

Defense Mechanisms

Introduction

Key Concept:

Pressure situations are best handled by maintaining control of your emotions and selecting positive defense mechanisms (those that don't hurt yourself or others).

Defense Mechanisms

1 What is a defense mechanism?

2 **Situation** How do you respond (act) when:

| | | | |
|----------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------|
| • Disrespected | • Mad At Parent | • You're Hit | • Blamed |
| • Yelled At | • Embarrassed | • Make A Mistake | • Get Caught |
| • Put Down | • You Lose | • Confronted | • Hurt |
| • Laughed At | • Feel Pressure | • Frustrated | • Angry |

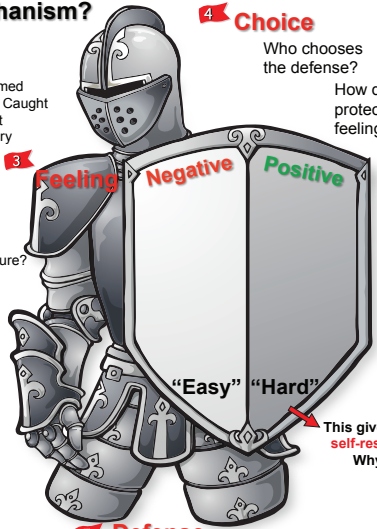
3 **Feeling** Negative Positive

4 **Choice**
Who chooses the defense?
How do you protect your feelings?

5 **Defense**
How do you know when you've selected a positive defense mechanism?
"When you are helping, not hurting, yourself and others."

6 **Four Steps to Control Your D.M.**

- 1. Recognize the situation.**
When you are in a pressure situation, these are the signs:
You feel angry, frustrated, nervous.
What outward behaviors can you use to help control the pressure?
- 2. Identify the situations where you can practice step 1.**
What are the situations you need to practice this?
- 3. Don't let other people control how you will respond.**
You know that someone is trying to control you if they are yelling at you, physically attacking you, or putting you down.
"Easy" "Hard"
This gives you self-respect. Why?
- 4. Select a positive solution.**
What would motivate you to do the tougher (harder) thing?
What might happen if you stay in control?



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Vocabulary

- Defense
- Self-discipline
- Impulse control
- Pressure situations
- Negative response
- Positive response
- Confronted
- Express feelings
- Self-control

Secondary Concepts:

- In pressure situations, our natural reaction is often negative.
- We can make a conscious choice to react positively. This gives us control over the conflict situations we encounter.
- We can identify techniques to calm and control our emotions.

Personalize your Lesson:

- Do you have any personal stories where you lost control of your defense mechanisms?
- Do you have any personal stories of times where you controlled your defense mechanisms in a pressure situation?
- What are your techniques for calming your emotions (i.e. take a time out or count to ten, etc.)?
- What are some typical pressure situations your students might face daily at home, at school, and with friends?

Activity:

To introduce this lesson, complete the attention activity "Name Writing Activity." (See the "Learning Activities" section under "Defense Mechanisms.")

Defense Mechanisms

Lesson Plan: Introducing Defense Mechanisms

Questions

- Look at the knight in this picture. What is he wearing?
- Why do you think he would be wearing this?
- What kind of weapons would be used against him to need this kind of protection? (These could include a sword, spear, lance, arrows, or mace.)
- Have you ever seen a suit of armor in real life? What does it look like? (Usually someone will say, “Heavy.”)
- How much do you think a suit of armor weighs? (Often it is around 100 pounds.)
- Why would this knight want to carry so much weight around? (The amount of protection would make it worth it.)
- Would it be weird to see someone walking down the street wearing armor like that today?
- Do soldiers today wear

different types of armor to protect themselves? (Bullet-proof vests, kevlar, helmets, etc.)

Explain that in modern times, we all still do things to protect ourselves like this knight. Often, when confronted with pressure situations, we just do what comes naturally. Explain that this picture is about the ways we try to protect ourselves.

