Defense Mechanisms

Defense mechanisms us from being consciously aware of a thought or feeling which we cannot tolerate. The defense only allows the unconscious thought or feeling to be expressed indirectly in a disguised form. Let's say you are angry with a professor because he is very critical of you. Here's how the various defenses might hide and/or transform that anger:

DENIAL: You completely reject the thought of feeling. / "I'm not angry with him!"

SUPPRESSION: You are vaguely aware of the thought or feeling, but try to hide it. / "I'm going to try to be nice to him."

REACTION FORMATION: You turn the feeling into its opposite. / "I think he's really great!"

PROJECTION: You think someone else has your thought or feeling. / "That professor hates me." "That student hates him."

DISPLACEMENT: You redirect your feelings to another target. / "I hate that secretary."

RATIONALIZATION: You come up with various explanations to justify the situation (while denying your feelings) / "He's so critical because he's trying to help us do our best."

INTELLECTUALIZATION: A type of rationalization, only more intellectualized. / "Nietzsche said that anger is ontological despair."

UNDOING: You try to reverse or undo your feeling by DOING something that dictates the opposite feeling. It may be an "apology" for the unacceptable feeling. / "I think I'll give that professor an apple."

ISOLATION OF AFFECT: You "think" the feeling but don't really feel it. / "I guess I'm angry with him, sort of."

REGRESSION: You revert to an old pattern of behavior to ventilate your feeling. / "Let's shoot spitballs at people!"

SUBLIMATION: You redirect the feeling into a socially productive activity. / "I'm going to write a poem about anger."

** Defenses may hide any of a variety of thoughts or feelings: anger, fear, sadness, depression, greed, envy, competitiveness, love, passion, admiration, criticalness, dependency, selfishness, grandiosity, helplessness.