

# Impostor phenomenon: A symptom of systemic inequity

**IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON:** A phenomenon in which high-achieving individuals who, despite their objective successes, have persistent self-doubt and fear of being exposed as incompetent or less intelligent.<sup>1</sup>

Overcoming impostor phenomenon requires systems-level change, not necessarily a fix for an individual.

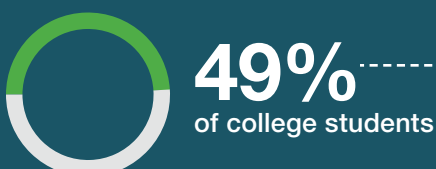
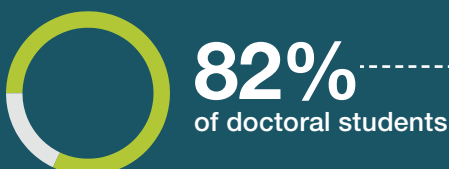
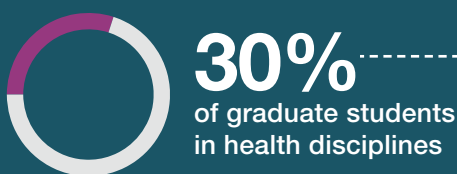
## SIGNS OF IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON<sup>2</sup>

- Attributing success to external factors such as luck or timing
- Fear of being exposed as a fraud or impostor
- Working excessively hard to prove yourself/ unhealthy pressure to succeed
- Denial of competence and discounting of praise
- Feelings of inadequacy and not belonging

## IMPACT OF IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON<sup>3,4</sup>

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Decreased career planning<sup>5</sup>
- Burnout
- Low self-esteem
- Psychological distress

## WHO DOES IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON AFFECT?<sup>6</sup>



## WHICH STUDENT GROUPS ARE MOST AFFECTED BY IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON?

Impostor phenomenon is commonly a result of a history of systemic exclusion and bias for many marginalized groups, such as colonization, racism, sexism, white supremacy, etc.

- Women<sup>10</sup>
- Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) students<sup>11</sup>
- First-generation students
- Mature students<sup>12</sup>



## INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES TO ADDRESS IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON<sup>13</sup>

Advancing inclusion is a correlated two-step process that requires both proactive and reactive efforts to ensure safety and belonging.

### 1. Cultural change:

identifying and removing barriers that limit the progress of students from diverse backgrounds

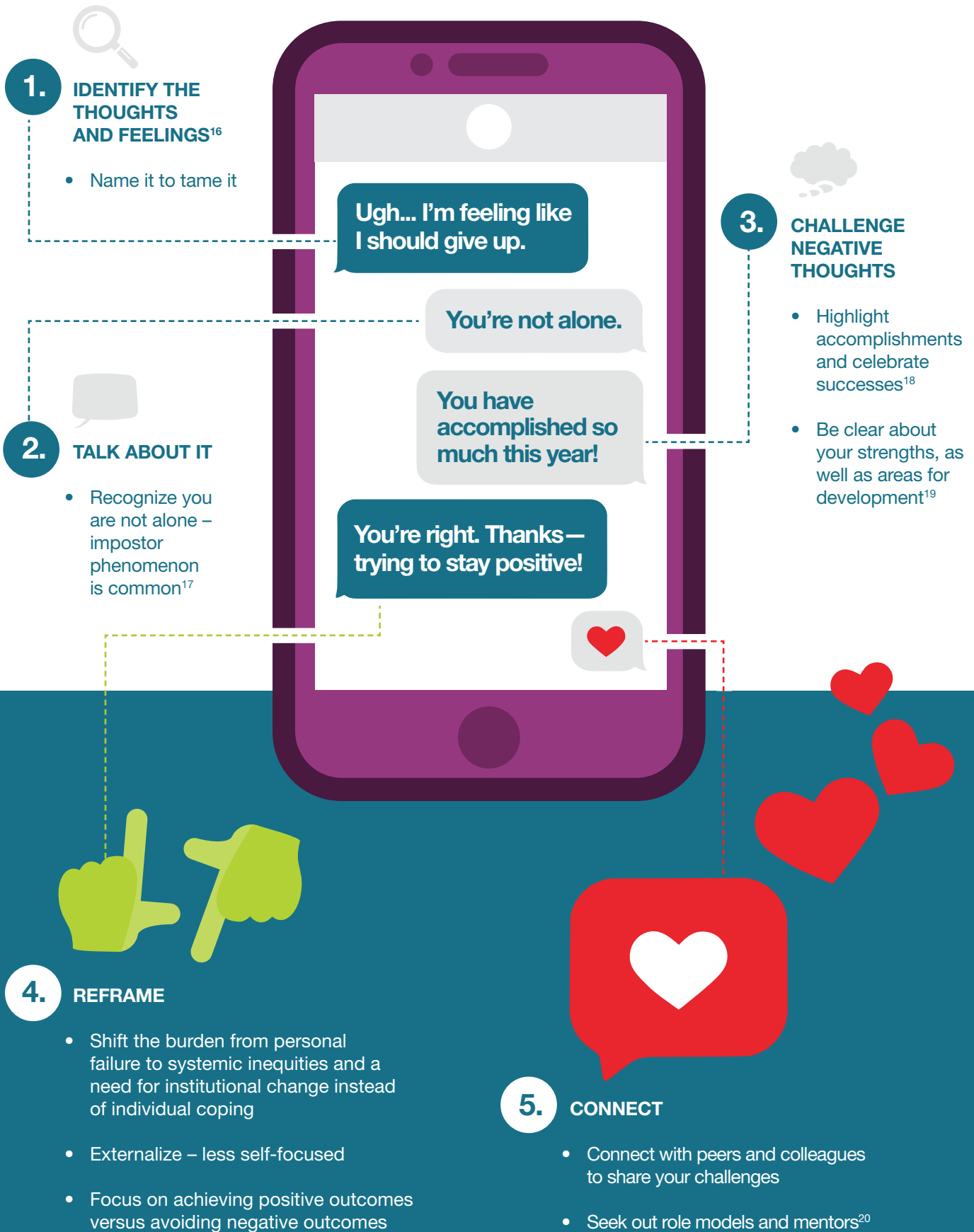
- Create inclusive and welcoming spaces<sup>14</sup>
- Positive, informal interactions with faculty and peers<sup>15</sup>
- Realistic expectations for students
- Prioritize collaboration instead of competition
- Highlight and celebrate contributions from marginalized groups
- Recognize accomplishments outside of academics
- High-quality mentoring opportunities

### 2. Increase diversity representation:

recruiting and employing more students, faculty and staff from diverse groups



# HOW CAN STUDENTS MANAGE SYMPTOMS OF IMPOSTOR PHENOMENON?



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