

# Imposter Syndrome

For **Barefoot Coaching**

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Imposter Syndrome



# Imposter Syndrome

*“The fundamental cause of trouble in the world today is that the stupid are cocksure, while the intelligent are full of doubt”.* Bertrand Russell.



- ***Imposter Syndrome*** was first recognized in 1978 by **Professor Pauline Clance** and **Suzanne Imes** at Georgia State University.
- ***Imposter Syndrome*** is the experience that many high-achieving people have of feeling a fraud, of not deserving their success, a fear of being ‘found out’, of not being as competent as other people think they are. It is characterized by chronic self-doubt, feeling phoney, attributing success to luck or other external factors, feeling unable to live up to expectations, etc.
- The best evidence is that it effects women more often than men and people from humble origins more than those from more privileged backgrounds.
- People who experience ***imposter syndrome typically*** prioritize ***self-esteem*** (which has to be earned) over ***self-worth*** (which is innate). The solution therefore is to encourage ***unconditional self-acceptance*** and a focus on recognizing our innate ***self-worth*** rather than chasing ever-higher ***self-esteem***.

# Self-Esteem or Self-Worth?

- When a person's sense of value is deeply-rooted in real **self-worth**, they feel more secure from day to day. Even if today they don't meet their own expectations, they can resume life tomorrow without a loss of identity or energy.
- For decades however, we have been educated in a culture of conditional **self-esteem** – not intrinsic **self-worth**. As a result, there is mounting evidence that we are nurturing an ever-present anxiety about not being worthy – a key feature of **Imposter Syndrome**.
- Whilst the pursuit of **self-esteem** often motivates action, it also creates the conditions for depression, insecurity, self-preoccupation and an insatiable craving for attention and validation.
- The philosopher **Alan Watts** once labelled this this **“the law of reverse effect”**. As **Watts** put it, **“Insecurity is the result of trying to be secure”**. In the pursuit of **self-esteem**, we often become more increasingly aware of that which we lack.
- Unlike **self-esteem**, **self-worth** is not contingent on meeting expectations – neither those of others nor of ourselves. **Self-worth** is independent of our performance; it's a fundamental **unconditional** friendship with ourselves.
- When you possess real **self-worth**, you are not obsessed with proving yourself. An **unconditional** sense of your own value enables you to recover quickly from setbacks and gain confidence that you can develop and grow.
- ...And your **self-esteem** grows too, precisely when you are no longer chasing it!

***Close your eyes and picture yourself as a new born infant, lying in a cot.*** And as you look at yourself as a new-born child lying contentedly in your cot, get a really strong sense that you are fundamentally OK...that you are fine, just as you are...that you are totally unique and that this uniqueness gives you innate worth and value....And sense also, that you don't need to come top in any assessments in order to be OK...you just are OK...And that you don't need to win any awards in order to be OK...you just are OK....And you don't need to be a size zero or to have a super-toned body and a six-pack in order to be OK...You just are OK...Just as trees come in all shapes and sizes, and there is no correct way to be a tree, so it is with people, and therefore, so it is with you...You were born OK...You were born worthwhile...You were born with innate worth and value....And these are not qualities that you have to earn...they are qualities that you are born with....and since no-one will ever perform surgery on you to take these qualities away, they are qualities you will carry with you always...regardless of how much you earn or how many friends you have on Facebook...You will always be a work-in-progress, never the finished article – since that would require that no further improvement were possible, and there will always be room for improvement...self-improvement is a journey, not a destination and you will therefore never be perfect...but you will always be fundamentally OK, fundamentally worthwhile; you will always have innate worth and value....And be aware also, that since all of us are always works in progress, never the finished article, our imperfections add value, they do not take it away. If every person were perfect, then every individual would be replaceable by anybody else...but we are not....our imperfections are what make us indispensable....irreplaceable. For we are all imperfect in our own ways...no one is universally gifted...our imperfections are what make us unique....Just as in a mosaic, every piece of stone is imperfect...incomplete...and yet each piece is the only piece that can make its unique contribution to the total mosaic...In the same way, you are the only person who can fill the 'you-shaped' hole in the mosaic of humanity...As the far from perfect Leonard Cohen once wrote, ***'There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in....'*** So celebrate your imperfections, accept yourself unconditionally as a work in progress, yet always, fundamentally worthwhile, fundamentally OK, and absolutely fine, just as you are...

