

Activity Plan



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NAME OF THE ACTIVITY: WHY DID I JUST DO THAT?

OVERVIEW

THIS NON-FORMAL, INTERACTIVE ACTIVITY HELPS YOUTH EXPLORE PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFENSE MECHANISMS THROUGH ENGAGING, RELATABLE METHODS. USING SCENARIO-BASED LEARNING, MOVEMENT BETWEEN STATIONS, TEAMWORK, AND PRIVATE REFLECTION, PARTICIPANTS LEARN TO IDENTIFY DIFFERENT DEFENSE MECHANISMS (PATHOLOGICAL TO MATURE), UNDERSTAND HOW AND WHY PEOPLE USE THEM, AND INCREASE SELF-AWARENESS OF THEIR OWN COPING PATTERNS.

OBJECTIVES

INTRODUCE THE CONCEPT OF DEFENSE MECHANISMS AND THEIR PURPOSE.
ENABLE PARTICIPANTS TO IDENTIFY AND CATEGORIZE DEFENSE MECHANISMS IN REALISTIC SITUATIONS.
ENCOURAGE SELF-AWARENESS AND REFLECTION ON PERSONAL EMOTIONAL RESPONSES.
PROMOTE UNDERSTANDING OF HEALTHIER, MATURE DEFENSIVE STRATEGIES.

TARGET GROUP:

YOUTH AGED 17-26

GROUP SIZE:

10-25 PARTICIPANTS (WORKING IN GROUPS OF 3-5)

THEMES ADDRESSED:

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
SELF-AWARENESS
DEFENSIVE MECHANISMS
MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION
HEALTHY COMMUNICATION

COMPLEXITY AND TIME:

MODERATE,
90-110 MINUTES

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MATERIALS:

PRINTED SCENARIO CARDS

[HTTPS://WWW.CANVA.COM/DESIGN/DAGNOZXS8OG/NFGJVII2AQDRAUUQWIMAJQ/EDIT](https://www.canva.com/design/DAGNOZXS8OG/NFGJVII2AQDRAUUQWIMAJQ/EDIT)

POSTERS OR FLIPCHARTS FOR EACH LEVEL OF DEFENSE MECHANISMS

COLOR-CODED HANDOUTS WITH DEFENSE LEVELS AND DEFINITIONS

REFLECTION HANDOUTS

OPTIONAL: TOKENS/STICKERS FOR STATION CHALLENGES

INSTRUCTIONS

1. WALL OF REACTIONS – ICEBREAKER (15 MIN):
 - PLACE POSTERS OR PRINTED PROMPTS WITH EMOTIONALLY CHALLENGING SITUATIONS AROUND THE ROOM (E.G., “YOU DIDN’ T GET INVITED TO A PARTY”).
 - PARTICIPANTS WALK AROUND AND WRITE RESPONSES ON STICKY NOTES (HOW THEY’D FEEL OR REACT).
 - BRIEFLY DISCUSS HOW THESE ARE ALL WAYS WE COPE WITH DISCOMFORT — DEFENSE MECHANISMS.
2. DEFENSE MECHANISM DETECTIVE GAME (30–40 MIN):
 - DIVIDE PARTICIPANTS INTO SMALL GROUPS (3–4 PEOPLE).
 - GIVE EACH GROUP A SET OF SCENARIO CARDS (ONE FOR EACH DEFENSE MECHANISM).
 - GROUPS READ EACH SCENARIO AND MATCH IT TO: THE DEFENSE MECHANISM NAME, ITS LEVEL (1–4) USING A COLOR-CODED KEY, WHETHER IT’ S HELPFUL, UNHELPFUL, OR MIXED
 - AFTER ALL GROUPS ARE FINISHED, ROTATE SETS OR HAVE A FACILITATOR REVEAL CORRECT ANSWERS AND LEAD SHORT DISCUSSIONS.
3. DEFENSE MECHANISM STATIONS (25 MIN):
 - CREATE 4 STATIONS AROUND THE ROOM, ONE FOR EACH LEVEL OF DEFENSE MECHANISMS.
 - EACH STATION INCLUDES:
 - A SHORT, FRIENDLY DESCRIPTION OF THE LEVEL
 - A FEW POP-CULTURE OR MEME EXAMPLES
 - A TEAM CHALLENGE (E.G., MATCH 3 SCENARIOS TO MECHANISMS, MINI-QUIZ)
 - GROUPS ROTATE AND COMPLETE ALL STATIONS.
4. ME AND MY DEFENSES – PRIVATE REFLECTION (15 MIN):
 - HAND OUT INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION SHEETS:
 - “WHICH 2 DEFENSE MECHANISMS DO YOU RECOGNIZE IN YOURSELF?”
 - “WHEN HAVE THEY HELPED? WHEN HAVE THEY HURT?”
 - “WHICH MATURE DEFENSE COULD YOU PRACTICE MORE?”

