

List of defence mechanisms

[Sigmund Freud](#) was the first person to develop the theory of defense mechanisms, and his daughter [Anna Freud](#) clarified and conceptualized it. She has described various different defence mechanisms:

- **[Compensation](#)**. Compensation occurs when someone takes up one behaviour because one cannot accomplish another behaviour.
- **[Denial](#)**. Unconsciously refusing to perceive the more unpleasant aspects of external reality (feelings, events, or both), replacing it with a less threatening but inaccurate one.
- **[Displacement](#)**. An unconscious defence mechanism, whereby the mind redirects emotion from a 'dangerous' object to a 'safe' object. In psychoanalytic theory, displacement is a defence mechanism that shifts sexual or aggressive impulses to a more acceptable or less threatening target; redirecting emotion to a safer outlet;
- **[Dissociation](#)**. Separation or postponement of a feeling that normally would accompany a situation or thought.
- **[Humour](#)**. Refocuses attention on the somewhat comical side of the situation as to relieve negative tension; similar to [comic relief](#).
- **[Idealization](#)**. Form of denial in which the object of attention is presented as "all good" masking true negative feelings towards the other.
- **[Identification](#)**. The unconscious modeling of one's self upon another person's behavior.
- **[Intellectualization \(isolation\)](#)**. Concentrating on the intellectual components of the situations as to distance oneself from the anxiety provoking emotions associated with these situations;
- **[Introjection](#)**. Identifying with some idea or object so deeply that it becomes a part of that person.
- **[Inversion](#)**. Refocusing of aggression or emotions evoked from an external force onto one's self.
- **[Isolation, separating feelings and thoughts that are connected](#)**
- *[minimizing](#)*. writing off problematic events or behaviors as being too minor to worry about.
- **[Projection](#)**. Attributing to others, one's own unacceptable or unwanted thoughts and/or emotions. Projection reduces anxiety in the way that it allows the expression of the impulse or desire without letting the ego recognize it;
- **[Rationalization](#)**. The process of constructing a logical justification for a decision that was originally arrived at through a different mental process;
- **[Reaction formation](#)**. The converting of unconscious wishes or impulses that are perceived to be dangerous into their opposites;
- **[Regression](#)**. The reversion to an earlier stage of development in the face of unacceptable impulses;
- **[Repression](#)**. The process of pulling thoughts into the unconscious and preventing painful or dangerous thoughts from entering consciousness. The painful feelings are initially conscious and then forgotten. They are stored in the unconscious and, under certain circumstances, can be retrieved. Repression can range from momentary memory lapses to complete amnesia of a catastrophic event, such as a murder or an earthquake.
- **[Somatisation](#)**. Manifestation of emotional anxiety into physical symptoms.

- **Splitting**. Repressing, dissociating or disconnecting important feelings that are "dangerous" to psychic well-being. Causes the person to get out of touch with her/his feelings; fragmented self. An example is Anna Nicole Smith's bizarre reaction to her son's death as she believed he was still alive.
- **Substitution**. When a person replaces one feeling or emotion for another.
- **Sublimation**. The refocusing of psychic energy (which Sigmund Freud believed was limited) away from negative outlets to more positive outlets. These drives which cannot find an outlet are rechannelled. In Freud's classic theory, erotic energy is only allowed limited expression due to repression, and much of the remainder of a given group's erotic energy is used to develop its culture and civilization. Freud considered this defence mechanism the most productive compared to the others that he identified. Sublimation is the process of transforming libido into 'socially useful' achievements, mainly art. Psychoanalysts often refer to sublimation as the only truly successful defence mechanism;
- **Suppression**. The conscious process of pushing thoughts into the preconscious.
- **Undoing**. A person tries to 'undo' a negative or threatening thought by their actions.
- **Escapism**. A person uses fantasy, literature or other forms of culture to escape real-world problems or perhaps to deal with difficult emotional problems within the laws of a safe, but imaginary world. This can both be constructive and developing or limiting if the real problems are never faced.