# Other-Esteem and Self-Esteem

- **Other-esteem** is chasing recognition and affirmation of your value from an external source, often a person or group.
- **Other-esteem** seems to climb steadily during the twenties and peak in the early thirties. Winning the approval of other people is a key motivator in early professional life.
- In the early thirties, **self-esteem** seems to take over from **other-esteem** as a key driver. Our **reputation with ourselves** now begins to assume more importance.
- Both **other-esteem** and **self-esteem** have one characteristic in common: they are contingent. Only the source is different. When we are operating in **esteem** mode, it hardly matters what the source is. Whether we are getting our validation from inside or outside, the level will always be variable and based on achievement. We pursue each new validation with all the earnestness of a dog chasing a car.
- In contrast, **Self-worth** is a deep belief in your inherent value as a person, from a position of **unconditional** friendship with yourself. **Self-worth** is **intrinsic**, not **extrinsic**. It comes from within, not from your behaviour or your performance. **Self-worth** is not contingent. In other words, you always have it. There are no conditions to be fulfilled. It's yours by the very fact of your existence. Even if you have not found it yet!

# Shame and Guilt

- **Shame** is the *opposite* of **self-worth**. This short word captures the deep sense of being undeserving or unworthy which anyone who has struggled with **Imposter Syndrome** will recognize immediately.
- As humans, we have the capacity to reflect on what we have done or not done. This can produce two closely related feelings – **guilt** and **shame**.
- **Guilt**: *“I’ve done something I shouldn’t have: the act was bad”*. Guilt is about the **action**.
- **Shame**: *“I’ve done something I shouldn’t have (or not done something I should have). I am bad”*. Shame is about **me**, not the action (or inaction).
- A person with **high self-worth** can still experience guilt but somehow it does not impinge on **who** they are. They can make amends (or not) and move on.
- But for the person with **low self-worth**, a sense of guilt is easily transformed into a feeling of shame. Even when there is no specific act to feel guilty about, they can feel ashamed of who or what they are *not*.
- For many people suffering from shame-related issues, just grasping the distinction between **self-esteem** and **self-worth** can be enlightening.

# The Erosion of Self-Worth

The current emphasis on *self-esteem* (as contingent and extrinsic) is eroding *self-worth* (unconditional and intrinsic).

- In a famous experiment conducted by **Mark Lepper** and **David Greene** in the early 1970s, two groups of children – both of which liked drawing – were studied and compared. One group was given rewards; the other group was allowed to draw without rewards. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the effect of the rewards was to distract from the creativity of the first group. They spent more time squabbling over the rewards than enjoying the activity of drawing.
- Even more perniciously, when the rewards stopped, the children who were previously rewarded stopped drawing. However, the second group, who had never received awards, continued to draw. The psychologists concluded that extrinsic rewards have a negative effect on intrinsic motivation.
- Could something similar be happening with *self-esteem* and *self-worth*? For example, is our emphasis on *physical self-improvement* actually eroding *intrinsic self-worth*? This might help explain why, for all the emphasis on physical wellbeing, Western countries have the highest levels of obesity ever. By focusing on appearance, we seem to be ignoring the widening black hole inside: an emptiness of *low intrinsic self-worth* that craves fulfilment.

# The Person-Centred Approach

- Based on work of Carl Rogers (1902-1987)
- Key concepts:
- Self<----->Self-Concept  
degree of disturbance
- Conditions of Worth (“love with strings attached”)
- Locus of Evaluation (internal or external)
- Organismic Trusting
- Actualizing Tendency
- Core Conditions for promoting Growth:
  - Empathic Understanding
  - Genuineness/Congruence
  - Unconditional Positive Regard



*“The curious paradox is that when I can accept myself as I am, then I can change.”* Carl Rogers.



