

Defense Mechanisms*

Denial – Do not see what is real, pretend painful event, thought or feeling did not exist

Reaction Formation – Express the opposite of the impulse we experience that threatens us. Converting of wishes or impulses that are perceived to be dangerous into their opposites. A woman who is furious at her child and wishes her harm might become overly concerned and protective of the child's health.

Projection – Put desires onto others. Thus, an angry spouse accuses their partner of hostility.

Displacement – Express impulses in a safer place. Being angry at the boss and kicking the dog can be an example of displacement.

Rationalization – The cognitive reframing of ones perceptions to protect the ego in the face of changing realities. Thus, the promotion one wished fervently for and didn't get becomes "a dead end job for brown nosers and yes men".

Sublimation – channeling of unacceptable impulses into more acceptable outlets. For example, a student who has a major upcoming test, rather than spending time and energy worrying about it, might rechannel that time and energy into studying; and a sexually perverse person who is accustomed to wasting time and energy on sex, might instead rechannel those outlets towards expressions of sexuality such as art.

Regression – Go back to old behavior we had outgrown. For an example an adolescent who is overwhelmed with fear, anger and growing sexual impulses might become clinging and begin thumb sucking or bed wetting.

Introjection – Taking in others values, More specifically introjection means incorporating attributes, attitudes or qualities of an absent person of high significance (for example, an absent working mother or a recently deceased relative) into oneself for the sake and anxiety relief and a sense of safety.

Identification – Identify with others in order to feel better about self. Children incorporate their parents values into their developing superegos.

Compensation – Hide weaknesses or develop traits so weaknesses are not seen. A process of psychologically counterbalancing perceived weaknesses by emphasizing strength in other arenas. The "I'm not a fighter, I'm a lover" philosophy can be an example of compensation

Transference/Countertransference

Transference is what the client projects on to the counselor. For example, client might say to counselor "I know you don't really care about me" when really client doesn't care for themselves or they don't feel cared for by a significant loved on in their life.

Countertransference is when the client evokes an emotional/personal response in the counselor. For example, if a counselor experiences resistance from the client or doesn't like his or her attitude, he/she might say, "that client is a hopeless case." Or, if client comes in with an issue that the counselor has not resolved him/herself, the counselor will feel uncomfortable working with the client and providing the services necessary for the client to heal.

*Taken from pages 23-24 in Learning the Language of Addiction Counseling by Geri Miller, http://www.planetpsych.com/zPsychology_101/defense_mechanisms.htm and www.wikipedia.org