

## Defense Mechanism Examples from Students

**Denial** (ignoring what is and creating a story that's more comfortable to believe, based in fear)

Need help but don't ask for it or get it

Pretend things aren't as bad as they are

Stay busy to keep self too occupied to think about the problem

Tell myself things will get better

Ignore problems

Spend money I don't have to distract myself from my problems

Pretend it's not really happening

Get medication and sleep the problem away

Deny anger then bust out in an extreme way that ends in jail or hospital

Go to Vegas and escape, come home to same problems

Lying

Ignore the inner voice that tells you something is going on (i.e., husband is having an affair)

**Reaction Formation** (feeling one way, behaving in another)

A woman who is fearful of sex and intimacy becomes the aggressor and initiates sexual contact with men

A young woman who despises her mother and hates her, treats her well and caters to her every need and at times seeking approval

Young man struggling with homosexuality is participating in gay bashing and hate crimes to suppress his real feelings and attraction toward the same sex.

You're mad at someone but you treat them as if nothing ever happened

You want to say no on the inside but you say yes instead

**Projection** (blaming the other person, pointing the finger at someone else for what one is feeling or thinking within themselves, pain reliever)

A cheating spouse accuses his or her partner of cheating

A client has a problem with their counselor and says it's because the counselor is on a power trip

Get mad at neighbors because they have a perfect lawn and you are too lazy to cut yours

**Displacement** (shifting negative feelings to someone safer)

A person is angry and stressed out about something at work and takes it out on the dog

Wife is angry at her husband and takes it out on the kids

If someone cuts you off while driving you would cut them right back or get in front of them and slam on the brakes.

Got a bad grade in school so you'll make your kids miserable

Punch the wall, shoot birds



**Emotional Displacement** (putting up a wall of armor, feel safe and insulated behind the wall)

Don't allow yourself to be vulnerable in a relationship

Guarded, defensive, hard to get to know you.

People who want to get closer to you may feel frustrated or like you are not on equal ground in the relationship.

**Fantasy** (Imagining something better)

Only tell people the parts of life that are good

Imagine yourself in a better place like a movie star or famous person

Imagine a prince charming

Daydream about winning the lottery

Escape reality by creating an imaginary world

**Humor** (looking at the lighter side)

Sarcasm to change the tone of a conversation or relationship

Laughing or giggling when you're not sure how to handle the situation

If someone brings up a serious topic, laugh at them and say, "that's so funny" so they won't be able to continue the serious topic

Make fun of other people or tell a joke to get the focus off of yourself

Be the class clown so people like you

**Rationalization** (inventing excuses)

I failed because the class was too hard or the class size was too large

I relapsed because it was my brother's birthday

**Sublimation** (substituting one goal for another)

Woman wants a lot of attention but because of traditional ideas she won't become a stripper or model. Instead, she channels her drive into helping others or becoming very religious.

Man is a sex addict but wants to follow religion so he channels his expression into art or music.

Child wants to be a musician or dancer but the family forbids it so he/she becomes a super-fan of musicians and dancers.

**Suppression** (conscious exclusion of unpleasant thoughts)

Memories of an armed robbery continue to haunt you but you decide to think of something else in order to stay calm and in control

Memories of past relationship that was painful come to mind but you focus on an affirmation or Bible passage instead

Fear of an upcoming test overwhelms you so you turn on music so you don't have to think about it

You have a chronic illness that scares you and you focus on something positive instead



**Regression** (returning to younger behaviors)

Thumb sucking or bed wetting in adolescence or adulthood

Reading an old book, watching an old movie, listening to old songs that evoke childhood feelings of security or better times

Talking in a baby voice

Trying to be cute or sweet to get something done (being indirect or dishonest in the process)

Runaway, hide under the covers, throwing a temper tantrum

**Repression** (forgetting the unpleasant)

Memory gaps or forgetting what is painful or overwhelming

Changing the subject or avoiding people who might evoke unpleasant memories

**Introjection** (taking in others values for anxiety relief/safety)

Daughter who was very spiritual dies, family becomes interested in spirituality and continues her practices as a way to "keep her alive"

Husband who loved a certain sports team dies, his widow becomes a fan of that team even when she wasn't a fan before

Grandma made quilts. When she dies, granddaughter becomes a quilter.

**Identification** (Identify with others to feel better about self)

Join a group or gang to feel more powerful, in control

Hang out with "cool" people so you can be considered cool when actually you feel like nobody likes you.

Hang out with people older than you and do what they do so you can fit in and maybe avoid trouble/punishment/bullying.

Change your behavior around a certain person to look and feel good even if you don't usually act that way

**Compensation** (making up for perceived deficiencies)

Feel like a bad parent so you buy your kids a lot of goodies out of guilt

Put on a tough act because you feel weak inside

**Undoing** (counteracting unacceptable desires or acts)

Feel bad about a violent past so become very caring and involved in altruistic activities

Feel bad about sexual acting out as a young person so choose celibacy in adulthood

Feel guilty for stealing so give freely as a way to make up for it

Feel ashamed of drug use so become clean and sober and help many to become sober

**Unsolicited Advice Giving** (A variation on identification, being a "know it all")

You tell your friend she should take sewing because you do even if she isn't interested

You tell your daughter she should be a cheerleader because you were one

