

Guide to Common Defence Mechanisms

We all have defences. Defences are clusters of thoughts, feelings, sensations and behaviours which protect us against deeper thoughts or emotions we feel we cannot handle. Everyone has defence mechanisms. The best way of handling them is firstly to identify which ones we use, recognise them in action and then learn how to handle them. The following list represents 20 common defences. Read this then complete the table below to identify your favourites.

1. Denial	Refusing to perceive or face unpleasant realities. Denying that unfavourable situations/facts exist.
2. Aggression	Being aggressive to others as a way of discharging your own anger or frustration.
3 Displacement	Discharging pent up feelings - usually hostility or anger - on to other, often less threatening individuals, e.g. if your boss shouts at you, you come home and kick the dog/shout at your partner.
4. Blaming	Refusing to take responsibility for one's actions by claiming that the responsibility lies with others.
5. Flippancy	Being flippant and facetious. Using humour to deflect criticism.
6. Self Censorship	Absorbing the values, standards and beliefs imposed by others. Suppressing doubts about their ideas or beliefs and thinking to yourself: "They must be right. I'd better not say anything"
7. Rationalisation	Keeping to rational explanations and denying the emotional content of the situation. E.g. if you don't get offered a job you applied for, you say to yourself: "I never wanted the job anyway!"
8. Withdrawal	Going into your shell. Reducing involvement and withdrawing in order to protect yourself from hurt.
9. Playing Victim	Not taking any responsibility for anything that happens to you. Seeing yourself as a victim of circumstance and helpless to respond.
10. Illusion of Invulnerability	Exaggerated belief in one's abilities. Believing that nothing could go wrong or that you could never make a mistake. Belief that you are always right.
11. Cynicism	Protecting yourself from potential disappointment or hurt by anticipating negative outcomes or distrusting others' intentions.
12. Stereotyping	Classifying people in crude ways that deny their individuality. Blaming these groups for problems as a way of denying personal responsibility.
13. Projection	Assuming that your boss is like a previous boss. Projecting your thoughts and feelings about this previous boss onto a current boss, who is entirely different.
14. Harmonizing	Suppressing conflict by soothing people's feelings; asserting that people's interests are in complete accord.
15. Confirmation Bias	Interpreting everything that happens as a confirmation of what you already believe, e.g. you use one politician's unethical behaviour as proof of your belief that all politicians are corrupt.
16. Regression	Becoming child-like in your behaviour e.g. becoming clingy, dependent, avoiding responsibility, wanting constant support.
17. Repression	The unconscious blocking of unacceptable thoughts, feelings and impulses. Done unconsciously, so you have very little control over it.
18. Passive Aggression	Indirectly expressing negative feelings or hostility, often through subtle or covert actions, like quips or sarcasm.
19. Intellectualization	Overemphasising thinking at the expense of emotions e.g. when introducing major change, focusing on the reasons why it is necessary rather than recognising your own or others' emotions.
20. Reaction Formation	Behaving in a way that is the opposite to how you feel e.g. being kind and polite when you are feeling angry and frustrated.

DEFENCE MECHANISMS INVENTORY

Complete the table below. Remember, we all use defence mechanisms at some point, so be honest honest with yourself! See if you can identify what triggers your defence mechanisms. What can you learn from these triggers that you may be trying to avoid?

Type of Defence Mechanism	Not at all	Seldom	Often	Trigger
Denial				
Aggression				
Displacement				
Blaming				
Flippancy				
Self-Censorship				
Rationalisation				
Withdrawal				
Playing Victim				
Illusion of Invulnerability				
Cynicism				
Stereotyping				
Projection				
Harmonization				
Confirmation Bias				
Regression				
Repression				
Passive Aggression				
Intellectualization				
Reaction Formation				