**Defense mechanism** is any of a group of mental processes that enables the mind to reach compromise solutions to conflicts that it is unable to resolve. The process is usually unconscious (unaware). The following are a number of common defense mechanisms:

**1. Denial**

Denial is one of the most common defense mechanisms. It occurs when you refuse to accept reality or facts. You block external events or circumstances from your mind so that you don’t have to deal with the emotional impact. In other words, you avoid the painful feelings or events.

This defense mechanism is very common. The phrase, “They’re in denial” is commonly understood to mean a person is avoiding reality despite what may be obvious to people around them.

**2. Repression**

Unsavory thoughts, painful memories, or irrational beliefs can upset you. Instead of facing them, you may unconsciously choose to hide them in hopes of forgetting about them entirely. This is also considered a way in which your brain protects you from unbearable memories.

That does not mean, however, that the memories disappear entirely. They may influence behaviors, and they may impact future relationships. You just may not realize the impact this defense mechanism is having.

**3. Displacement**

You direct strong emotions and frustrations toward a person or object that doesn’t feel threatening. This allows you to satisfy an impulse to react, but you don’t risk significant consequences.

A good example of this defense mechanism is getting angry with a child or spouse because you had a bad day at work. Neither of these people is the target of your strong emotions but reacting to them is likely less problematic than reacting to your boss.

**4. Projection**

Some thoughts or feelings you have about another person may make you uncomfortable. If you project those feelings, you’re misattributing them to the other person.

For example, you may dislike your new co-worker, but instead of accepting that, you choose to tell yourself that they dislike you. You see in their actions the things you wish you could do or say.

**5. Reaction formation**

People who use this defense mechanism recognize how they feel, but they choose to behave in the opposite manner of their instincts.

A person who reacts this way, for example, may feel they should not express negative emotions, such as anger or frustration. They choose to instead react in an overly positive way.

**6. Regression**

Some people who feel threatened or anxious may unconsciously “escape” to an earlier stage of development.

This type of defense mechanism may be most obvious in young children. If they experience trauma or loss, they may suddenly act as if they’re younger again. They may even begin wetting the bed or sucking their thumb.

Adults can regress, too. Adults who are struggling to cope with events or behaviors may return to sleeping with a cherished stuffed animal, overeat foods they find comforting, or begin chain smoking or chewing on pencils or pens. They may also avoid everyday

**7. Rationalization**

Some people may attempt to explain undesirable behaviors with their own set of “facts.” This allows you to feel comfortable with the choice you made, even if you know on another level it’s not right.

For example, people who might be angry at co-workers for not completing work on time could be ignoring the fact that they’re typically late, too.

**8. Sublimation**

This type of defense mechanism is considered a positive strategy. That’s because people who rely on it choose to redirect strong emotions or feelings into an object or activity that is appropriate and safe.

For example, instead of lashing out at your employees, you choose to channel your frustration into kickboxing or exercise. You could also funnel or redirect the feelings into music, art, or sports.

**9. Compensation**

The term **compensation** refers to a type of **defense mechanism** in which people overachieve in one area to **compensate** for failures in another.

For example, individuals with poor family lives may direct their energy into excelling above and beyond what is required at work.