



## DEFENSE MECHANISMS: WAYS OF ADJUSTING WITH LIFE STRESS

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### Abstract

*Stress, from whatever source, calls for adjustment. When our needs and desires are frustrated, we attempt to remove the obstacles between ourselves and our goal or give-up our goal. When we are threatened, we try to eliminate the source of the threat- either by attacking it or by escaping from it. In self-defense, we make efforts to avoid the conflict. In many situations the most effective solution is to withdraw ourselves. We can deal with it through avoidance behavior and escape ourselves. We use defense mechanisms to deal with them. We use such mechanisms to distance ourselves from unpleasant feelings. Defense mechanisms are the psychological strategies to maintain balance and inner peace as well as to cope with the reality. It enables an individual to resolve conflict and reduce his stress and anxiety.*

**Key Words:** *Defensive, Psychoanalytic, Projection, Sublimation, Compartmentalization, Rationalization, Coping, Mechanism*



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Disasters as floods, droughts, epidemics, pandemics and wars etc. cause drastic changes in the lives of innumerable people. People we are attached with die. A Mother is conscious about her child's adjustment in school at primary level. A retired person is in need of counselling because he is unable to adjust to his status of retirement. In such like cases adjustment refers to the success or failure of the individual to the adaptation to change. The necessity to adapt to change is a constant factor in the lives of all people.

Adjustment is the unstable or ever-changing balance between our needs and desires as well as the demands and restraints of the environment. People adapt to change in several ways In case of damaging all belongingness due to natural calamity may search a job, may call an insurance agent or simply collapse and end up in a hospital. All these reactions are ways of adjustments.

**Stress**

When we feel that we are unable to adapt with the demands of our environment or we face any threatening situation which can harm us physically or psychologically. We start to feel tense and uncomfortable, such feelings are stress creators. The word stress means the occurrence of situations in which we realize ourselves in conflict. Psychologists have studied and found that coping with psychological stress is a complicated problem. Remarkably stress is not limited to life and death circumstances only. The person in situation of missing his job also may feel threatened as it happened during Corona Pandemic recently a few years back.

Stress depends on our evaluation of our ability to cope with whatever is threatening us. Students who have been successful in the past are calm a day before appearing in examination than those who failed earlier in the last semester.

The opposite of stress is a sense of well-being. People feel that life is going well. According to Campbell, our sense of well-being is most affected by adjustments to age and the life cycle, including the presence or absence of marriage and children.

### **Pressure**

Pressure occurs when we feel that we must live up to a specific standard of behavior and adapt to rapid change. Our internal pressures generally are linked with the maintenance of self-esteem. Internal pressures can be constructive. It can lead to a serious effort to learn something new which can ultimately bring us great pleasure. On the contrary internal pressure can be destructive also if our ideals are impossible to be achieved.

External pressures hit us from all sides. The rapid change in society and expectations of family and friends are most significant pressures. Some stressful situations lead to anxiety.

In present competitive scenario failure is a constant source of frustration. Everyone feels that he should have done something differently and thus he feels responsible for his own failure, pain and disappointment. Finding a meaningful and fulfilling desire of life is often difficult than his expectations. He has to do nothing and society is to blame. This type of feeling can result in despair.

Stress, from whatever source, calls for adjustment. When our needs and desires are frustrated, we attempt to remove the obstacles between ourselves and our goal or give-up our goal. When we are threatened, we try to eliminate the source of the threat- either by attacking it or by escaping from it. In self-defense, we make efforts to avoid the conflict. In many situations the most effective solution is to withdraw. We can deal with it through avoidance behavior and escape ourselves

In ambiguous situations when individual realizes hopeless situations but that problem cannot be ignored and he becomes distressed. Psychologists have suggested certain basic types of defensive coping, called defense mechanisms- the ways people react to frustration and conflict by deceiving themselves about their real desires and goals in an effort to maintain their self-esteem and to avoid anxiety.

Defense mechanisms refer to the unconscious process for defending or protecting a person from stress, anxiety, conflicts or any type of unacceptable feelings. Defense mechanisms are the psychological strategies to maintain balance and inner peace as well as to cope with the reality. It enables an individual to resolve conflict and reduce his stress and anxiety. In simple words defense mechanisms are simply human behaviors that are used to deal with unpleasant feelings, events, thoughts, or actions.

