# Defense Mechanisms

Defense mechanisms. These are the mental gymnastics we all do, usually unconsciously, to avoid bringing painful thoughts and feelings into our conscious minds.

All of us have an outside me. The person we present to others and maybe even to ourselves. This person is socially acceptable, meets the norms, and we feel comfortable with the self and others feel comfortable with this self, too, but all of us have an inside me.

Someone we might not want others to know. Sometimes we don't even know that inside me very well for ourselves. We might not like who we are inside. We might have a lot of shame for some reason and that's too painful for us to know about. The bigger the gap is between inside me and outside me, the more likely we are to need defense mechanisms to rescue us; and the way that defense mechanisms rescue us is that they push the shame that we feel on the inside into blame on the outside.

Here are some common defense mechanisms:

Displacement is the classic story of how the boss that’s mean to you at work and then you come home, and poor Fido meets you at the door and you kick the dog, and you say this stupid animal is always in

my way makes me so angry.

Projection assumes that others feel and behave how we deeply feel. So, for an example, for an addict who feels extremely entitled and needs his addiction and will do whatever he needs to keep that addiction, he might say to somebody else you just want what you want you just think you can have it your own way all the time.

Rationalization. That's the story that we tell ourselves about why things are really not so bad as they might seem. For example, the alcoholic who comes into a counseling session and says well the drinks were poured, what was I supposed to do?

Reaction formation. Shakespeare called this methinks the lady doth protest too much. The classic example here is the preacher who rails against women and against immorality in this present age, and then you find out that he has a terrible porn problem and a paid account with Ashley Madison.

So, what do we do with defense mechanisms?

The first thing we do is take responsibility for ourselves and think about how much our insides and our outsides are matching up. We recognize those times when we are displacing our anger, projecting our emotions, rationalizing our behavior, and generally overreacting and when we've done that, then we can ask ourselves, do I want to continue to avoid reality, or am I ready to face my pain and see what's driving this crazy behavior?

The second thing that we do with defense mechanisms is we recognize those times when we are the target of somebody else's defense mechanisms and we understand that that person is trying to avoid reality, and if we argue, engage, and try to fix them, we just create drama that helps them to avoid reality, and so what we need to do instead is create healthy boundaries that will remove us from being their target, so the other person can decide what to do with their pain besides take it out on us.

I hope that helps you like it's helped me.