

**defence mechanisms**  
 unconscious mental  
 operations that deny or distort  
 reality

**TABLE 15.1 PSYCHOANALYTIC EGO DEFENCE MECHANISMS**

Defence mechanism	Description	Example
Repression	An active defensive process that pushes anxiety-arousing impulses or memories into the unconscious mind	A person who was abused in childhood develops amnesia for the event
Denial	A person refuses to acknowledge anxiety-arousing aspects of the environment. The denial may involve either the emotions connected with the event or the event itself	A man who is told he has terminal cancer refuses to consider the possibility that he will not recover
Displacement	An unacceptable or dangerous impulse is repressed, and then directed at a safer substitute target	A woman who is harassed by her boss experiences no anger at work but then goes home and abuses her husband and children
Intellectualization	The emotion connected with an upsetting event is repressed, and the situation is dealt with as an intellectually interesting event	A person who has been rejected in an important relationship talks in a highly rational manner about the 'interesting unpredictability of love relationships'
Projection	An unacceptable impulse is repressed, then attributed to (projected onto) other people	A woman with strong repressed desires to have an affair continually accuses her husband of being unfaithful to her
Rationalization	A person constructs a false but plausible explanation or excuse for an anxiety-arousing behaviour or event that has already occurred	A student caught cheating in an examination justifies the act by pointing out that the professor's tests are unfair and, besides, everybody else was cheating too
Reaction formation	An anxiety-arousing impulse is repressed, and its psychic energy finds release in an exaggerated expression of the opposite behaviour	A mother who harbours feelings of resentment towards her child represses them and becomes overprotective of the child
Sublimation	A repressed impulse is released in the form of a socially acceptable or even admired behaviour	A man with strong hostile impulses becomes an investigative reporter who ruins political careers with his stories