



CENTER  
FOR  
NEUROPSYCHOLOGY  
& CONSCIOUSNESS

*Defense Mechanisms*

Neurotic Defenses Examples	Examples
<p><u>Controlling</u>: Regulating the environment in order to avoid discomfort</p> <p>-Psychologically controlling parenting: “i...pressuring the child to think, act, and feel in particular ways, such as the use of guilt induction, love withdrawal, and shaming.”<sup>1</sup></p>	<p>Due to his own fears and anxiety, a father keeps his daughter’s cell-phone at night and audits all of her activity; even though there has been no evidence of any inappropriate interactions or searches.</p>
<p><u>Displacement</u>: Shifting one’s emotions or drives from an idea/object to another.<sup>2</sup></p>	<p>Someone who has a bad day may place their aggression on their pet dog.</p>
<p><u>Externalization</u>: Perceiving one’s own personality, impulses, conflicts, emotions, and ways of thinking onto the outside world; people.<sup>3</sup></p>	<p>A judgmental individual may perceive others as judgmental instead, and themselves as uncritical.</p>
<p><u>Repression</u>: Curbs ideas before reaching consciousness; but not forgotten.<sup>4</sup></p>	<p>Memories of an abuse that occurred in an individual’s childhood are ‘forgotten’ but still influencing their ability in forming stable relationships.</p>
<p><u>Intellectualization</u>: Avoiding feelings and affective expression by focusing on logical details and facts.<sup>6</sup></p>	<p>A patient diagnosed with a disease focuses on the intellectual components to avoid the emotional aspect of their situation.</p>
<p><u>Isolation</u>: Separating or repressing ideas from affect.<sup>7</sup></p>	<p>A Holocaust victim may recall details from memories, but may not express the associated emotions.</p>
<p><u>Rationalization</u>: Offering rational justifications on incongruent values, beliefs, behaviors, and/or attitudes.<sup>8</sup></p>	<p>An individual cheats on their spouse, and justifies this behavior on the perceived notion that she is unaffectionate.</p>

<u>Reaction Formation</u> : Adopting traits, feelings, beliefs that are opposite to what you believe. <sup>9</sup>	After committing a crime, the individual began judging others harshly on morality while preaching the importance of being a paragon of virtue
<u>Sexualization</u> : Endowing an object with sexual significance. <sup>10</sup>	After many failed attempts at sexual relationships, the lady began to find hairbrushes sexually arousing.
<u>Repetition Compulsion</u> : Repeating an internalized event behaviorally and psychologically. <sup>11</sup>	Because of emotional neglect from her father, the woman finds herself engaging in relationships with men who are emotionally distant.
Mature Defenses	Examples
<u>Altruism</u> : Pleasure in serving others to manage one's own pain. <sup>12</sup>	After the stock market crashed, the investor felt angry and sad. While walking home, he passed a homeless man begging for money. He decided to buy him lunch, and he felt better.
<u>Anticipation</u> : Realistic and goal-directed planning for future inner discomfort. One anticipates a dreadful outcome. <sup>13</sup>	After several indicators, verified by others, that an individual was to be let go from his company, he began actively searching for new jobs.
<u>Asceticism</u> : Renouncing from pleasurable experiences by assigning moral values to them. This renunciation is received with gratification. <sup>14</sup>	After self-exploration, she found her tendency to eat unhealthy foods ran counter to her values. She felt empowered and pleasure in the control she had over her eating behaviors.
<u>Humor</u> : One who focuses on funny aspects of a situation or experience to prevent uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. <sup>15</sup>	The comedian expressed his anger towards institutional policies, by creating a humorous act related to it.
<u>Sublimation</u> : Channeling instincts into socially acceptable outlets. <sup>16</sup>	In order to deal with his sexual desires, an artist paints erotica.
<u>Suppression</u> : Postponing, minimizing, and controlling uncomfortable thoughts or feelings. <sup>17</sup>	Despite feeling a desire to yell at his boss, the man decided to inhibit that desire to secure his job and express it more constructively.
Narcissistic Defenses	Examples
<u>Denial</u> : Consciously avoiding painful thoughts; refusing to examine uncomfortable realities. <sup>18</sup>	A couple who claims their relationship is "OK" when it is actually in trouble.
<u>Distortion</u> : Redesigning one's external reality to suit their inner need. <sup>19</sup>	A child tells their parents that they passed the examination, when in fact they did not.

