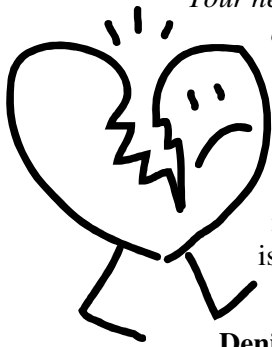


Defense Mechanisms



Your heart is the center of all you do, all you feel, and all you think. It is child-like, vulnerable, and carefree until it learns to protect itself from being hurt. The defenses that we use act as walls to protect against emotional pain. Following is a list of typical “walls” we use to protect our hearts. Which walls do you identify with? Think of times when you are struggling the most and ask yourself which of these sets of behaviors you use.

Avoidance: Avoidance pretends to see the full magnitude a trauma and/or sin but subtly reduces the size of the problem by moving it into the future. For example, I see that there is an elephant in the middle room. I agree with that fact and realize it is a big problem... but I'll just deal with it later. Maybe I'll have time tomorrow or maybe next week.

Denial: Denial is when someone choosing to “look away” from or ignore the things in life that they don't want to deal with. Usually a person is aware of those things but chooses not to look them. For example, there's an elephant in the middle of the room, but instead of dealing with the problem you just look in the other direction and pretend it's not there.

Displacement: Displacement is transferring an emotion from its original object to a safer, more acceptable substitute. For example, a man criticized by his boss and feels belittled, unappreciated, and angry. Unable to express his anger at work for fear of retaliation, he comes home and takes it out on his wife, punishes his children, or kicks the dog.

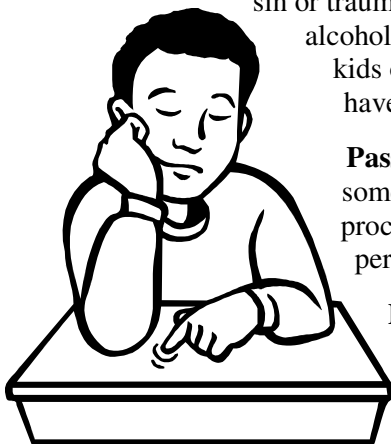
Dissociation: The mind uses dissociation to cope with traumatic events that are so immediately unbearable that the person cannot “stay in” the traumatic event. In attempt to “get out” of the situation part of the mind stays in the traumatic event and disconnects from the rest of the mind. That disconnected part of the mind carries the memories, thoughts, and feelings of the trauma while the other part functions separate from it. The person is often left feeling like “nothing happened” or that the trauma is “gone” except to that part of the mind.

Distortion: When a person reshapes their external reality to suit their inner needs. This often involves delusions and hallucinations such as hearing voices that no one else can hear.

Fantasy: This occurs when people find reality so painful that they escape through excessive daydreaming.

Intellectualization: Intellectualization is when an individual avoids the awareness of feeling inferior and/or other unconscious conflicts by excessive use of intellectual vocabulary, thinking or discussion. It's when one retreats from emotions by surrounding themselves with philosophical or academic issues.

Minimization: Minimization is very closely related to rationalization. It is trying to reduce the apparent size of a sin or trauma. It's usually done through logical distortions. For example, “Dad wasn't alcoholic or abusive - I mean, everyone in the neighborhood got drunk and beat their kids on the weekends. He wasn't actually trying to hurt us. Besides, lots of people have had it worse than me.”



Passive-aggressive behavior: This is when persons who have hostility towards some authority figure “get even” in a nonverbal, passive way such as pouting, procrastinating, acting inefficiently, or spreading secretive rumors about the resented person.

Perfectionism: Perfectionism is a person refusing to do something unless they can do it perfectly. A person does this to protect themselves from disapproval and rejection by trying to always ensure that others will always be happy with what they do. It avoids dealing with the fear of rejection and disapproval as well as the underlying wounds and lies dealing with rejection and disapproval.





Phariseeism: This is when persons become increasingly self-righteous and think they are better than others because of what they do or don't do religiously. The motivation is to avoid becoming aware of their own shortcomings.

Rationalization: Rationalization occurs when a person uses rational arguments to justify sinful behavior and/or avoiding dealing with traumatic memories. For example, "these nightmares (of being raped by my grandfather) don't mean anything. Everybody has nightmares. It must just be a coincidence."

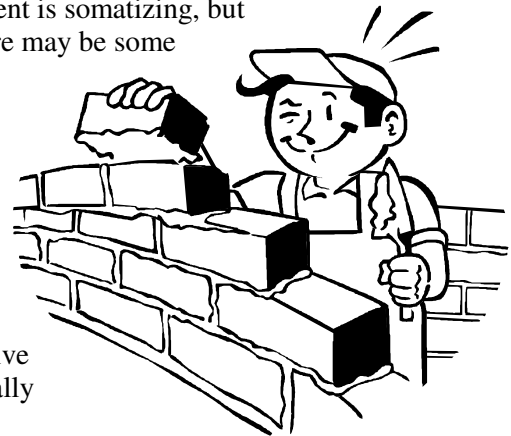
Reaction Formation: This is when a person projects the opposite image of what he or she really is, lying not only to others but also to themselves. On one level the person knows the reality, but on the other hand the person is able to say to him or herself, "I'm really a good person. See, I've done this and that to prove it." An example would be a preacher who preaches passionately and convincingly on issues like sexual purity and integrity but is himself involved in sexual impurity in his own private life.

Repression/ Suppression: Repression is more subtle than denial and occurs when one has "unacceptable" ideas, feelings, impulses, or motives surface and then automatically bans them from conscious awareness. Suppression is the avoidance of uncomfortable issues or emotions, usually because the timing isn't right. Unfortunately, many never find the "right time" so those issues and emotions are never dealt with.

Sarcasm: Sarcasm is when persons with suppressed hostility towards themselves or others ventilate that hostility without being aware of its existence by making critical jokes about themselves or others.

Somatization: This means expressing some type of emotion, frustration, or anxiety in bodily ways. For instance, a person who is unwilling to admit being angry or anxious turns those emotions on his body and develops ulcers, chronic headaches, or diarrhea. Not everyone who has a physical ailment is somatizing, but when people have a constant, steady stream of physical symptoms, there may be some emotional issues behind it.

Sublimation: Sublimation is when an individual unconsciously channels "unacceptable" drives (such as lust, anger, hostility) into acceptable channels (like exercise, housework, creative endeavors). Although sublimation does not seem unhealthy, it is still a form of avoidance. A healthier approach would be to become consciously aware of those unacceptable feelings and work through them.



Withdrawal: When a person who tends to be introverted tries to deceive themselves into believing that the problem is dealt with if they physically remove themselves from the situation.

God gave us these defense mechanisms to help us cope with our emotions, but He is calling us to give Him control and let Him defend our hearts. Here's a simple prayer to get you started. Insert the names of the defenses that you have used in the blanks:

"Lord Jesus, I thank You that You gave me psychological defenses to help me survive my childhood, but I acknowledge that they are now sin in that they are hindering Your better plan to expose and deal with the wounds and sins in my life. I ask Your forgiveness in every way in which my _____ (the defense(s) being addressed) hinder(s) Your plan to expose and deal with the wounds and sin in my life. I acknowledge that I cannot change my own heart, Your mind and Your truth regarding my _____. Lord, I cannot free myself, but I am willing to be freed. I cooperate with Your desires to free me by asking You to free me and by choosing to confess, renounce, and release using _____ in any way that hinders Your plan to expose and deal with the wounds and sin in my life. I ask You to cleanse me with Your blood, freeing me from using _____ in any way that hinders Your plan to expose and deal with the wounds and sin in my life."