

# Defense Mechanisms

## 8. Frustration Squares

**Spatial Requirements:** Regular classroom setup: little or no space required

**Activity Type:** Movement/group

**Grades:** 4-12

**Group Size:** 6, 12, 18, or 24

**Time:** 15-30 minutes

**Introduction:** When we respond negatively to a stressful situation, it usually becomes worse. The goal of this activity is to show that our natural response is not always the best one; and that there are many positive coping mechanisms we can choose as alternatives to deal with the pressures of life.

### Materials:

- 6 envelopes per group of 6 people
- 1 set of 6 squares per group of 6 people, with the pieces mixed up and divided equally into the envelopes (A pattern of the 6 squares is provided at [www.whytry.org/activities](http://www.whytry.org/activities).)
- 1 copy of instructions/rules per group (These are found below as well as at [www.whytry.org/activities](http://www.whytry.org/activities).)

### Activity:

Organize the participants into groups of six. Hand out the envelopes to each member. It doesn't matter if some group members do not have an envelope, or if there are more packets than group members. The contents of the envelopes will be divided up evenly later. Group members are not allowed to open the envelope until the rules are given. The goal of this task is to make six squares, all the same size. Give the following instructions to the group:

1. No talking, pointing, or any other kind of verbal or non-verbal communication to any member of your group.
2. Participants may give pieces to other participants, but may not take pieces from other members.
3. Participants may not simply throw their pieces into the center for others to take; they have to give pieces to an individual directly.
4. It is permissible to give away all pieces even if a square is formed.
5. All squares will be exactly the same size.
6. There is only one right way to make the six squares.

Ask the group if they have any questions. Have the group members open their packets. If packets are left over, divide the contents between all members. If there are not enough packets for each person, take a piece from two or three participants to equal out the number of pieces in front of each individual. Each table should have an observer watch to make sure the rules are followed. Make sure to block the view from one group to another.

As an observer, you may want to look for some of the following behaviors:

1. Monitor the frustration level of the group as well as individual members.
2. What behaviors did members of the group show when they finished their own square? Did they divorce themselves from the group?
3. How many people were mentally engaged in putting the pieces of the puzzle together?
4. Was there a turning point where members "put it together?"
5. Did anyone try to violate the rules by talking, pointing, or taking pieces from another group member?
6. What defense mechanisms did each member exhibit during the activity?

### Processing the Experience:

- How involved was each member of the group?
- What made this activity successful?

- Who was willing to share pieces of the puzzle with others?
- Did anyone try to violate the rules by talking, pointing, or taking pieces?
- On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high) what was the frustration level of the group?
- On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high) what was your frustration level?
- How do you deal with frustrations, challenges, anger, and stress in your own life?