## The 7 Key Shifts in Thinking to Develop Self-Worth and Overcome Imposter Syndrome:

### 1) From Assessing to Asserting

We build self-worth by asserting our value, not assessing it. Self-worth is a declaration, not an evaluation. There are no scales, no points, no scores out of a hundred, no preconditions. There is but a single assertion: **“I accept myself unconditionally as a work in progress, yet always, fundamentally worthwhile, fundamentally OK, and absolutely fine, just as I am!”**

Asserting requires action. Self-worth is an active process, not a passive state. When we start asserting our worth, we do healthy things like eat well, exercise and consciously choose people and activities that are good for us – because we are already – and always – *“worth it!”*

We stop making those remarks to the mirror that we would never make to a good friend. We look on ourselves with a new kindness and nourish ourselves accordingly.

## 2) From Condition to Expression

- When our *Self-Worth* is secure, we may set ourselves goals (as in sports) but we can still enjoy an activity even when we don't achieve our targets.
- We don't enjoy the game *on condition* we win. When acting from *Self-Worth* rather than *Self-Esteem*, we can enjoy the game, regardless of the outcome or of how well we played.
- Similarly, if we deny ourselves pleasure by only reading books or journals *on condition* they are related to our work, we probably struggle with *Self-Worth* too.
- The ability to enjoy simple pleasures is one of the most accurate indicators of *Self-Worth*.
- People who don't value themselves invariably struggle to enjoy life. Or else they require a lot of external stimulation, such as alcohol, drugs, attention or shopping.
- On the other hand, when you feel good about yourself, even watching the rain on the window can be pleasurable. The sunlight through the trees becomes your art gallery.
- If we allow it, our days can be filled with hundreds of pleasurable moments.

# 3) From Self-Reproach to Self-Acceptance

- **Self-Worth** does *not* ask you to give up your sadness or disappointment or even annoyance. But **Self-Worth** *does* ask you to end **self-reproach** for how you feel about yourself and to replace this with **self-acceptance**.
- **Self-acceptance** does not (necessarily) mean acceptance of circumstances. But it does mean acceptance (and kindness) toward yourself. **Self-acceptance** makes people **active**, not **passive**, because they are no longer burning up energy by resisting their emotions or other facts about their lives.
- A common misunderstanding is that **acceptance** leads to **resignation**, perhaps even tolerating unacceptable circumstances or behaviour. How do you know whether you are practicing **self-acceptance** or **resignation**?
- i) **Resignation** is usually accompanied by feelings of loss, sadness or longing, whereas **acceptance** is more peaceful.
- ii) If your energy plummets, then it's probably **resignation**. True **acceptance** does not result in an energy slump: it's a calm **acceptance** of the way things are, often accompanied by a sense of release.
- **Self-acceptance** does not require us to tolerate circumstances. On the contrary, when we accept ourselves and our needs, we are more able to make requests of others and can calmly state what is okay for us and what is not.
- Some people find it easiest to think of **self-acceptance** in terms of "**permission**". So, for example, "**accepting the need to rest**" might become "**giving myself permission to rest**".

# 4) From Self-Evaluation to Usefulness

- This shift invites us to move from an inward-looking state of *self-evaluation* to an *outward focus* on *others* and how we can be useful to them.
- The *self-worth* approach recognizes that you are always worthy and that there is nothing to be proved. Therefore, you can go out into the world to find opportunities to provide something of value to others – and you do so as an expression of your *self-worth*, not as a condition of your *self-esteem*.
- When we are focused on *usefulness*, this often unleashes a new sense of creativity and inquisitiveness. We think more clearly about issues when we are not trying to prove ourselves. For example: Changing questions such as *“What did you think of my presentation?”* to *“Which aspects of the presentation were most useful to you?”*
- The more we focus on *usefulness to others*, the more room *self-worth* has to grow. Precisely when we are not thinking about it, *self-worth* is expressed in our ability to focus on the issues and people around us.
- When a professional discovers they can drop all their *self-centred* concerns (*“How am I doing?”*) and participate from a perspective of *usefulness*, conversations flow where they are needed.
- Another way to think of this is with the metaphor of *“building a bridge from the other side”*. Instead of beginning with us/our expertise/our talents, we begin with the other: their opportunities, their risks, their complications, their issues. Then we build a bridge back to how we can be useful.

