

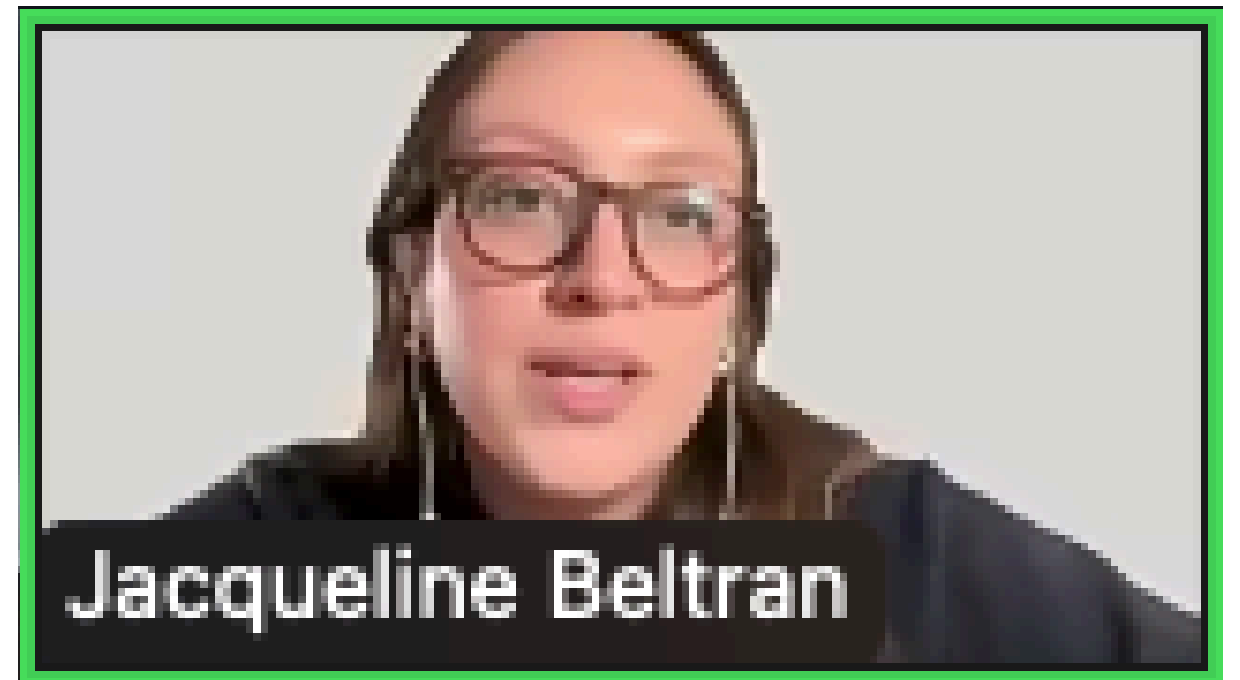
# Students Explore Identity and Imposter Syndrome with BHI



Every tutor and mentor volunteering their time at EVkids comes to the task with a unique perspective - their personal cultural background as well as their experiences as college students. The personal and academic challenges you have overcome have given you a unique ability to advise younger people, especially (but not exclusively) those from similar backgrounds.

The **“Cultural Identity and Belonging”** workshop presented this February, as part of the partnership between **EVkids College Success** and **Boston Health Initiative (BHI)**, a student-run organization at **Northeastern University**, demonstrated the value of shared experience in mentoring. BHI presenters Jacqueline, Sena, Sofia, and Alyssa all talked about how their cultural backgrounds affect their sense of belonging at Northeastern, and gave actionable advice to EVkids students who may encounter the same feelings when they begin college.

One of the main pitfalls that students of diverse backgrounds may experience upon entering college is called **“imposter syndrome.”** Jacqueline introduced the topic by talking about her own experience: her childhood spanned time in both the U.S. and Mexico, and she had few peers who could identify with both. “I felt like I had to fit a certain mold and I didn’t fit in,” she said, and the issue came to a head when she started college at Northeastern University.



*Jacqueline from BHI tells her story*

**Imposter syndrome** is the experience of internally believing that you are not as competent as others perceive you to be, despite the evidence of your achievements. First-generation college students are especially vulnerable to this phenomenon, for several reasons:

- They often find few peers at their school who come from the same cultural background, and may feel both isolated and obligated to be “perfect.”
- They may find few if any role models from the same background, who can support and encourage them from a place of knowledge and understanding.
- They are often very driven, high-achieving students who were at the top of their class in high school, but in college, they are surrounded by other high achievers, which undermines their confidence.
- They sometimes encounter microaggressions from individuals who question their ability or their hard work.

The end result can be a nagging feeling that they are going to be **“found out,”** and a toxic cycle of overwork and refusal to accept help can occur, ultimately leading to poor mental health outcomes and a risk of burnout. Jacqueline described herself as a perfectionist and workaholic early in her college career: she had a really specific vision of what college was going to look like, but had a terrible time adjusting as a freshman and struggled a lot. “I wouldn’t give myself time to have any breaks... it was a terrible negative feedback loop,” she said.

The good news, however, is that imposter syndrome can be combated with a combination of knowledge and support. Some important tips shared are:

- **Keeping lists of your achievements**, as a reality check to demonstrate that your track record doesn’t match your self-doubt.
- **Talking it out with peers**, who will help you recognize that your self-perception doesn’t match how others see you.
- **Seeking culturally aware mentors and allies**, ranging from professors and upperclassmen to friends: mentors from your own background are crucial, but anyone who “makes you feel more comfortable to be yourself” can help as well.
- **Finding spaces of belonging at school**, including both clubs centering around your identity and clubs centering around your other interests.

All EVkids students have their own advisors and cheerleaders, like **Dede Evans, our College Success Advisor**, who talked about how the adults in her life helped her get through tough times. She urged students to “remember that EVkids is here in your pocket to support you as well.” EVkids mentors are trained to help students through difficult moments by listening to their stories, affirming their abilities, and, when applicable, talking about their own experiences – transforming your own moments of self-doubt into a source of strength for your mentee!

Regardless of your background, if you are a college student in Boston today, you have valuable support and experiences to share with the young people we serve. **[Start making an impact by becoming a mentor for underserved youth in Boston!](#)**

Thank you to BHI for providing a safe space and plenty of information about a tough topic for our students!