Defense Mechanisms

Lesson Plan: Visual Analogy Walkthrough

Discussion Point 1

Question

Do you know what a defense mechanism is?

For your own knowledge, a defense mechanism is what you use to protect your feelings in various life situations, like a bulletproof vest for your feelings. For example, when Why-Try Founder Christian Moore was in school, he was a bad reader. If a teacher asked him to read out loud, he felt uncomfortable or embarrassed, so he used the defense mechanism of acting out (punching a kid next to him), so he would be sent to the principal's office instead of being embarrassed in front of the class. A defense mechanism

What is a defense mechanism?

nism is any behavior used to divert attention away from the pressure situation. People can learn to identify negative defense mechanisms that hurt them and to select positive defense mechanisms that will help them deal with difficult situations.

If students don't know what a defense mechanism is, tell them that this picture will help them understand defense mechanisms, and how to use them to stop crashing (refer to the Reality Ride). If students know what a defense mechanism is, congratulate them

and tell them you are going to teach them how to take control of their defense mechanisms. Whether students do or do not know the answer to this question, don't formally define “defense mechanism” yet; this will be done in a few steps.

Discussion

To create interest in the subject, tell students that many adults don't know what defense mechanisms are or how to use them positively. Tell students that if they pay careful attention, they will have a tool that will give them a huge advantage in life. They will also feel like they have more control in the three areas discussed in Reality Ride: at home, at school, and with peers.

Point 2: Situation

Question

Ask the students, "How do you respond or act in the following pressure situations?" (There are 16 pressure situation scenarios listed on the visual analogy under #2, "Situation.")

After asking this question, draw a large picture of a shield on a whiteboard or chart paper. On one side of the shield, write "Negative," and on the other side of the shield write "Positive." Write the students'

| Situation How do you respond (act) when: | | | |
|--|-----------------|------------------|--------------|
| • Disrespected | • Mad At Parent | • You're Hit | • Blamed |
| • Yelled At | • Embarrassed | • Make A Mistake | • Get Caught |
| • Put Down | • You Lose | • Confronted | • Hurt |
| • Laughed At | • Feel Pressure | • Frustrated | • Angry |

responses on either side of the shield as you go down a number of items in the list. (Instead of using what's listed, you may also try to use situations that your students regularly encounter. Examples could include: "Someone cuts in front of you in the lunch line;" "Someone next to you is talking in class, and the teacher yells at you;" or "Someone in

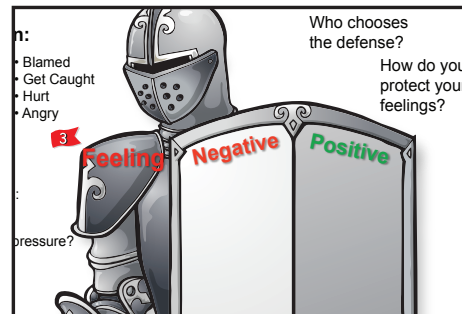
the hall bumps into you on purpose.") Use your discretion to decide if the students' answers are positive or negative defense mechanisms.

Write down their response on the side of the shield you feel is appropriate. You don't need to write every answer; write five or six on each shield and then discuss the rest. Then ask students again, "Do you know what a defense mechanism is?" Tell students that all of their answers written on the shield are defense mechanisms.

Point 3: Feeling

Question

Everyone has pressure situations. As a result of those situations, we have feelings. What feelings do you have in pressure situations? (Responses could include anger, frustration, fear, or anxiety.) Do you like having those feelings? Most people respond to those feelings with a quick reaction.



Psychologists call this an "impulse response." Unfortunately, most impulse responses in

pressure situations are negative.

Discussion

Make it clear that you understand how difficult it can be to control your feelings in various life situations, especially when others are trying to hurt you emotionally or physically.

IMPORTANT:

You may want to introduce this concept by saying, "Remember when we talked about how understanding this picture can give you a huge advantage in dealing with life's challenges? This is the part you need to understand. It is the difference between people who are locked up in jail and people who have successful careers and relationships." It is vital that you sell this portion of Defense Mechanisms to your students. If you do, it can have the power to change their lives.

