

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry
Empowering Our True Selves - Shedding the Imposter Syndrome
First Parish Church of Stow and Acton, MA. January 2023

Opening Words and Chalice Lighting

“O sacred flame blaze forth – wisdom brought to life.

Guide us – with the light of hope, the warmth of love, the beacon of purpose and meaning. Because we are all afraid of the dark. Let there be light.” - *Rev. Andy Pakula*

Check-in/Sharing: This is the time to mention any issues or events on your mind that you would like to share. Please brainstorm possible future SGM topics. SGM 2023 registration is open: <https://www.fpc-stow-acton.org/sgm> .

Topic: Empowering Our True Selves - Shedding the Imposter Syndrome

Do you often doubt yourself? Are you sometimes bothered by a fear that despite your success, you’ll be “found out” to be a fraud?

Behavioral scientists estimate that 70% of people in the U.S. have experienced feelings like these at some point in their lives. They call it “Imposter Syndrome.”

While Imposter Syndrome can be associated with overt trauma, exclusion, and bias, it is often a result of more subtle forms of lack of support, and/or neglect.

Imposter feelings can include a tendency to dismiss achievements as luck, or a fluke. You may seek validation of your accomplishment from authority figures in your family, or workplace.

It has been suggested that simply living and surviving in our modern, fast-paced, competitive, image-driven culture can create a level of Imposter Syndrome, regardless of who we are or how we, or the outside world, would define ourselves.

“Every time I was called on in class, I was sure that I was about to embarrass myself. Every time I took a test, I was sure that it had gone badly. And every time I didn’t embarrass myself—or even excelled—I believed that I had fooled everyone yet again. One day soon, the jig would be up.” - *Sheryl Sandberg*

“When you stop living your life based on what others think of you, real life begins. At that moment, you will finally see the door of self-acceptance opened.” - *Shannon L. Alder*

“You’ll never know who you are unless you shed who you pretend to be.” - *Vironika Tugaleva*

“Be who you are and say what you feel, because the ones who mind don’t matter and, the ones who matter don’t mind” - *Anonymous (often attributed to Dr. Seuss)*

“So when you feel the ‘imposter,’ acknowledge it. Don’t run the other way. It's standing in front of a wall that needs to come down. It is showing you exactly where you need to go to break out of your comfort zone and into the magic that is a life lived at your fullest capacity. It’s an invitation for courage, and I promise you, I promise you, courage is where the magic happens.” - *Robyn O'Brien*

“The greatest act of courage is to be and to own all of who you are — without apology, without excuses, without masks to cover the truth of who you are.” - *Debbie Ford*

Possible Questions for Discussion:

- Have you had times in your life where you felt like you were pretending to be someone that you were not? What were the situations? How did you feel?
- Have you ever interacted with someone who may have been experiencing imposter syndrome? What were the situations? How did it feel for you to see this?
- In your experience, what are some of the cultural, family, or life situations that may have contributed to feelings of being an imposter?
- What has been the impact of experiencing imposter feelings for you?
- In the situations where you or someone you knew was experiencing imposter syndrome, did anything help to move you or them through that time to more complete self-acceptance and self-expression?
- What kinds of support have you had that have helped your courage to be authentic? What kinds of additional support and resources do you wish you had had to promote your own self-acceptance and self-expression?
- Could you share any ways in which you have tried to help others to be more able to be their authentic selves? Or ways in which you wish you had been of more help to someone else?
- Going forward can you think of any resources you might offer to others or seek out for yourself to help deal with imposter syndrome?

(Group will take a few minutes to consider topic and questions and then share).

Wrapping Up: How did you like this topic and session?

Closing Words

“Today you are You, that is truer than true. There is no one alive who is You-r than You.” - *Dr. Seuss*