

## Six of the Most Common Defense Mechanisms

Defense Mechanism	Example	Effect	Antidote
<b>Denial:</b> Inability to accurately perceive the extent or severity of a problem.	"I don't care what other people think, I'm not an alcoholic."	A person in denial makes no effort to change because they see no need for change.	A clear, factual presentation of evidence to the contrary.
<b>Rationalization:</b> Manufacturing or inventing reasons for the problem behavior that make it seem okay.	"I was under a lot of stress, that's why I drank so much."	The rationalizer's excuses prevent them from taking positive action.	Offer examples of the the problem in other circumstances.
<b>Externalization:</b> Blaming the behavior on an outside force or circumstance, often connected to a resentment.	"if you were married to her, you'd wanna get high too."	Externalizers try to "fix" their lives by changing everyone else but themselves.	Remind person that we're all responsible for our own behavior.
<b>Minimizing:</b> Discounting the importance of a problem to make change seem less necessary.	"You're overreacting. I'm not that bad yet."	The minimizer fails to see escalating problems until it's too late.	Offer examples that suggest the problem is growing worse.
<b>Intellectualizing:</b> Focusing on semantics or trivial disputes to distract from the issue.	"I disagree with your definition of 'problem'."	The intellectualizer is so busy arguing they never get around to addressing the problem.	Refuse to argue details. Instead remind the person of the big picture in which substance use is growing worse.
<b>Fantasy:</b> Retreating into unrealistic dreams or expectations as a way of avoiding problems.	"Once I get another job, everything will be OK again."	If you can't see your life as it really is, you can't change it.	Point out that substance problem can undermine future opportunities.

## About Defenses

Defenses share three characteristics:

- » We all use them – or they use us
- » They exist as a way of protecting against feelings of anxiety
- » They are irrational

By the time alcoholism or addiction have reached a middle or late stage, defenses have escalated to a pathological level – meaning they've become part of the illness. But they're still rooted in normal human behavior.

## Countering Defenses

Three advantages help us counter the addict or alcoholic's defenses:

- » We've heard them before- many times. We can anticipate and prepare responses for them.
- » Defenses are irrational. They sound convincing but their flaws are usually easy to find.
- » If we refuse to "go along" with the defenses, the addict or alcoholic's resistance may weaken or even collapse.

SNAPSHOT (continued)

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