Point 4: Choice

Discussion

Point out to your students that they don't have to respond to pressure situations and feelings by just doing what comes naturally. Tell them, "You actually get to make a choice in every situation. You can choose to do something different. You can choose to do something positive." Although it is difficult to control how we feel inside, we can control how we respond outwardly. The choice is ours.

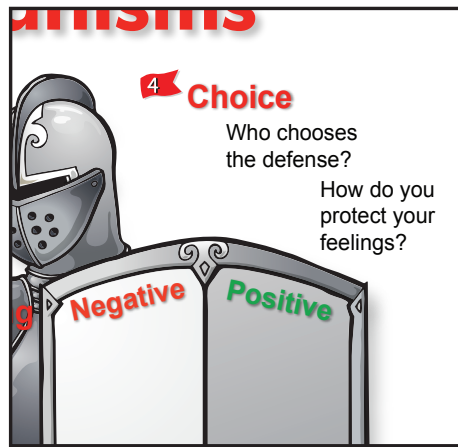
Question

Why does choosing the positive response give you self-respect?

Some answers may be: "It takes more effort," "It is harder," "I stay in control of my actions." Point out how good it feels to be in control.

Discussion

Choosing a positive response will not always be easy - sometimes it will require you to pause for a moment before you react - but in the end it will give you more self-respect



and freedom. Other people can affect our feelings, and sometimes they will do all they can to influence our choices. Because life is not fair, it is easy to blame others for our actions, particularly if we do not have control over our defense mechanisms. For example, "He/she yelled at me so I had to yell back," or "They hit me first," or "They were disrespectful to me." People who are trying to take control of their defense mechanisms will take responsibility for their actions.

The prison population provides an example of this: Many people in prison will tell you that someone hurt them so they had to hurt them back. Although they may have thought that retaliating would give

them back respect, in reality, in the long term, it didn't. It took away their opportunities.

Challenge

Encourage students to be aware of how they feel as they start selecting more positive defense mechanisms. At first they may feel stupid or embarrassed in front of peers. Selecting positive defense mechanisms may make life harder in the beginning, but it will be worth it as they begin to feel more self-respect. Challenge them to find out for themselves if what you are teaching is true. Tell them that they will notice that other people have less control over them and they will feel more freedom as they select positive defense mechanisms. Challenge them also to pay attention to other people's defense mechanisms and see if they can learn from others' mistakes. You may want to point out the defense mechanisms you are seeing in the room right now. For example, point out someone who is talking, not paying attention, or being disrespectful. (Do this as a learning experience, not to put down. Keep it humorous.)

Point 5: Defense

Question

How do you know whether your response is positive or negative?

Some possible responses might be, "Because of the conse-



quence;" or "Because of the way you feel." These are both true. However, the easiest way to define if a defense mecha-

nism is positive or negative is by whether or not it hurts you or another person.

(You may jump to this as you're listing defense mechanisms on the shield if someone asks you how you determine which responses are positive or negative.)

Discussion

Review the defense mechanisms listed on the shield from your discussion.

In most pressure situations, people respond by doing the things that they are used to doing. Notice how frequently in their examples, their natural response in a pressure situation is often negative. Point out to students that although negative defense mechanisms may give some short-term relief from the situation, too often they make the situation worse. Negative defense mechanisms are usually the easiest to

choose. For example, if someone hits you, the easiest thing to do is to hit back. If someone yells at you, the easiest thing to do is yell back. Selecting a negative defense mechanism is easy: anyone can do it.

Point out that positive defense mechanisms can be harder to choose because they require effort and strength. But the more we select positive defense mechanisms, the easier it becomes.

