

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 or 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 indicates 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.