

Top 10 Most Common

# DEFENSE

Mechanisms



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Dozens of different defense mechanisms have been identified. Some are used more commonly than others. Here are a few common defense mechanisms:

## 1. DENIAL

Denial is one of the most common defense mechanisms. It occurs when you refuse to accept reality or facts. People in denial may block external events or circumstances from the mind so that they don't have to deal with the emotional impact. In other words, they avoid painful feelings or events. This defense mechanism is one of the most widely known, too. The phrase, "They're in denial," is commonly understood to mean a person is avoiding reality despite what may be obvious to people around them.

## 2. REPRESSION

Unsavory thoughts, painful memories, or irrational beliefs can upset you. Instead of facing those thoughts, people may unconsciously choose to hide them in hopes of forgetting them entirely. That does not mean, however, that the memories disappear entirely. They may influence behaviors, and they may impact future relationships. You just may not realize the impact this defense mechanism is having.

## 3. PROJECTION

Some thoughts or feelings you have about another person may make you uncomfortable. When people project those feelings, they misattribute them to the other person. For example, you may dislike your new co-worker, but instead of accepting that, you choose to tell yourself that they dislike you. You start to interpret their words and actions toward you in the worst way possible, even though they don't actually dislike you.

## 4. DISPLACEMENT

You direct strong emotions and frustrations toward a person or object that doesn't feel threatening. This allows you to satisfy an impulse to react, but you don't risk significant consequences. A good example of this defense mechanism is getting angry at your child or spouse because you had a bad day at work. Neither of these people is the target of your strong emotions, but your subconscious may believe reacting to them is likely less problematic than reacting to your boss.

## 5. REGRESSION

Some people who feel threatened or anxious may unconsciously "escape" to an earlier stage of development. This type of defense mechanism may be most obvious in young children. If they experience trauma or loss, they may suddenly act as if they're younger again. They may even begin wetting the bed or sucking their thumb as a form of regression. Adults can regress, too. Adults who

are struggling to cope with events or behaviors may return to sleeping with a cherished stuffed animal, overeat foods they find comforting, or begin chain-smoking or chewing on pencils or pens. They may also avoid everyday activities because they feel overwhelmed.

## 6. RATIONALIZATION

Some people may attempt to explain undesirable behaviors with their own set of “facts.” This allows you to feel comfortable with the choice you made, even if you know on another level it’s not right. For example, someone who didn’t get a promotion at work might say they didn’t want the promotion anyways.

## 7. SUBLIMATION

This type of defense mechanism is considered a mature, positive strategy. That’s because people who rely on it choose to redirect strong emotions or feelings into an object or activity that is appropriate and safe. For example, instead of lashing out at your coworkers during a stressful shift, you choose to channel your frustration into a kickboxing class. You could also funnel or redirect the feelings into music, art, or sports.

## 8. REACTION FORMATION

People who use this defense mechanism recognize how they feel, but they choose to behave in the opposite manner of their instincts. A person who reacts this way, for example, may feel they should not express negative emotions, such as anger or frustration. They choose to instead react in an overly positive way.

## 9. COMPARTMENTALIZATION

Separating your life into independent sectors may feel like a way to protect many elements of it. For example, when you choose to not discuss personal life issues at work, you block off, or compartmentalize, that element of your life. This allows you to carry on without facing the anxieties or challenges while you’re in that setting or mindset.

## 10. INTELLECTUALIZATION

When you’re hit with a trying situation, you may choose to remove all emotion from your responses and instead focus on quantitative facts. You may see this strategy in use when a person spends their days creating spreadsheets of job opportunities and leads after they are let go from a job.

## Treatment for unhealthy defense mechanisms

Defense mechanisms can sometimes be viewed as a type of self-deception. You might be using them to hide emotional responses that you don’t want to deal with from yourself. However, it’s done mostly on an unconscious level. You’re not always aware of the way your mind or ego will respond. That doesn’t mean, however, that you can’t modify or change the behaviors. Indeed, you can transform unhealthy defense mechanisms into ones that are more sustainable. These techniques may help:

- **Find accountability.** Friends and family members can help you recognize defense mechanisms you may be using. By drawing attention to the self-deception, they can help you identify the moment you unconsciously use self-deception. That allows you to then decide in the conscious state what you really want to do.
- **Learn coping strategies.** Therapy with a mental health expert, such as a psychotherapist, psychologist, or psychoanalyst, may help you recognize the defense mechanisms you use most often. They can then help you learn active responses to make choices on a more mindful level.

**Defense mechanisms are natural. They are often used without any long-term complications or issues. However, some people do develop emotional difficulties if they continue to use these mechanisms without coping with the underlying threat or anxiety. Treatment focuses on helping you address issues from a mindful place, not an unconscious one.**

**resource:** [www.healthline.com](http://www.healthline.com)