# 5) From 'Should' to 'Could'

- When we take the word **“should”** out of our vocabularies and replace it with **“could”**, we cease to act out of obligation and instead, choose what we'll do based on an array of possibilities.
- Behind the word **“should”** lies an incessant need to prove something to ourselves - usually because we don't feel good enough as we are. And as soon as we accomplish something, we are thinking about the next thing we **“should”** do.
- It's not that aspirations are harmful; it's the constant need to prove things to ourselves that does the damage. We can embark on any course of action with more freedom and courage if we feel empowered by a sense of **possibility**, rather than pressed by concepts of necessity and imperative.
- When we come to these decisions from the vantage of **choice**, then we gain new perspectives. We see more options and make better decisions because we are less focused on trying to prove things to ourselves. For example, note the difference in the feelings generated by the following statements:
  - ***'I should exercise more'*** vs ***'I could exercise more'***; ***'I should go to bed earlier'*** vs ***'I could go to bed earlier'***;
  - ***'I should eat healthier'*** vs ***'I could eat healthier'***; ***'I should drink less alcohol'*** vs ***'I could drink less alcohol'***.
- **'Should'** statements typically generate feelings of inadequacy, failure and of not *'measuring up'* (all classic symptoms of **Imposter Syndrome**) whereas **'Could'** statements open up possibilities for self-care.

# 6) From Proving Oneself to Valuing Oneself

*“Too many people spend money they haven’t earned, to buy things they don’t want, to impress people they don’t like.”* Will Rogers.

- Many people live their lives following the logic of **Have, Do, Be**. For example, when I **have** sufficient money/qualifications/achievement, then I will **do** the things I want to do, and finally, I will **be** the person I want to be.
- **Self-worth** is about consciously inverting this process. Starting by **being** the person I want to **be** (valuing myself), I now **do** the things that fit with my values and end up (at least some of the time) **having** the things I want or need.
- When we make the shift away from **having** or **doing** to **being**, we typically experience a lift in energy - the **doing** somehow gets lighter and the **having** (or not *having*) less significant. If our friendship with ourselves is conditional on how our financial situation or career is developing - perhaps because we link our **self-worth** with our **net worth**, we need to be able to access something deeper than **self-esteem**.
- When we are firmly in touch with our **self-worth**, when we reflect back on a week in which we did not achieve very much, we can bounce back and make next week more productive.
- In a very real way, **self-worth** empowers us to live our dreams, rather than to be ruled by them.

# 7) From Being Interesting to Being Interested

- When in the grip of ***Imposter Syndrome***, there are two common pitfalls. The first is shrinking into isolation, where setting up any meeting (even with friends) can take superhuman effort. The second is talking too much about ourselves, often out of desperation for validation.
- The following question is a simple test of self-worth: ***‘When listening to a friend tell a story, are you listening out of interest or are you listening in order to reply?’***
- In other words, is your focus on being ***interested*** or trying to be ***interesting***? If the latter, why? What are you trying to prove?
- Sometimes we are genuinely interested and we accord our friends the full focus of our attention. Other times, we are looking for the gap where we can drop into ***“That reminds me of the time when...”*** or ask a question that makes us look clever, if only in our own eyes.
- Often, ***being interested*** just takes remembering. As long as we remind ourselves, we can switch out of ***“interesting mode”*** and focus on the other person – And it’s a lot easier to be curious about someone else than to be endlessly entertaining!
- A conscious focus on being interested is rewarding at many levels. The quality of connection with others almost instantly improves. During social occasions that might otherwise be a source of anxiety, being ***interested*** is a game changer. Being interested is a passport to any conversation with anyone.

