

## Coping & Defenses

The problem is not the problem, “coping” is what is *problematic*. *Problematic* to get stuck on taking things *too* personally and being *too* defensive. Very important to note that it is not pathological to take things personally or be defensive, it becomes problematic when they dominate and interfere with relating with the other. We learn to internally monitor these dynamics, acknowledge they are playing out and being ok with this while focusing on understanding the other. It’s ok to express “I’m feeling too defensive or I’m taking this too personally right now” – take time-out, regroup, and begin again.

Certain coping patterns are called defense or survival mechanisms. Survival stances are a precarious balance between self-expression and self-repression. Under stress, they appear in defensive mechanisms. As symptoms of stress, these stances become dysfunctional solutions to conflicts on a deeper level. They often serve as protection, a way to survive to protect one’s self-worth against verbal and nonverbal, perceived and presumed threats. They also indicate how a person sees him or herself in relation to others. The following are examples of defense mechanisms:

**Denial** - The most well-known defense mechanism. If we deny a problem exists, we do not need to give it our attention or take responsibility for it. Protecting oneself from unpleasant aspects of life by refusing to perceive, acknowledge, or face them.

**Rationalization** - Trying to prove one's actions "made sense" or were justified; making excuses.

**Intellectualization** - Hiding one's feelings about something painful behind thoughts; keeping opposing attitudes apart by using logic-tight comparisons.

**Projection** - Attempting to put our responsibility on somebody else, i.e. *blaming*. It helps reduce our guilt, but it abdicates personal responsibility. Projecting promotes the status quo, since nobody accepts responsibility or attempts to change anything.

**Withdrawal** - Becoming emotionally uninvolved by pulling back and being passive.

**Repression** - Unconsciously blocking out painful thoughts.

**Identification** - Trying to feel more important by associating oneself with someone or something that is highly valued.

**Acting Out** – Repeatedly doing actions to keep from being uptight without weighing the possible results of those actions.

**Ignoring** - We admit a situation or pattern exists but avoid facing any changes.  
*Procrastination* is often associated with ignoring.