13 Defense Mechanisms which commonly appear on the Exam

1. Displacement: one way to avoid the risk associated feeling unpleasant emotions is to displace them; or put them on someone less threatening or an innocent bystander.

Example: being angry at your boss, however, you cannot express that anger or you will be terminated. Instead you redirect it to another source—best friend. They will forgive you, therefore you are able to express your anger without losing your job.

1. Projection: an act of taking your own emotions and placing it onto others. This can be positive or negative; main defense mechanism of paranoia and depression.
2. Projective identification: mostly used with those diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. The person will identify someone else with their feelings, however, the person does not identify with those feelings.
3. Introjection: to identify features of a person and incorporate them into one’s own self.
4. Splitting: primarily used with those who are diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. Identify person as all good or all bad.
5. Rationalization: making excuses and/or making justifications to avoid unwanted feelings.

Denial: complete refusal to acknowledge what is, will or can happen to avoid feelings.

1. Intellectualization: using logic and reason to avoid dealing with emotions. Someone who intellectualizations becomes very distant from feelings and may have a difficult time identifying emotions.
2. Sublimation: healthy redirection of an emotion. Socially acceptable way to release emotions.

Example: instead of taking out anger on friend you go to the gym.

1. Repression or suppression: often thought of as the parent of all defenses. Repression: putting painful thoughts and memories out of our minds and forgetting them.

Example: often clients who have trauma history

1. Reaction formation: (forming an opposite reaction) when we have a reaction that’s too painful to feel, such as an intense emotion, to which we then turn the emotion to the opposite.

Example: Despite feeling intense sadness after the death of a family member, one exhibits laughing to cover up the pain.

1. Undoing: taking back one’s unwanted behaviors through praises and gifts.

Example: Yelling at kids then buying them gifts. Classic example is domestic violence.

1. Isolation of affect: Expressing no emotion when confronted with difficult events.

Communication techniques between client and therapist:

1. Reflection: way of acknowledging a client’s feelings and telling them you understand their feelings.
2. Active listening: focus on both verbal and nonverbal communication.
3. Paraphrasing: restatement of the client’s statements demonstrating the social worker understood what the client was conveying.
4. Clarification: ask a client a question encouraging him/her to be more explicit and to expand on what they are saying.
5. Encouragement: using words or phrases or statements like “go on”, “tell me more”, to encourage the client to keep talking.
6. Summarization: taking the statements of the client and putting it together in an easy-to-understand summary of the whole situation.
7. Exploring silence: being attentive to periods of time where the client pauses and they are silent. Silence is good on the exam.
8. Partalization: taking clients overwhelming and seemingly unsolvable statements and breaking them into smaller more manageable parts.
9. Confrontation: only a good technique for established clients. May be used with addicts and perpetrators. It’s when you challenge clients to think about discrepancies in what they have said or done.