

## DEFENSE MECHANISMS

Defense mechanisms are tools we all use to avoid emotional pain. Below are descriptions of the most commonly used defenses. We all use defenses in our lives. The problem comes when we use these defenses to allow us to not look at the reality of our lives, and keeps us from making changes to make our lives better. We get in trouble when we hide behind our defenses and don't look at the reality of our lives. When our lives become difficult or unmanageable we need to address which defenses we are using and make some changes so we can address our problems more realistically. Read them and see if you can identify which ones you use, which ones you have seen your partner use, and which ones your children use.

- **Denial**-this is the art of believing that something did not happen, something was not said, something was not done. It is like lying-only lying to oneself before we lie to anyone else. When we deny, we first deny to ourselves and then to the other people in our lives. How have you used denial in your life? How do you see others around you using denial? How is this causing problems in your life?

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- **Minimization**-this is the art of making something smaller than it really is. A hit becomes a "slap", a kick becomes a "bump", and other actions become significantly smaller than they really are. We all do this with our children when they are small-we say things like; "you aren't really hurt, it is only a small cut". When it is used appropriately, minimization helps keep us from being emotionally stuck and unable to move forward because of the fear of what could happen to us.

How have you used minimization in your life? How do you see others around you using minimization? How is this causing problems in your life?

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- **Rationalization**-this is the art of making something right-even when it is wrong. This is when we say things like "he hit me first", "it was only a small lie", "it wasn't my fault, because he/she told me to do it". We find reasons to explain why we have done things instead of taking responsibility for what we did. Things never get dealt with because responsibility is never taken for what has happened. How have you used rationalization in your life? How do you see others around you using rationalization? How is this causing problems in your life?

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- **Forgetting**-this is exactly what it sounds like. We simply "forget" what we said, did, promised, etc. There is absolutely no responsibility taken for what has been done. If no one acknowledges any responsibility, then nothing can be dealt with, and progress cannot be made. How have you used forgetting in your life? How do you see others around you using forgetting? How is this causing problems in your life?

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- **Externalization**-this is the art of blaming outside forces for unhealthy behavior. It is very much like rationalization except it is not as sophisticated. Externalization is blaming anything except oneself for what has happened. How have you used externalization in your life? How do you see others around you using externalization? How is this causing problems in your life?

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- **Intellectualization**-this is the art of making everything "make sense". This is thinking without feeling and it helps us not address our emotional responses to what we do. We take the feeling component out of what is happening. How have you used intellectualization in your life? How do you see others around you using intellectualization? How is this causing problems in your life?

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- **Shifting**-this is the art of working to take attention from one situation and creating another situation as a diversion. This helps avoid unpleasant feelings about the original situation. An example of this is people who are always dealing with a crisis in their lives. When we are dealing with a crisis, we have no time to deal with the emotional issues of any situation. How have you used shifting in your life? How do you see others around you using shifting? How is this causing problems in your life?\\

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- **Repression**-this is when we "stuff" feelings and do not deal with them on any level. We are too busy, too tired, or we "forget" about things and we never deal with them. The hope is that the problem will go away and we will never have to deal with it. Unfortunately this is not true, unresolved/stuffed issues simply lie in wait until we are weak and they then appear to be addressed. How have you used repression in your life? How do you see others around you using repression? How is this causing problems in your life?

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- **Projection**-this is when we put our uncomfortable feelings, motives, and desires onto another person or object. We are not angry or mad-"you are angry". This helps us never be responsible for what has happened. Our children "make" us angry or upset-it is never our fault. How have you used projection in your life? How do you see others around you using projection? How is this causing problems in your life?

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#### **Guideline Questions-on Parenting**

1. What do you feel good about or like about your relationships with your children?

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2. What don't you like or want to change about your relationships with your children?

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3. What do you do when the children do something wrong? (E.g., explain rules; take away privileges, yell, scold, spank, hit, etc.)

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4. If physical punishment is used, what kind? How often?

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5. Do you ever feel like you lose control? What happens?

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6. Have there ever been bruises or marks as a result of physical discipline by you? (If so, specify last incident, location of marks.) How did you feel when you saw those marks?

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7. Do you ever use any objects? (E.g., belt, ruler, hairbrush, etc.)