# Looking Outwards

- People with real **self-worth** don't usually live narcissistic lives, cocooned in a safe bubble of smug contentment. They are more typically active people with the energy that comes from a deep sense of self-belief.
- People with real **self-worth** are not lost in self-contemplation - they are more likely to turn **outwards**. Their thoughts naturally evolve toward how they can **contribute** to the world, how they can be useful.
- As the psychologist **Tasha Eurich** noted in her article, *'The Right Way to be Introspective'*, there is no intrinsic link between introspection and self-insight. **Eurich** expected her research to show that people who spent time and energy examining themselves would have a clearer understanding of how they tick and that this knowledge would have positive effects throughout their lives: ***"But to my astonishment, our data told the exact opposite story. The people who score high on self-reflection were more stressed, depressed and anxious; less satisfied with their jobs and relationships; more self-absorbed; and they felt less in control of their lives. What's more, these negative consequences seemed to increase the more they reflected"***
- We can spend a lot of energy on self-reflection but emerge with no more **self-worth** than when we started. It's the **quality** of our thinking about ourselves that matters, not the **quantity**. As we start **accepting** ourselves, rather than **assessing**; as we become **interested in the world around us**, rather than trying to be **interesting** – we let go of **neediness** and we focus on **usefulness**.
- Many of the best contributors keep quiet about it. They don't contribute in order to draw attention to themselves or their "personal brand". They are happy to contribute as an expression of their own values. Whether they are contributing at work, to a charity, to the local community or school, they just get on with it. The activity of contributing is its own reward.



# The Life Script and Imposter Syndrome

- The **life script** consists of a set of **decisions** made by the child in response to **script messages** about **self**, **others** and the **world**. The script messages come mainly from the child's parents, and may be conveyed **verbally**, **non-verbally**, or as combinations of the two.
- **Non-verbal messages:** Before infants have words, they interpret other people's messages in terms of their non-verbal signals. (The young baby has acute perception of expressions, body tensions, movement, tones, etc). If their parents hold them close and warm, the child is likely to perceive their message to them as **'I accept and love you!'** But if they tense up and hold the child stiffly away from them, the child may read this as conveying, **'I reject you and don't want you close!'**
- **Verbal messages** can be in the form of **direct commands:** **'Don't bother me!'** **'Do what you're told!'** **'Hurry up!'** **'Don't be naughty!'** **'Nothing but your best is good enough!'**, etc.
- Most parents bombard their children with hundreds of commands like these. Their potency as **script messages** will depend on how often they are repeated, and on the non-verbal signals that go with them.

- At other times, **verbal messages** are conveyed in the form of **attributions**:
- The child is told, not just what he should **do**, but what he should **be** - eg. **'You're stupid!'** **'You're nothing but trouble!'** **'You're precious!'** **'You're a rascal!'** etc.
- Again, Their potency as **script messages** will depend on the non-verbal signals that accompany them – **'You're a rascal!'** spoken harshly with a blow conveys a very different message than the same words spoken with a soft voice-tone, a cuddle and a smile.
- Frequently, **attributions** are delivered **indirectly** –ie. the parents speak about the child to someone else, either when the child is present, or in a way that will be communicated back to the child –eg. **'This one is the quiet one!'** **'She's the difficult one!'** **'He's a real daredevil!'** **'She's such a nuisance!'** **'He's the clever one!'** **'She's going to be a doctor when she grows up!'** etc.
- **Indirect attributions** like these are especially likely to be read by the child as potent **script messages**. Children view their parents as determining reality. Hearing them talking to other people about how he or she **is**, they take it for granted that what they say has to be fact.

# Injunctions and Permissions

As grown-ups, we each carry around a set of *injunctions* and *permissions*, which we received from our parents. The *decisions* we made in response to these messages form the foundations of our *life script*. Each *injunction* has its corresponding *permission*. Typically, injunctions begin with the word *'Don't...'* and permissions begin with *'It's OK to...'*

**Bob & Mary Goulding** identified **12 themes** which occur again and again as the basis for people's early negative decisions, often resulting in feelings associated with *Imposter Syndrome*:

**1) *Don't Be (or Don't Exist)*:** If anyone has ever felt worthless or unlovable, it is likely that their script messages include a *Don't Exist* injunction. For example, where parents already have several children and don't want more, they may in all sorts of subtle ways, convey rejection to a new arrival; maybe by rarely smiling or talking to him or her.

**2) Don't Be You** - This injunction can be conveyed to a child by parents who have a boy when they wanted a girl, or vice versa. (This may be reflected in their choice of name for the child). Or **Don't be You** may be more general - eg. parents may favour a younger to an elder child or may continually compare their child with other children –eg. *'the boy down the road can ride a bike without stabilisers and he's a year younger than you'*.