<p><u>Primitive Idealization:</u> Imposing more negative or positive qualities on an external object than they possess.<sup>20</sup></p>	<p>A girlfriend infatuated with her new boyfriend experiences him as absolutely perfect; even though he has been abusive at times.</p>
<p><u>Projection:</u> Attributing one's inner qualities to another person. The individual may act on these perceptions.<sup>21</sup></p>	<p>A teenager is angry that his parents don't listen to him, when he is the one not listening to them.</p>
<p><u>Projective Identification:</u> Places unwanted qualities or pressures onto another person to experience similar feelings.<sup>22</sup></p>	<p>An individual who has recently put on weight decides to body shame another individual. The other individual subsequently began to feel insecure about her weight.</p>
<p><u>Splitting:</u> Viewing external objects as "all good" or "all bad" without considering all of their qualities.<sup>23</sup></p>	<p>An individual diagnosed with BPD may believe they will "always" be abandoned by others; despite the many signs that her friends and family have demonstrated otherwise.</p>
<p>Immature Defenses</p>	<p>Examples</p>
<p><u>Acting Out:</u> Expressing extreme behaviors to avoid affect; acting on impulse.<sup>24</sup></p>	<p>A child throws a temper tantrum because she doesn't want to go to bed.</p>
<p><u>Blocking:</u> Inhibited thoughts and feelings similar to repression, except the tension is felt.<sup>25</sup></p>	<p>In a moment of vulnerability, the man blocks this expression because he was taught that men should avoid weakness.</p>
<p><u>Hypochondriasis:</u> Exaggerating somatic illness in order to avoid responsibilities and feelings of guilt.<sup>26</sup></p>	<p>In a moment of anxiety, the client experiences a headache and believes they have a tumor. He begins learning all that he can about tumors.</p>
<p><u>Identification:</u> The opposite of projection; the individual conforms to the aspects of another object/person for approval.<sup>27</sup></p>	<p>The interviewee begins to adopt the same mannerisms and body language as the interviewer, despite his true feelings for the other, in hopes they will be liked and hired.</p>
<p><u>Introjection:</u> The internalization of an expectation from others.<sup>28</sup></p>	<p>The individual struggled to get a raise, and did not know why. His work was strong and numbers were high. He was recommended to be more assertive, which confused him as he had always been taught to "keep your head down, and focus on the quality of your work."</p>
<p><u>Passive Aggressive Behavior:</u> Aggression that is indirectly expressed that affects others more than the self.<sup>29</sup></p>	<p>After being told by his spouse that he was not cleaning the dishes correctly. He began to spend an inordinate amount of time cleaning them, making sure it would protrude unto time they would usually spend together.</p>

<p><u>Regression</u>: Returning to earlier functioning to avoid uncomfortable situations.<sup>31</sup></p>	<p>An individual suffers a mental breakdown and begins to suck their thumb after hearing the news of the death of a loved one.</p> <p>Includes: child-like behaviors, self-destructive acting out, dissociative experiences, pursuit of sexual affairs, and reckless drug and alcohol usage.</p>
<p><u>Schizoid Fantasy</u>: Withdrawal in self to obtain gratification; resolve conflict.<sup>32</sup></p>	<p>A schizoid patient claims he is riding a horse down a hospital hallway, but he is actually on a bicycle (he is aware). The fantasy is symbolic and necessary as a transitional space, enabling them to safely traverse what might be considered dangerous.</p>
<p><u>Somatization</u>: Individuals react with bodily symptoms rather than psychic derivatives.<sup>33</sup></p>	<p>The individual began having seizures after the experience of a traumatic event. Upon further investigation there was found to be no medical cause, or involvement of malingering.</p>

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