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8. What are your concerns about the way you discipline the children?

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9. What does your spouse/partner do when the children do something wrong? (e.g., explain rules, take away privileges, yell, scold, spank, hit, etc.)

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10. If your spouse/partner uses physical punishment-what kind? How often? Most recent incident?

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11. Do you ever feel like your spouse/partner loses control? What happens? How do you handle it?

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12. Have there ever been bruises or marks as a result of physical discipline by your partner? (If so, specify last incident, location of marks.)

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15. Have your children ever expressed to you fears or uneasiness about the way your partner touches them? If so, how did you respond to those concerns?

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16. Do you ever feel your behavior with the children seems inappropriate or sexual?

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17. Do you think or are you concerned that conflicts between you and your partner have affected your children? In what ways-school behavior, relationships with siblings and friends, acting out in school or in the neighborhood.

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### ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of this section is to help you identify any areas of difficulty that you may be currently experiencing, any traumas that your children may be dealing with, and any areas of change you want to make with your children. Please answer as honestly as possible.

1. Are you currently experiencing any feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, or inability to cope? If so, what kinds of things are going on in your life that you feel might be causing these feelings?

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2. Who is the primary caretaker of the children? Who has been the main primary caretaker for most of their lives? Have there been any changes in the primary caretaker in the last few months? If so, in what ways?

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3. What kind of support system do you have? How do you use it? How are you with your primary support system? What changes, if any, need to be made with your support system?

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4. How do you show your children love? How do you want them to show love to you? Do you push them away when they want to hug or kiss you? Do you kiss and hug them a lot?

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5. Do you reward your children for good behavior? How?

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7. What kinds of activities do you like to do with your children? How often do you do them?

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8. Are you able to do things without your children? How often? What kinds of things do you like to do without the children?

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9. What kinds of behaviors do you expect from your children? Please list as many as possible in a variety of settings.

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10. When and why do you get really angry with your children? For example talking back, demanding time and attention, not minding, ignoring the rules. What are your normal responses at these times? Do you feel these responses need to be changed in any way?

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11. How often does this (getting angry) happen on a typical day? Are there are times that are more difficult than others, afternoon, weekends, late evenings vacations, etc.?

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12. What methods do you use to discipline your children? Do they work?  
How do you know?

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13. Are you having any problems with your children? If so what are they?  
How are you dealing with them? Do you feel it is working?

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14. Has you or the person who cares for the children ever been physically or mentally  
abused? If so, what kind of abuse and by whom? (parent, relative, spouse)

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15. Has you or your spouse ever been reported to Children's Protective Services for  
child abuse? If so, please provide details.

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16. Are there any things that you would like to change about how you  
parent your children?

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## WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

The legal definition of child abuse as defined by California Penal Code Section 11165.6 is as follows:

- Child abuse means a physical injury, which is inflicted by other than accidental means on a child by another person. "Child abuse" also means the sexual abuse of a child or any act or omission proscribed by Section 273A (willful cruelty or unjustifiable punishment of a child) or 273D (unlawful corporal punishment or injury). "Child abuse" also means the neglect of a child or abuse in out-of-home care. "Child abuse" does not mean a mutual affray between minors. "Child abuse" does not include an injury caused by reasonable and necessary force used by a peace officer acting within the course and scope of his/her employment as a peace officer.

A situation involving child abuse may result in a violation of one or more of the following sections of the Penal code.

- PC271-Child abandonment
- OPC 273d-Felony Corporal injury
- PC 278- Child abduction
- PC187-Murder
- PC271a-Failure to Provide
- PC273a-Abusing or endangering health of a child

Child abuse includes the following:

- **Physical**-fractures, lacerations, bruises that cannot be explained, or explanations which are improbable given the extent of the injury, burns (cigarette, scalding water, rope, iron, and radiator), facial injuries (black eyes, broken jaw, broken nose, bloody or swollen lips), with implausible or nonexistent explanation.
- **Neglect-Failure**- refusal, or inability by a parent, guardian, or caregiver to provide necessary food, clothing, shelter, education, supervision or health care to seriously endanger the health of the child. Neglect occurs for reasons other than poverty. Includes the failure to thrive, malnutrition or poorly balanced diet (bloated stomach, extremely thin, dry flaking skin, pale, fainting), inappropriate dress for weather, extremely offensive body odor, dirty, unkempt, and unattended medical conditions (infected minor burns, impetigo).
- **Emotional**-refers to rejection, intimidation, or humiliation of a child that undermines his/her sense of self-esteem and well-being. It may include withholding love and affection. It is important to understand that emotional abuse is characterized by a pattern of negative behavior aimed at the child and not simply by isolated incidents or the normal ups and downs of parental emotions.



