

DEFENSE MECHANISMS AND SELF-DECEPTIONS USED TO AVOID FEELINGS AND RESPONSIBILITY

David Leventer, LPC, LMFT

1. **Simple denial:** Simply lying or denying that something occurred which actually did. Pretending like it didn't happen.

Example: "I never get angry," or, "I don't have a problem with anger or violence," or, "I'm not violent" (When you have thrown things, pushed your partner, etc.), or, "I never get irritated."

2. **Minimizing:** Making something seem small, inconsequential, less than it actually was – especially your violent, controlling or abusive behavior – or minimizing the importance of the other person's feelings.

Example: "I didn't hit her, I only pushed her a little." "She feels hurt even if I just look at her wrong." "I barely touched her."

3. **Vagueness:** Speaking in generalities, avoiding specifics.

Example: Saying, "I shook her," when what you did was shake her hard, leaving bruises on her arms, hitting her against the wall so she fell down and began sobbing.

4. **Blaming:** Putting responsibility or blame on something or someone else.

Example: "If you hadn't blocked the door, I wouldn't have knocked you down."

5. **Playing the victim / Helplessness:** Acting as if you couldn't help it, it was beyond your control.

Example: "She made me angry." "I got shafted." "I had no choice. I had to defend myself." "I was out of control," when you actually hit her while in full control of your muscles, or you hit her on a specific part of her body, or you chose specific things to break. (Being out of control means you cannot control your muscles, so, for instance, you might drool or urinate uncontrollably.)

6. **Rationalizing / Justifying:** Making excuses for the behavior, explaining away the problem. Making it a reasonable, credible response.

Example: "It's a natural reaction." "It's the way I was raised." "I had a really hard day."

7. **"I'm unique":** Claiming to be special or an exception to the general rules.

Example: "That might be true for him, but that just doesn't fit my situation." "Others might get jealous over small things, but I actually found her in bed with another man."

8. **Intellectualizing:** Talking impersonally, generally, or abstractly, or arguing over small points (which distracts attention from the main issue). Not talking about your personal involvement with the issue.

Example: When your partner or someone else complaining about your controlling or abusive behavior and in response you begin giving a lecture about what controlling or abusive behavior really is. Or if your partner says you smashed the door, you might argue the point saying you didn't smash the door, you pulled the doorknob off.

9. **Diversion / Distraction:** Changing the subject, focusing on irrelevant details, asking a lot of questions. Shifting the focus away from the issue.

Example: In response to a question about your controlling or violent behavior, you would respond with, "Are you getting mad?" or, "Why do you ask?" or, "Look at what you did last week."

10. **Humor:** Making light of serious topics. Making fun while talking about your controlling or violent behavior. Another form of distraction. Can also include telling elaborate or amusing stories.

Example: "I hit this guy and he did a back flip and landed on a wedding cake." "Would you believe he kept slamming his face into my fist?"

11. **Hostility:** Using anger and intimidation to get the person to back off.

Example: "Get out of my face. Why don't you just lay off before I really blow my top." "If you don't watch it, I'll show you what anger is."

12. **Playing stupid:** Acting as if you don't know better, pretending to be ignorant.

Example: "Who, me?" or, "I didn't realize I was being controlling by doing that," or, "Did that hurt?" or, "What did I do?"

13. **Forgetfulness:** "Forgetting" important information or actions, thereby avoiding accepting responsibility for them or the consequences of those actions.

Example: "I forgot that you wanted to use that money for our vacation, otherwise I wouldn't have used it for the down payment on this new truck," or, "What do you mean I pushed you down last week, too? I don't remember that."

14. **Selective attention:** Only reporting or acknowledging certain aspects of a situation. Leaving out important, but incriminating facts.

Example: While reading or filling out a Feeling or Control Journal, leaving out the result of your controlling behavior (f or instance, saying your voice got a bit louder, while neglecting to mention that you were swearing – out loud or as negative self-talk.)

15. **Agreeing:** Superficially agreeing with the confronter to cut them off. Using excessive politeness.

Example: Saying, "You're right, I shouldn't have called you those names," or, "No problem," or, "Whatever you say," but then doing it again the next night without a thought

16. **Future-focus / Superficial optimism:** Promises never to do it again without making any real changes, offers promises and reassurances about the future.

Example: "I won't do it again, I promise." Apologizing, which implies one is asking for forgiveness, for example, "I'm sorry, I won't let it happen again."

17. **Self abusive negative self-talk:** Shaming yourself either because you believe you deserve it or because you believe such behavior will make you change (which it will do – it will make you more controlling and abusive and depressed).

Example: "I'm such a jerk."

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

Taking responsibility means working toward fearlessly, shamelessly and honestly acknowledging your controlling, violent and abusive behavior (every instance you can remember) to someone else, and committing to undertake the lifelong discipline to change that behavior, which includes the activities mentioned on the Group Goals sheet, such as doing Control and Feeling Journals, making amends, etc.

Example: "In the past five years of our relationship I have yelled at you on at least 50 occasions, calling you hurtful names in at least a dozen of those times. On three occasions, I have held you by both arms, causing you to feel physical pain, bruise, and feel emotional pain and hurt through my anger outbursts and intimidation."