In case there's a physical threat, what is the first thing we do? Naturally, we do whatever we can to defend yourself. The same concept applies when there is an emotional or mental threat in our life. We use defense mechanisms to deal with them. We use such mechanisms to distance ourselves from unpleasant feelings like guilt or shame.

The term "Defense mechanism" has been explained in the psychoanalytic theory by eminent psychologist Sigmund Freud in 1904. The psychoanalytic theory states that behaviors like defense mechanisms are out of a person's control or are applied without even realizing it.

Defense mechanisms are a normal part of our psychological development. Whether they are used to avoid unwanted thoughts or deal with anxiety, defense mechanisms will always be a part of our everyday life. Defense mechanisms are a normal part of our psychological development. Whether they are used to avoid unwanted thoughts or deal with anxiety, defense mechanisms will always be a part of our everyday life.

For some, defense mechanisms are used positively, while some use them in an unhealthy manner.

### **Most Common Defense Mechanisms**

Defense mechanisms are used in day-to-day life. Even the person may not be aware he is actually using them. There are ten most common defense mechanisms.

**1. Denial:** One common defense mechanism is denial – refusing to acknowledge threatening or painful situations. It comes naturally to humans. Denial occurs when a person refuses to accept reality.

Example of Denial: You refuse to accept the reality that your loved one died and wish you were just dreaming, or it's not really happening. Another example is a person who excessively drinks, denies having substance use problems. He insists that he is merely experimenting with drugs and denies the need of help.

**2. Projection:** The displacement of one's own motives onto others is known as projection. In other words, we attribute our unwanted behaviors or unacceptable impulses and making it appear that it's the people around you who are manifesting such behaviors.

Projection happens because it may be hard for some people to accept their bad behaviors. Anger is often projected onto another person. What you may not be conscious of is that what you blame on other people is actually a reflection of your personality.

Example of Projection:

A husband has anger management problems and may become hostile. Instead of acknowledging that behavior, the husband blames the wife for having anger issues, which in reality is not true.

**3. Repression:** Perhaps the most common mechanism to block out the painful feelings and experiences is repression. Repression protects us from remembering things that are so painful that we would prefer even not to think about them. Painful memories, traumatic experiences, and heart-breaking events are upsetting. Instead of facing these painful thoughts or feelings the right way, we unconsciously repress those feelings.

Repression is a just a way of "feeling okay for now," as painful memories will not disappear entirely. It's like sweeping the dirt under the rug; it may not be seen on the surface, but it's still there. Instead of dealing with it the healthy way, these feelings may influence a person's behavior, change their mood, and impact their relationships.

Example of Repression: A child who was physically abused chose to repress those memories. Later in life, they may find it hard to form meaningful relationships because the trauma was not dealt with properly. Psychologists opine that repression is not entirely successful, repressed drives may cause anxiety and irrational behavior.

**4. Regression:** Individuals under severe stress may revert to childlike behavior. Why do people regress? Psychologists say that it is because an adult cannot stand feeling helpless. On the other hand children are made aware of their dependency every day. Someone who feels anxious or worried about a situation may unconsciously return to his earlier stage of development, which is

not appropriate for their age. In short, regression makes a person act younger than what is expected of their age.

Example of Regression: An adult who's too stressed at work may start to bite his nails or begin to watch his favorite cartoons to be happy. Sometimes he can cry in expectation of sympathy as his parents did in his childhood when his argument fails.

**5. Displacement:** Displacement is the redirection of the energy from unsatisfied drives onto other objects. It is closely related to repression. With displacement, repressed feelings find a new outlet. Displacement is characteristic of situations in which an individual is unable to defend himself directly.

Example of Displacement: The person who has to smile and be agree with the boss all day to save his job may yell at an innocent child or spouse i.e. the safer target at home. He is displacing his anger to the wrong people which may affect his relationships.