- **Sexual**-bruising around genital area, swelling or discharge from vagina, penis, tearing around genital area including rectum, visible lesions around mouth or genitals, complaining of lower abdominal pain, painful urination, defecation.

It is important to remember and be aware that children react in different ways to being abused. There are a number of possible behaviors, which have been found to be consistently correlated with abuse. The following behaviors should be looked at as possible warning signs of child abuse and certainly show the need to investigate further.

- **Physical**-hostile or aggressive behavior towards others, extreme fear or withdrawn behavior around others, self-destructive (self-mutilation, banging of head), destructive (breaking of things, setting of fires), verbally abusive, out of control behavior (seems angry, panics, and easily agitated)
- **Neglect**-clingy or indiscriminate attachment, isolated self, seems depressed or passive.
- **Sexual**- sexualized behavior (has precocious knowledge of explicit sexual behavior and engages self or others in overt or repetitive sexual behavior), hostile or aggressive, fearful or withdrawn, self-destructive (self-mutilates), pseudo-mature (seems mature beyond chronological age) eating disorders, alcoholism/drug abuse, running away and promiscuous behavior.
- **Emotional**-lacks self-esteem, puts self down constantly, seeks approval to an extreme, and seems unable to be autonomous (makes few choices, fears rejection) hostile, verbally abusive and provocative

**Exercise:** Write an example of each type of abuse below. This could be something you have witnessed growing up or have read about from the newspaper.

Physical abuse:

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Emotional abuse:

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Neglect:

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## A PARENT'S PRAYER

May I have the strength and courage  
to see when my child is in trouble  
and to see when it is I myself who is in trouble;  
to accept the limits of my children  
and my own limits;  
to forgive them  
and myself,  
to discipline them  
and myself,  
to respect them  
and myself.

May I learn to show them respect in all things.

May I learn to be the person I want to be so I can be the parent I want to be.

May I learn that their path is their own.

May I remember that they are already made and I cannot make them do anything.

I can open doors; they may not want to walk through.

I can sing; they may not want to sing along.

Each is unique--may I accept their uniqueness.

When they hurt each other, I hurt.

When they hurt themselves, I hurt even more.

I want to protect; they will not always let me.

I want to teach them a less painful way; they may not want to hear it.

I want to make them happy; they must find their own fulfillment.

May my life be an example to them so that by watching me they can pursue their own dreams.

And may I have the strength and courage to continue in my path, to trust my beliefs,

and to listen to my children with an open heart.

*Ellen Beck*



## CHILD ABUSE RISK FACTORS

The following are examples of situations that can lead to child abuse. Please remember that this list does not mean that child abuse will occur, only that the potential for child abuse is higher when these factors are present.

- Poverty
- Loss of job
- Loss of home
- Mental problems
- Substance abuse
- Divorce, family problems
- Lifestyles
- Physical problems
- Family of origin issues
- Cultural background and beliefs
- Family strengths or lack of strengths
- Lack of support systems
- Lack of extended families to help

Which ones of these have you or your family experienced? Please write about this below.

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## WHY I BECAME A PARENT

- I wanted to be a parent because:

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- I didn't realize:

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➤ If I could, I would do over:

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➤ I wasn't ready for...

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➤ The things I didn't think about in being a parent were:

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➤ I wish I had known...

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➤ I wish I had more.....I wish I had less.....

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➤ My parenting support system is...(who, how I use it, what I need more of, what I need less of)

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- A person I admire as a parent is...\_\_\_\_\_. I admire this person because...

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- In order to be more like \_\_\_\_\_, I need to make the following changes and adjustments:

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- I am like my parents in the following ways...

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- I am unlike my parents in the following ways...

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