

The best offense is a good defense! Healthy coping mechanisms

In the last article, we discussed unhealthy defensive strategies that some people will use to cope with stress based on the work of theorist George Eman Valliant. He proposed four categories of coping mechanisms, ranging from unhealthy or immature, to healthy and mature. Here are the healthier strategies:

Level 3: Neurotic Defenses

These coping techniques are temporary solutions at best. The problem is not dealt with effectively which can actually exacerbate the issue.

- ❖ **Rationalization:** People who use this defense try to convince themselves that nothing is wrong, and will justify their own or other people's behavior. For example: People who justify a spouse's abuse ("His/Her job is really stressful," or "It's my fault. I was late for dinner.").
- ❖ **Displacement:** People who use this defense mechanism, transfer their negative emotions about a stressful situation (or person) onto something (or someone) else. For example: A manager who is angry with upper management, but takes it out on his or her subordinates.
- ❖ **Withdrawal:** People who use this method will physically distance themselves from anything that reminds them of a painful experience. For example: When a person avoids a place or event that triggered a panic attack in the past.



- ❖ **Reaction Formation:** People who use this technique will take action and make decisions that are in complete contrast to their feelings and attitudes. For example: Someone who openly criticizes a law or belief that he or she secretly supports.
- ❖ **Undoing:** Similar to Reaction Formation, people who use this coping mechanism will try to compensate for a destructive thought or behavior by taking the complete opposite action. For example: An employee who is excessively nice to a boss that he or she detests. Undoing actions are often observed in intensely superstitious people or obsessive-compulsive individuals who engage in ritualistic behavior to counter an unpleasant thought (e.g. knocking on wood, excessive hand-washing).



Level 4: Mature Defenses

Used by emotionally healthy adults, the goal of these coping mechanism is to gain a sense of control and nurture empowerment.

- ❖ **Altruism:** People who use this defense mechanism dedicate themselves to helping others (often by engaging in a cause that is close to their heart). For example: A former gang member who starts an after-school program to get kids off the streets.
- ❖ **Anticipation:** People who adopt this technique take active steps to plan for a better future. For example: A wife who mentally, emotionally, financially, and practically prepares herself for the death of her terminally ill husband.
- ❖ **Identification:** Unlike the Idealization technique, the person who uses this defense simply adopts the qualities of someone he or she admires. For example: A son who wants to have the same close relationship with his children as he did with his father, so he uses the same parenting approach.
- ❖ **Introjection:** Someone who uses this technique will identify with other people's ideas or causes and makes them his or her own. For example: Children of philanthropists who continue their parents' charitable works.
- ❖ **Humor:** A person who uses humor acknowledges a problem and the distress it causes, but makes light of it, or tries to turn it into something light-hearted. For example: A comedian who humorously discusses a divorce or a troubled childhood.
- ❖ **Sublimation:** People who use this coping mechanism deal with negative emotions by directing their energy into something healthy. For example: A person who burns stress by exercising, or a writer who uses emotional pain as inspiration for a poem.
- ❖ **Suppression:** When this defense mechanism is used, a person consciously blocks out certain thoughts, emotions, and actions in order to avoid the unpleasantness they cause. This approach allows the individual to focus on priorities and not get distracted or pulled down by negative emotions. This approach can be temporary (so that they person can deal with a pressing task) or long-term. For example: An employee who refuses to talk about a nasty argument with a customer, a parent who chooses not to discuss the death of a child, or a couple who postpones the discussion of a sensitive topic while they have guests visiting.



Contact:

PsychTests AIM Inc.

Tel : 1-888-855-6975

Fax : (514) 745-6242

sales@psychtests.com

<http://archprofile.com/corporate>

PsychTests AIM Inc. has been the top provider of online assessments since 1996, offering convenient testing solutions to HR managers and researchers worldwide. With pre-employment and job fit assessments based on job-specific competency models, PsychTests has taken the guesswork out of hiring and staffing, helping HR managers find the right person for the job the first time around. Their career development, employee development, and team building tests help managers retain talent, reduce turnover, and ensure that all staff members work to their fullest potential. PsychTests has a solution to maximize all of a company's HR processes and needs. Click [here](#) to download ARCH Profile's Assessment Catalog or [contact us](#) for a free demo of our tests.