**6. Reaction Formation:** The term 'reaction formation' refers to a behavioral form of denial. The person expresses emotions that are the opposite of what he really feels. Individual recognizes his feelings, chooses to deny them, and acts the opposite way. It may be detected as being "pretentious" because he prefers to act differently from what he truly feels. People who use reaction formation may show exaggerated convincing behaviors.

Example of Reaction Formation: Someone else was promoted to the position a particular individual wants to have it. He tries to act as professional, but he knows deep inside that he is more deserving to the position of promotion in the job. He may react by exaggeratedly congratulating that person to cover his frustration. He may pretend to be happy for the person who has been given promotion.

### **7. Rationalization**

Rationalization is a defense mechanism where an individual makes efforts to rationalize or give reasons when something unpleasant things happen. He tries to make excuses for his awkward behavior and cover up the real reasons behind that action. Rationalization can have two sides as useful or harmful. It can prevent a person from feeling anxious by not overthinking the situation because he is able to justify his actions. Furthermore, rationalization can protect a person's self-esteem and self-concept.

In rationalization, when the person experiences success, he provides credit to his skills or capabilities for his achievement but in the face of failure, he tries to rationalize the situation and blame other people or factors that seem out of his control.

Example of Rationalization: Individual could not meet the deadline for a project. He tries to rationalize the situation by blaming it on the slow internet connection. But the truth is, he was procrastinating, even though he had plenty of time to finish the project.

**8. Sublimation:** Of all the defense mechanisms, sublimation is the most positive strategy. Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud believed that sublimation is the transformation of drives into more socially acceptable forms that is essential for the development of personality and beneficial to

civilization. Sublimation is about taking the strong emotions and redirect them into something appropriate, safe, healthy, or socially acceptable ways.

Example of Sublimation: An individual is stressed at work. Instead of taking it out on his family, he joins the gym to exercise to channelize his frustrations in a healthy manner. For some others, this stress may redirect the negative emotions by writing songs, painting, or blogging.

**9. Compartmentalization:** Compartmentalization means to manage compartments in the life. This psychological defense mechanism means an individual separates his work life, family life, or relationships to prevent conflicting emotions. This mindset is helpful, especially when it comes to workplace issues.

Example of Compartmentalization: An individual does not have desire to think or talk about his personal issues at work, and vice versa. This can help him focus well at work without any consideration about problems at home. He doesn't think about the stress of work-place at home. This defense mechanism may prevent the occurrence of problematic situation of displacement.

**10. Intellectualization:** This defense mechanism is a subtle form of denial. In intellectualization, an individual is threatened but chooses to block off his emotions or can detach himself from his problems by analyzing intellectually. Whenever a person is in an adverse situation, instead of focusing on the quantitative facts he may cut himself off from his emotions. Intellectualization may help reduce anxiety.

Example of Intellectualization: An individual is fired from his job. Instead of sulking and thinking about the painful feelings, he gathers information about the job opportunities he can apply to. He can use this opportunity to learn new skills and pursue his dream job also. Second example can be doctors who who see pain and suffering every day but keep themselves detached from that.

All people use defense mechanisms to cope with real –world problems and internal conflicts. Coleman and They are able Hammen pointed out, “defenses are essential for softening failure ...alleviating anxiety, repairing emotional hurt, and maintaining our feelings of adequacy and worth”. Any person couldn't get along from day to day if allows himself to fully realize the dangers of flying in an airplane or driving on an expressway.

Well- adjusted people learn to balance conformity and non-conformity, self-control and spontaneity. They are able to let themselves go, and are also able to control themselves in situations which might be damaging. They are able to change themselves when society demands it and can bring transformation in the society when need arises to do so for the better course.

Overall healthy people are realistic in their appraisal of the world around them and of their needs and capabilities. They know their strengths and weaknesses. As a result they choose a role in life that is in harmony with their inner selves. They don't realize that they must act against their values in order to be successful. This self-trust enables them to face conflicts and threats without excessive anxiety and perhaps more important, to risk their feelings and self-esteem in intimate relationships.

An effective adjustment takes into consideration both individual needs and the well-being of others. Use of defense mechanisms provides assistance to people to adapt to specific

circumstances. The defense mechanisms can be protect an individual from anxiety and from internal or external stressors.

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