

# Defence mechanisms

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# Functions of Defense/Mental Mechanisms

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- Facilitates the resolution of emotional conflict
- To provide relief from stress
- To cushion emotional pain
- To avoid or alleviate anxiety
- To protect and maintain the individual's self-esteem and ego identity from the continuous blows of reality

# Defence mechanisms

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- are a set of unconscious ways to protect one's personality from unpleasant thoughts and realities which may otherwise cause anxiety.
- These mechanisms are an integral part of the psychoanalytic theory.

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- Are used sparingly, they help people face difficult life situations. However, a defence mechanism can also lead to a neurosis if it leads a person to adopt ineffectual or inappropriate coping strategies.

# Acting out

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by actions rather than reflections or feelings.  
*For example, a person facing a small problem responds quickly with intense passion when the situation would not have required it.*

# Anticipation

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by experiencing emotional reactions in advance of, or anticipating consequences of, possible future events and considering realistic, alternative responses or solutions. *For example, after a difficult job interview a candidate expects that he might not be selected by the employer.*

# Altruism

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by dedication to meeting the needs of others. *For example, a person putting away her own problems starts to volunteer.*

# Avoidance

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by refusing to encounter situations, objects, or activities because of the fear of failures or difficulties. Often seen in phobias. *For example, a worker refuses to confront an employer fearing his or her reactions.*



# Compensation

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by overemphasizing other activities or situations. *For example, a physically unattractive adolescent starts weightlifting.*

# Denial

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by failing to recognize obvious implications or consequences of a thought, act, or situation. *For example, a disabled person plans to return to former activities although it is evident it is virtually impossible.*

# Displacement

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by redirecting emotions from a 'dangerous' object to a 'safe' object. *For example, a worker is angered by his superior but suppresses his anger; later, on return to his home, he punishes one of his children for misbehaviour that would usually be tolerated or ignored.*

# Humour

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by emphasizing the amusing or ironic aspects of the conflict or stressors. *For example, a patient is laughing off the fact that physicians are unable to diagnose him with a specific disease.*

# Idealization

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by overestimating the desirable qualities and underestimating the limitations of a desired object. *For example, a lover speaks in glowing terms of the beauty of an average-looking woman he has recently dated.*

# Intellectualization

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by excessive use of abstract thinking or complex explanations to control or minimize disturbing feelings. *For example, a husband is constructing elaborate logical explanations for his wife's recent paranoid ideas.*

# Introjection

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by internalizing the values or characteristics of another person; usually someone who is significant to the individual in some way. *For example, adopting the ideals of a charismatic leader in order to deal with feelings of one's own inadequacy.*

# Isolation

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by splitting-off of the emotional components from a difficult thought. The mechanism of isolation is commonly over utilized by people with obsessive compulsive personalities. *For example, a medical student dissects a cadaver without being disturbed by thoughts of death.*



# Passive Aggression

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by indirectly and unassertively expressing aggression toward others.

# Projection

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- The opposite of introjection. Attributing one's own emotions or desires to an external object or person. *For example, saying others hate you when it is you who hates the others.*

# Rationalization

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by inventing a socially acceptable or logical reason to justify an already taken unconscious emotional action. *For example, becoming drunk and then after that saying that it was needed to 'take the edge off'.*"

# Reaction formation

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by converting an uncomfortable feeling into its opposite. *For example, a married woman who is disturbed by feeling attracted to another man treats him rudely.*

# Regression

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by returning to a less mature, anxiety reducing behaviour. *For example, a high school girl who has had a very traumatic day at school curls up in a blanket and rocks herself to sleep.*

# Repression

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- Moving thoughts unacceptable to the ego into the unconscious, where they cannot be easily accessed.

# Somatization

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by physical symptoms involving parts of the body innervated by the sympathetic and parasympathetic system. *For example, a highly competitive and aggressive person, whose life situation requires that such behaviour be restricted, develops hypertension*

# Sublimation

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by using the energy in other, usually constructive activities. *For example, playing sports to relieve stress or anger.*



# Suppression

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by deferred dealing with the stressor. *For example, a worker finds that he is letting thoughts about a date that evening interfere with his duties; he decides not to think about plans for the evening until he leaves work.*

# Undoing

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- Dealing with emotional stressors by negating a previous act or communication. *For example, after having made a derogatory statement to his wife, a husband brings her a gift.* Seen in obsessive compulsive disorder.