**3) Don't Be a Child** – This injunction is conveyed in messages like *'You're too old to...'* or *'Big boys don't cry.'* It is given out by parents who were never allowed to be child-like themselves (perhaps because they were raised in hardship or in a stern home) . Sometimes children give themselves this injunction –eg. where they act as carers for their parents or younger siblings.

**4) Don't Grow Up** - It is often the youngest child who gets a **Don't Grow Up** injunction. The parents may not want to let go of having a young child around the family and may define their whole worth in terms of being a good father or mother. A variant of **Don't Grow Up** is **Don't Leave Me**. Children who stay at home to care for demanding parents often carry this message. Another variant is **Don't be Sexy** which is often given by a father to his daughter when she reaches puberty.

**5) Don't Make It** – This injunction is given by parents who feel threatened by their children's accomplishments or jealous that they are getting chances that they themselves never had. Overtly, such parents will often urge their children to work hard and do well. The **Don't Make It** injunction is conveyed covertly. A student who decides to obey this injunction may study hard but then find a way of sabotaging herself –eg. by *'forgetting'* to hand in a crucial piece of work.

**6) Don't (Don't Do Anything)** - The injunction **Don't** implies *'Don't do anything, because anything you do is so dangerous that you're safer doing nothing at all.'* People who, in adult life, continually dither between courses of action may be carrying this script message. It is given by parents who are terrified that their children will come to harm if allowed to run free of the parental apron strings.

**7) Don't Be Important** – People carrying this message may become panicky when asked to take on any kind of leadership role or may *'dry-up'* when asked to speak in public. In their career, a person complying with **Don't Be Important** may work excellently in a subordinate post, but either not seek promotion or sabotage themselves when there is a chance of getting it. The message conveyed (covertly ) from parents is *'I'll put up with having you around, as long as you realize that you and your wants are not important around here.'*

**8) Don't Belong** - The person complying with **Don't Belong** feels 'out of it' in groups and is likely to be seen by others as a 'loner' or 'unsociable'. The message may be conveyed by parents who continually tell their child they are '*different*' from other children, that they are '*shy*', '*difficult*' or '*special*'. Or the parents may model this injunction through their own social ineptitude; or convey it by continually scape-goating the child.

**9) Don't Be Close** – This injunction may imply a ban on physical closeness . In this form it is modelled by parents who seldom touch each other. Alternatively, it may signify '**don't be emotionally close**' and be conveyed in families that never talk about their feelings. A child may give themselves **Don't be Close** (or a variant, **Don't Trust**) to stave off the pain of rejection, if they are rebuffed whenever they reach out to their parents; or if a parent goes away abruptly or dies.

**10) Don't Be Well (Don't Be Sane)** - This injunction may be given by busy parents, both out at work all day and short of energy when they get home. If, when their child is ill, one of the parents takes time off work and the other, perhaps reads takes time to read bedtime stories, the child might conclude, '*To get attention around here, I have to be ill*' and develop the strategy of getting sick whenever things go wrong.

**11) Don't Think** – This injunction may be given by a parent who consistently belittles their child's thinking. An adult complying with a **Don't Think** injunction is likely to respond to problems by being confused or by feeling bad, instead of thinking how to solve it. Two variations are **Don't Think About X** (where **X** stands for money, sex, politics, etc) or **Don't Think what You Think, Think What I Think**.

**12) Don't Feel** – This injunction may be modelled by parents who themselves bottle up their feelings. Sometimes there is an embargo on **all** feelings. More often, particular feelings are prohibited –eg. **Don't Feel Anger, Don't Feel Fear**, etc (often conveyed as '**boys don't cry**', '**be a brave soldier**', etc). Some parents convey a version that goes **Don't Feel What You Feel, Feel What I Feel**, conveyed as '**I'm hungry, what do you want to eat?**' or '**I'm cold, go and put on your jumper.**'

**How Decisions Relate to Injunctions** – Parental injunctions cannot *make* the child write their *Script* in a particular way. It is the child who *decides* what to do with the injunctions they receive. One child may accept an injunction as it stands. Another may modify it ingeniously to ease its impact (eg. a boy who gets **Don't Be the Sex You Are** may develop positive qualities, conventionally considered feminine). Still another may refuse to accept the injunction at all; recognizing that the injunction represents their parents' pathology, not their own.

