philosopher, 1844-1900
KEEP CALM AND HAVE A CUPPA

NOW PANIC AND FREAK OUT
PARETO PRINCIPLE

20 % to 80 %
PARETO PRINCIPLE

80

20

80

20
PARETO PRINCIPLE

Trivial Many

Vital Few

20

80
Multi-tasking
Multi-tasking

Multi-failing

Doing several things at the same time and doing them all less well.

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Don’t check emails:

First thing in the morning

Last thing at night

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Multi-tasking

Untick all of these

- Play a sound
- Briefly change the mouse pointer
- Show an envelope icon in the taskbar
- Display a Desktop Alert
Shhh!
Research in progress
Multi-tasking

GO AWAY
I HAVE A DEADLINE
Limits

Time Limit
Mental health tip: Take a lunch break
Run
Creative writing
Swim
Pets
Voluntary work
Read
TV
Pottery
Travel
Paint
Friends
Movies
Yoga
Walking
oops!
If you knew the answer before you started it wouldn’t be called Research
Catastrophising
Catastrophising

ANXIETY GIRL!

able to jump to the worst conclusion in a single bound!
Bouncing back

“Our greatest glory consists not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.”

*Oliver Goldsmith, (1730-1774), Irish writer*

Samuel Beckett, Worstward Ho
Re-planning

When things go wrong don’t throw out the plan.

Revise the plan.
Re-planning

Tools, planners, templates.

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Maybe it would be easier if we put this down.
THE IMPOSTER SYNDROME
That Nagging Feeling

New job
Assignment
Public speaking
Writing
A feeling that you will be exposed
That they will find out what you are really like
Imposter Feelings

You occasionally feel like a fraud even though there is evidence that you are not.

Qualifications
Expertise
Experience
Prevalence – imposter feelings

70%

occasional feelings
Prevalence – imposter syndrome

30%

consistent feelings
The Imposter Syndrome

The thoughts, feelings and behaviours

I can’t do this
I will be found out
Who am I to be doing this
I just got away with it this time
The next time they will find out
The Imposter Syndrome

The thoughts, feelings and behaviours

I feel like a fraud
Anxious
On edge
The Imposter Syndrome

The thoughts, feelings and behaviours

Over-working

Avoidance
The Imposter Syndrome

Particularly common when we are being evaluated:

• Sport
• Academia
• Research
• Promotion
• Transitions
Success is attributed to:

- Luck
- Just being nice
- Easy task
- Other people
- That was then - this is different
- Worked hard
How people respond

Work hard

Avoid
The Imposter’s Cycle

Feeling like a fraud
Not OK – Not good enough
The Imposter’s Cycle

Feeling like a fraud
Not OK – Not good enough

WHY?
Looking for a reason
The Imposter’s Cycle

Feeling like a fraud
Not OK – Not good enough

WHY?
Looking for a reason

Create a reason
A target. If I had a certificate I’d feel OK
The Imposter’s Cycle

Feeling like a fraud
Not OK – Not good enough

WHY?
Looking for a reason

Create a reason
A target. If I had a certificate I’d feel OK

Work to achieve target
The Imposter’s Cycle

Still feel like a fraud but with Hope

Work to achieve target

Create a reason
A target. If I had a certificate I’d feel OK

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Not OK – Not good enough

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WHY?
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Achieve target

Still feel like a fraud but with Hope

Work to achieve target

Momentary pleasure
The Imposter’s Cycle

Feeling like a fraud
Not OK – Not good enough

WHY?
Looking for a reason

Create a reason
A target. If I had a certificate I’d feel OK

Work to achieve target

Still feel like a fraud but with Hope

Achieve target

Momentary pleasure

But glow quickly wears off and the feeling returns
The Imposter’s Cycle

- Feeling like a fraud
- Not OK – Not good enough

WHY?
- Looking for a reason

Create a reason
- A target. If I had a certificate I’d feel OK

Discount previous reason
- Discount evidence

Round 2

Work to achieve target
- Still feel like a fraud but with Hope

Achieve target
- Momentary pleasure

But glow quickly wears off and the feeling returns
The Imposter’s Cycle

Feeling like a fraud
Not OK – Not good enough

WHY?
Looking for a reason

Round 2

Create a reason
A target. If I had a certificate I’d feel OK

Discount previous reason
Discount evidence

Create a new reason
A target. If I had a higher certificate I’d feel OK

Work to achieve target

Still feel like a fraud but with Hope

Achieve target

Momentary pleasure

But glow quickly wears off and the feeling returns
The Imposter’s Cycle

Feeling like a fraud
Not OK – Not good enough

Why?
Looking for a reason

Round 2

Create a reason
A target. If I had a certificate I’d feel OK

Create a new reason
A target. If I had a higher certificate I’d feel OK

Discount previous reason
Discount evidence

Work to achieve target

Still feel like a fraud but with Hope

Achieve target

Momentary pleasure

But glow quickly wears off and the feeling returns
How people respond

Work hard

Avoid
Avoid being found out

• Avoid
• Don’t try
• Procrastinate
• Over-commit
Six things

1. Imposter feelings are normal

Most people will occasionally feel like an imposter, especially in new situations.
2. Feelings are not facts

You can feel something (even strongly) and it might not be true. Look at the facts.
3. Mind your language

Don’t discount your achievements. Just say Thank you.
Six things

4. Create a fact file and a brag file

Make a file that contains evidence about your achievements.
5. Know your imposter moments

When you:
- Speak in public
- Write
- Make a mistake
6. Be brave and take action

“A great deal of talent is lost to the world for want of a little courage.”
Sydney Smith, 1849
Six things

1. Imposter feelings are normal
2. Feelings are not facts
3. Mind your language
4. Create a fact file and a brag file
5. Know your imposter moments
6. Be brave and take action

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So

In conclusion
The Secret Life of the Researcher
Thank you.

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