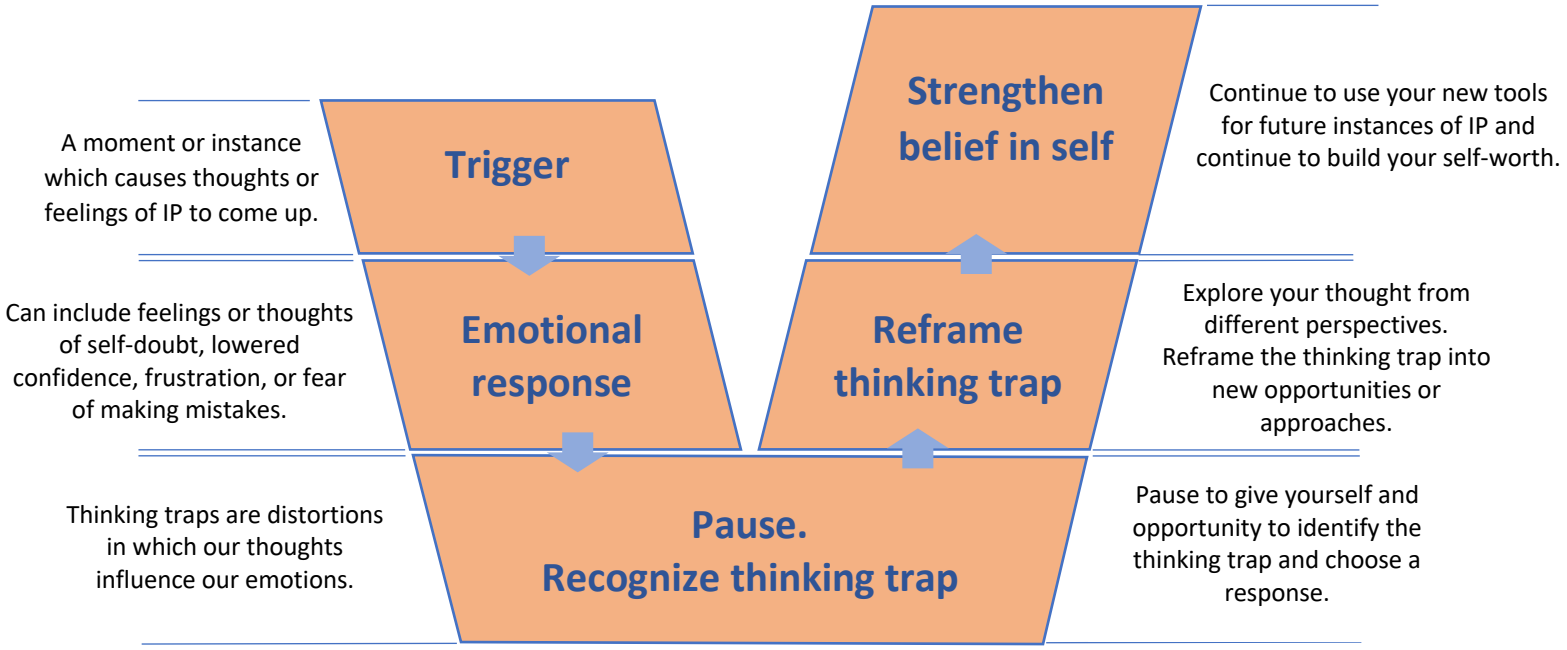
Navigating feelings of Imposter Phenomenon (V-model)



Notes:

Sample techniques that others have used in their own IP experiences

Below is a list for inspiration – see what works for you:

On relationships and conversations with others

- Impostor phenomenon is a shared human experience, but the feeling that you're the only one feeling it is magnified when people are socially isolated from one another. Consider that the people you are working with or look up to likely have experienced it as well, and use that knowledge in approaching your conversations.
- Share your thoughts and feelings with others that you trust (including friends, family, classmates, professors, academic counsellors). Asking others about their experiences can be a powerful way to connect with them and normalize your own experience.
- Be willing to be vulnerable: use moments of uncertainty to ask for help or feedback. There is no shame in wanting to understand more. This can be difficult to do online, because there is less direct human interaction, but it can also be easier if taking advantage of anonymous message boards or chat groups.

On personal wellbeing and expectations

- Reframe setbacks as opportunities to approach a task or situation from a new angle.
- Recognize that new tasks or roles have learning curves and that it is normal and expected to take time to settle into new situations.
- Don't create expectations or benchmarks of your success based on other peoples' highlights (usually what is posted online and on social media).
- Manage your workload and learn to say no. Saying no in certain cases allows you to: prioritize your personal health and wellbeing, and lets you focus on things that you find meaningful.
- Acknowledge and celebrate your accomplishments and successes.

On other practical methods

- Regularly journal your thoughts and feelings. This method can help you challenge negative thought patterns by bringing clarity and identify thinking traps.
- Be kind to yourself. Speak to yourself as you would to a friend going through the same situation.

On the influence of systemic factors

- Recognize that you might be in an environment that is not inclusive of your identity. This can contribute significantly to feelings of imposter phenomenon. These include social identities that are not limited to: race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, age, income, status, learning style preferences, etc. Your environment influences your expectations of success – consider that the source of your feelings of imposter phenomenon might not be your fault.
- There are many organizations and groups working to improve equity in work and educational environments. There are resources and supports designed for you and your social and personal identity that you can seek out on campus and beyond.
- Being online creates natural challenges to relationship building, which makes it difficult to read non-verbal cues, connect, and open up to each other about feelings of imposter phenomenon. Recognize that this is also not your fault and that everybody else is struggling with this right now.

Examples of Reframing Thinking Traps

Thinking Trap	Reframing Thinking Trap
I am not smart enough, I don't deserve to be in this program, I feel like a failure	This is supposed to be a challenging program and learning takes time; I'm growing
My family is spending a lot of money supporting my studies and if I don't do well I will let them down	I want to make my family proud but I also need to learn how to reduce the stress I feel from their expectations. I'm allowed to also set my own expectations for success
I'm afraid to speak up because I am afraid my professor will think I'm not keeping up	The job of a professor is to help students learn, asking questions is often welcome and expected
If I reach out for help or use student services then there must be something wrong with me	Remember the success iceberg! Many people face challenges before they achieve success and look to others in doing so. Services are there for a reason and they can provide concrete strategies and support.
I am not on track to finish my degree at the same time as my classmates, I'm so behind	Taking the time to learn what I need is more important for my future progress than finishing on a strict timeline
I don't see anybody else who looks like me, I'm probably not supposed to be in this program	I got here through the same admissions system as everybody else, I belong here as much as they do
I should be using every moment that I have (especially with the "time" afforded by the pandemic) to be productive and work	I exist and have value beyond the classes that I'm taking and projects that I'm working on. I have the right to rest. I need rest, social engagement, and fun to function properly at my best

Engineering Resources on Campus

Please contact your academic advisor or the First Year Office to schedule appointments (https://undergrad.engineering.utoronto.ca/advising-and-wellness/, https://gradstudies.engineering.utoronto.ca/grad-admins/) with any of these embedded staff members:

- Learning Strategist – Shahad Abdulnour (shahad.abdulnour@utoronto.ca)
- Health and Wellness Counsellor – Stacey Barosso (stacey.barroso@utoronto.ca)
- Accessibility Advisor – Annicka Stabenow (annicka.stabenow@utoronto.ca)
- Inclusion and Transition Advisor – Mikhail Burke (mikhail.burke@utoronto.ca)

Further resources are available here: https://undergrad.engineering.utoronto.ca/undergrad-resources/resources-for-u-of-t-engineering-students/