

**TABLE 5: DEFENSE MECHANISMS**

| NARCISSISTIC DEFENSES   | IMMATURE DEFENSES   | NEUROTIC DEFENSES   | MATURE DEFENSES   |
|---|---|---|---|
| <p><b>Denial-</b> Negates sensory data to avoid awareness of painful aspect of reality. Abolishes external reality. Used in normal and pathological states.</p>   | <p><b>Acting Out-</b> Acts an unconscious impulse or affect to avoid affect. Acting gives into the impulse rather than prohibiting it. Avoids the tension of postponing expression.</p>   | <p><b>Controlling-</b> Manage or regulate environment excessively to avoid anxiety.</p>   | <p><b>Altruism-</b> Experiences vicarious pleasure by serving others constructively and instinctually. Reaction formation is benign and constructive. Serving others does not take the place of meeting own needs.</p>  |
| <p><b>Distortion-</b> Reshapes external reality to suit inner needs. Beliefs, hallucinations, delusions. Sustains feelings of superiority, entitlement.</p>   | <p><b>Blocking-</b> Inhibits thinking temporarily. May include affects and impulses. Resembles repression, except tension felt.</p>   | <p><b>Displacement-</b> Shifts an emotion or drive from one idea or object to another. Permits symbolic representation of less distress.</p>  | <p><b>Anticipation-</b> Anticipates, plans for future inner discomfort that is goal directed. Careful planning or worrying and premature but realistic affective anticipation of dire and potentially dreadful outcomes.</p>  |
| <p><b>Primitive Idealization-</b> Endows either “all good, omnipotent” or “all bad,” inflated external objects with great power</p>   | <p><b>Hypochondriasis-</b> Transforms bereavement, loneliness, aggressive impulses into self-reproach, pain, somatic illness. Avoids responsibility, circumvents guilt. Affliction due to ego-alien nature of introjects.</p>   | <p><b>Dissociation-</b> Drastically modifies personal identity or character to avoid emotional distress, including fugue states, hysterical conversion, DID, drug highs, religious joy.</p>   | <p><b>Asceticism-</b> Eliminates pleasurable effects of experiences. Uses morals to assign values to specific pleasures. Derives gratification from renunciation of all consciously-perceived base pleasures.</p>   |
| <p><b>Projection-</b> Perceives and reacts to inner qualities as though outside the self. May include frank delusions, persecutions, and acting on the perceptions.</p>   | <p><b>Identification-</b> Crucial to ego development. But person may identify with love object to defend against anxiety or pain, real or threatened. Person adopts quality or symptom of one about whom feels guilty. Identifies with aggressor.</p>                           | <p><b>Externalization-</b> Perceives in external and objects, elements of one’s own personality, including impulses, conflicts, moods, attitudes, and styles of thinking.</p>   | <p><b>Humor-</b> Permits overt expression of feelings and thoughts without personal discomfort or immobilization and does not produce unpleasant effects on others. Person may focus and tolerate what is too terrible to be borne. Wit, however, does not allow feeling of the affect at all.</p>      |
| <p><b>Projective Identification-</b> Deposits unwanted aspects into another person so projector feels at one with object. Recipient modifies projections and projector recovers them. Allows one to distance and make self understood by exerting pressure on another to experience similar feelings.</p> | <p><b>Introjection-</b> Although, vital to development, when used as a defense, can obliterate distinction between subject and object. Avoids painful awareness of separateness of threat of loss. Avoids the anxiety of feared object as in identification with aggressor.</p> | <p><b>Repression-</b> Expels or withholds idea from consciousness. Primary curbs ideas before reaching consciousness; secondary excludes what was once conscious. Not really forgotten. Symbolic behavior may be present. May lose cherished goals.</p> | <p><b>Sublimation-</b> Achieves impulse gratification and retention of goals via altering object to one that is socially acceptable. Channels instincts rather than blocking them. Acknowledges, modifies, directs feelings toward an object or goal, yet allows modest gratification of instincts.</p> |
| <p><b>Splitting-</b> Divides external objects into “all good” and “all bad.” Abruptly shifts from one extreme to other. Sudden and complete reversals of feeling. Self-concept may oscillate.</p>   | <p><b>Passive Aggressive Behavior-</b> Expresses aggression indirectly through failures, procrastination, illness that affect others more than self.</p>  | <p><b>Inhibition-</b> Inhibits or renounces ego functions consciously to evade anxiety arising out of conflicts with impulses, superego, environmental forces or figures.</p>   | <p><b>Suppression-</b> Decision or action to postpone attention to a conscious impulse or conflict Does not avoid issues, but cuts them off. Acknowledges discomfort, but minimizes it.</p>   |
| <p><b>Projection-</b> Attributes own feelings to another due to intolerable feelings or painful affects. In psychosis, become frank delusions and persecutions.</p>   | <p><b>Regression-</b> Attempts to return to earlier functioning to avoid tension at current level. Necessary for creativity.</p>  | <p><b>Intellectualization-</b> Avoids affective expression, experience, relationship. Attends to external reality to avoid feelings, and details to avoid whole.</p>  | <p><b>Isolation-</b> Splits or separates idea from affect. Represses affect. May remove one from object relationships.</p>  |
| <p><b>Regression-</b> Attempts to return to earlier functioning to avoid tension at current level. Necessary for creativity.</p>  | <p><b>Schizoid Fantasy-</b> Retreats autistically to avoid intimacy, obtain gratification. Eccentricity repels.</p>   | <p><b>Rationalization-</b> Offers rational explanations to justify attitudes, beliefs, behaviors instinctually based.</p>   | <p><b>Reaction Formation- (Reversal)</b> Transforms an unacceptable impulse into its opposite. If frequently used early, can become obsessional character trait.</p>  |
| <p><b>Regression-</b> Attempts to return to earlier functioning to avoid tension at current level. Necessary for creativity.</p>  | <p><b>Somatization-</b> Converts psychic derivatives into body symptoms. Desomatization, infantile somatic responses replaced by thought, affect</p>  | <p><b>Sexualization-</b> Endows sexual significance to an object or function.</p>   |   |
| <p><b>NOTE:</b> Those identified by Anna Freud are grayed. She also identified Reversal and Turning Against the Self (Fairbairn’s Moral Defense in Children.) Adapted by Martha Blake 5/02. From Vaillant, <i>Adaptation to Life</i>, 1977.</p>   |   |   |   |