DEBRIEFING AND EVALUATION:

GATHER PARTICIPANTS IN A CIRCLE (SEATED OR STANDING, DEPENDING ON THE ENERGY OF THE GROUP).
USE SOME OF THE FOLLOWING REFLECTIVE PROMPTS FOR A FACILITATED DISCUSSION:

- AWARENESS & INSIGHT
 - WHAT DEFENSE MECHANISM WAS MOST FAMILIAR OR RELATABLE TO YOU?
 - WHICH ONE SURPRISED YOU THE MOST?
 - WERE THERE ANY YOU’ VE NEVER THOUGHT OF AS “DEFENSES” BEFORE?
- APPLICATION TO REAL LIFE
 - HOW DO YOU THINK DEFENSE MECHANISMS SHOW UP IN DAILY SITUATIONS—SCHOOL, WORK, RELATIONSHIPS?
 - CAN YOU THINK OF A TIME WHEN A DEFENSE MECHANISM HELPED YOU IN THE SHORT TERM BUT MADE THINGS WORSE IN THE LONG RUN?
- VALUES & GROWTH
 - WHY DO YOU THINK WE USE IMMATURE OR NEUROTIC DEFENSES EVEN WHEN THEY’ RE NOT HELPFUL?
 - WHICH MATURE DEFENSE MECHANISM DO YOU THINK IS MOST REALISTIC OR USEFUL FOR YOU PERSONALLY?

ENCOURAGE PARTICIPANTS TO SPEAK VOLUNTARILY AND RESPECT THOSE WHO PREFER TO JUST LISTEN.
VALIDATE CONTRIBUTIONS WITH NEUTRALITY AND OPENNESS.

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DEBRIEFING AND EVALUATION:

WRITTEN EVALUATION (OPTIONAL – 5 MIN):

PROVIDE A FEW WRITTEN FEEDBACK PROMPTS SUCH AS:

- ONE THING I LEARNED TODAY WAS...
- I NOTICED THAT I OFTEN...
- AFTER THIS SESSION, I WANT TO TRY TO...

THESE CAN BE ANONYMOUS AND ARE USEFUL FOR BOTH PARTICIPANT REFLECTION AND FACILITATOR IMPROVEMENT.

INFO FOR FACILITATOR

1. WHY DEFENSE MECHANISMS MATTER:

- THEY' RE NOT INHERENTLY "BAD" — THEY ARE ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES THAT PROTECT THE EGO/SELF FROM PAIN, SHAME, AND ANXIETY.
- THE GOAL ISN' T TO ELIMINATE THEM, BUT TO INCREASE AWARENESS AND SHIFT TOWARD MORE MATURE, CONSTRUCTIVE WAYS OF COPING.
- UNDERSTANDING THEM BUILDS EMPATHY (FOR SELF AND OTHERS) AND REDUCES REACTIVITY.

2. PSYCHOLOGICAL LAYER TO WATCH FOR:

- PARTICIPANTS MIGHT RECOGNIZE THEMSELVES IN LESS DESIRABLE BEHAVIORS AND FEEL EXPOSED OR UNCOMFORTABLE.
- AVOID LABELING ANYONE OR INTERPRETING THEIR EXPERIENCES.
- IF SOMEONE HAS A STRONG EMOTIONAL REACTION, VALIDATE THEM GENTLY ("THAT' S ACTUALLY A REALLY COMMON REACTION. THANKS FOR BEING REAL ABOUT IT.").

3. ENCOURAGE CURIOSITY, NOT JUDGMENT:

- HELP THE GROUP STAY OPEN-MINDED AND PLAYFUL. IF SOMEONE LAUGHS OR REACTS STRONGLY TO A CARD (E.G., PROJECTION OR SPLITTING), INVITE A NEUTRAL EXPLORATION:
- "INTERESTING REACTION—WHAT MAKES THAT ONE STAND OUT TO YOU?"
- "HAVE YOU SEEN THIS HAPPEN IN A WAY THAT FELT FUNNY OR STRESSFUL?"

4. NORMALIZE AND EMPOWER:

- REMIND PARTICIPANTS:
- "ALL OF US USE DEFENSES. THEY' RE HUMAN. THE GOAL IS TO LEARN TO NOTICE THEM, NOT BEAT OURSELVES UP FOR HAVING THEM."
- LET PARTICIPANTS KNOW THAT BY IDENTIFYING THEIR DEFENSE PATTERNS, THEY' VE ALREADY TAKEN A HUGE STEP TOWARD EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND GROWTH.

TIPS FOR FACILITATOR

- EMPHASIZE THERE ARE NO "RIGHT" OR "WRONG" EMOTIONS—THIS IS ABOUT AWARENESS, NOT JUDGMENT.
- USE EXAMPLES THAT RESONATE WITH YOUTH CULTURE (MUSIC, SOCIAL MEDIA, RELATIONSHIPS).
- MAINTAIN EMOTIONAL SAFETY: AVOID SINGLING ANYONE OUT OR ANALYZING PERSONAL BEHAVIOR PUBLICLY.
- ENCOURAGE HUMOR AND CURIOSITY, NOT SELF-CRITICISM.

FOLLOW-UP

- OFFER A JOURNALING CHALLENGE FOR A WEEK: "NOTICE AND WRITE ABOUT ANY DEFENSE YOU USE."
- SHARE A SIMPLE HANDOUT ON MATURE DEFENSES WITH REAL-LIFE STRATEGIES.
- IN THE NEXT SESSION, EXPLORE EMOTION REGULATION SKILLS OR ASSERTIVE COMMUNICATION AS NEXT STEPS.