# Anti-Script

Some people may take one of their **script** messages and turn it round to its opposite. When we act in this way, we are in **anti-script**. For example, a teenager may go through childhood obeying the script message, **'Be quiet and do what your parents say'** and then suddenly switch to becoming brash and loud, staying out late, etc. It might seem that they have broken free of their **script** message, but in reality, they have merely turned the **script message** on its head and is following it just as much as they did before. Later on, they may move back out of **anti-script** and revert to the original **script** message by becoming quiet and conventional.

## Overcome Imposter Syndrome by turning Injunctions into Permissions

**'Don't Exist'** becomes, **'It's OK to Exist'**; **'Don't Be You'** becomes **'It's OK to Be Me'**; **'Don't Grow Up'** becomes **'It's OK to Grow Up'**; **'Don't Make it'** becomes **'It's OK to Make it'**; **'Don't be Important'** becomes **'It's OK to be Important'**; **'Don't Belong'** becomes **'It's OK to Belong'**; **'Don't Think'** becomes **'It's OK to Think'**; **'Don't Feel'** becomes **'It's OK to Feel'**, etc.



# Process Scripts

Study of *life-scripts* has revealed that there are just **6 main patterns of script process**, irrespective of age, gender, education or culture:

- **1) Until** – If you live out your script according to the **Until** pattern, your motto in life is, *'I can't have fun until I've finished my work'*. There are lots of variants of this, but they all share the notion that *'something good can't happen until something less good has been finished'* –eg. *'After I retire, I'll be able to travel'*, *'Life begins at 40'*, *'I'll get my reward in the next world'*. Like all process themes, the *Until* pattern is lived out in the short-term and long-term –eg. *'Once the children have grown up, I'll have time for me'*, *'I'll come out for a drink when I've finished the dishes'*, etc.
- **2) After** – The **After** pattern is the opposite of **Until**. The motto here is *'I can have fun today, but I'll have to pay for it tomorrow'*. Variants of this pattern include *'This is a great party, but boy am I going to regret it tomorrow!'*, *'After you have children, life is just one round of obligations'*, etc.
- Like Damocles, the person with an **After** script believes he can have a good time today, but only at the cost of the sword falling tomorrow.

**3) Never** – The theme of **Never** is *‘I can never get what I most want’*. A person with this script pattern will **never** take the small steps they need to take to get what they want –eg. a person may claim they would like to get into a steady relationship, but **never** go to places where they might meet potential partners. Or they may claim that they would like to go to university but **never** get round to applying for a place.

**4) Always** – The person with an **Always** script asks, *‘Why does this always happen to me?’* People with an **Always** pattern play it out by going from one unsatisfactory relationship, job or location to another.

**5) Almost** – The person with an **Almost** script says, *‘I almost made it this time’* – eg. **almost** getting promoted at work, **almost** finishing a book, etc. Sometimes people with an **Almost** script do “make-it” – though their success is never enough –eg. getting a 1<sup>st</sup> class degree then starting work on a PhD, then a Fellowship, etc, etc. (*Almost there...but not quite*)

**6) Open-Ended** – The motto here is, *‘Once I get to a certain point in time, I won’t know what to do with myself afterwards’* –eg. having looked forward to retirement, or to the youngest child leaving home, feeling uneasy and not knowing what to do with yourself or how to fill the time.

**Combinations of the Process Themes** – While we may show all 6 of the process script patterns, for most of us, one is dominant. Some people combine two patterns –eg. a person who combines **Until** and **Never** scripts will follow the belief, *‘I can’t relax until I’ve finished my work ... But I never finish my work ... Therefore, I can never relax’*.

**Overcoming Imposter Syndrome by Breaking Out of Process Script Patterns** – Begin by identifying what your main *process patterns* are. Then, behave in ways that break the pattern –eg. If your main pattern is **Until**, break it by going ahead and having fun even before you’ve finished all your work! (known as *‘riding the pony without waiting until you’ve cleaned out the stables’*).