

Family Shelter Service

605 EAST ROOSEVELT ROAD • WHEATON, ILLINOIS 60187 • HOTLINE: (630) 469-5650

Defense Mechanisms

Defenses are used by all of us to protect ourselves from internal and external stresses. Some of these stresses are anxiety, hurt, shame, jealousy, low self worth and change. Defenses can help us as well as hurt us in our lives. Below are some pros and cons of defense mechanisms.

PROS	CONS
They help us survive.	They can distort and deny reality.
They protect us.	They can deceive us.
They are a coping tool.	They can keep us from coping, adjusting, changing, and growing.
They act as a valve or filter.	They can keep others away.

Below is a list of a few defense or denial mechanisms that people use.

- Avoidance:** Changing the subject, avoiding a response, unwilling to acknowledge confrontation, refuse to take responsibility, and playing “dumb”.
- Blaming:** Holding someone else accountable for your actions. “I learned how to be violent from my father”.
- Rationalizations:** Making excuses, justifying and giving reasons for actions.
- Minimizing:** Making something less than it really is, such as “I’m not a battered woman, I’ve never been hit”.
- Displacement:** Expressing anger toward someone else because it’s too threatening to express anger to the original person.
- Isolation:** Staying alone, avoiding contact with other people, stay in the house. For example: not going to church or synagogue, giving up night classes.
- Internalizing:** Taking on another person’s beliefs, thoughts, actions and believing they are your own, such as “If only I was a better wife, he wouldn’t...”
- Escape:** Running away from the truth and yourself. Examples: Moving to a new location, abusing drugs or alcohol, watching T.V. all the time, working all the time, etc.
- Defiance:** Rebelling against the truth and responsibility. Example: resisting other’s suggestions, advice, etc.
- Compliance:** Doing something that someone else suggests even though you may not agree. For example: promising that you’ll call the police “next time” but never do.
- Lying:** Denying the truth to others but knowing the truth ourselves.
- Aggression:** Intimidating, bullying, threatening, controlling, or abusing others to keep them from confronting us with the truth about ourselves.
- Denial:** Believing and/or acting as if the truth is not the truth.
- Intellectualize:** Staying in your head, shutting down emotions. For example: giving elaborate explanations about an event while never discussing feelings.