Challenge

From today on, challenge students to choose more positive defense mechanisms. As they

do, they will notice that their self-respect will grow. Have them start with simple things. For example, Mom asks them to take the trash out and they forget. When Mom confronts them, they don't make up excuses or yell; instead, they say "sorry" and take responsibility. Explain that choosing the positive defense mechanism takes a lot of practice, but their self-respect will begin to grow as they take control of their own actions. Each day they need to try to handle the small situations to prepare them for the tough situations.

Point 6: Four Steps to Control Your Defense Mechanisms

This point consists of four steps to help students control their defense mechanisms. Discuss the following four steps, which correspond with the "Four Steps to Control your Defense Mechanisms" on the visual analogy.

Step 1: Recognize the situation.

The first step in controlling defense mechanisms is noticing the pressure situation. We know that we are in a pressure situation when we feel angry, frustrated, or nervous.

Discussion

Encourage students to identify feelings as soon as possible because feelings can quickly intensify. Feelings and emotions can be just like a fire. Both can

6 Four Steps to Control Your D.M.

1. Recognize the situation.
When you are in a pressure situation, these are the feelings you feel:
You feel angry, frustrated, nervous.

What outward behaviors can you use to help control your feelings?

quickly get out of control and cause serious damage if not calmed or expressed in a controlled way. The simple spark of irritation can quickly turn into the flame of frustration. The flame of frustration can then easily ignite an anger explosion. This explosion can turn into an inferno of rage that too often burns others emotionally or physically. To prevent the out-of-control fires of anger and rage, we need to first identify and control our emotions. Emotions and feelings can be very positive when controlled. They motivate us to accomplish things and to treat others with the respect that we want! Discuss with students early warning feelings, such as irritation, frustration, confusion, nervous-

ness, mild anger, etc.

Question

What behaviors can you use to help control the pressure situation? (For example, they could walk away, smile, say something positive, talk to a friend, count to 10, exercise, think of a quote or song that helps them, etc.)

Review the behaviors they identified to help them calm these feelings. Or, brainstorm new ideas with students that may apply to their unique situation. Encourage them to express their feelings and emotions in ways that are creative and comfortable to them.

Challenge

Ask students to pay more attention to these feelings, so they can get ready to put up a positive defense.

Step 2: Identify the situations where you can practice

Step 1.

Question

What are the situations in which you need to practice controlling your feelings and expressing them positively? Try to think of some examples that your students may face on a regular basis. These may include:

- You are blamed for something that you didn't do.
- Someone tries to provoke you by calling you a name.

What outward behaviors can you use to help control the

Identify the situations where you can practice step 1.
What are the situations you need to practice this?

- Someone spreads a rumor about you on the Internet.
- Someone intentionally bumps into you in the hallway.
- Someone cuts in front of you in line.

Discussion

Much like preparing for any battle or war, the key to being in control is to be one step

ahead of the person or situation that is attacking. And being in control allows you to select a positive defense mechanism in the heat of the battle or pressure situation.

Challenge

Challenge students to identify the three most challenging situations of that day, those in which they feel the least control over their defense mechanisms. Once these are identified, challenge them to make a game of staying in control of the situation. Tell them to relax and have fun with it.

Step 3: Don't let others control your response.

Don't let other people control how you will respond. The following are signs that others might be trying to control you: someone yells at you, you are physically attacked, or you are put down.

Discussion

Warn students to prepare themselves, because what you are about to teach them in this step might be new to them. Point out that the things that they wrote on the shield are what they usually do when someone yells at them, hits them, or puts them down. Tie these responses back into the consequences of the crash. (See Reality Ride.)

Point out that after the initial short-term rush of hurting a person in return, they are not

Don't let other people control how you will respond.

You know that someone is trying to control you if they are

left with much long-term self-respect. Too often TV, movies, peers, and daily examples teach them that if they don't get revenge or lash out back, they don't have self-respect and they are weak. In reality, people who believe this often crash because they hurt themselves and others.

Challenge

Be creative in challenging students to figure out what you are about to teach. Warn them again that what you are going to share will likely change their lives if they can apply it.

Tell students you are going to tell them one of the biggest -- and easiest -- mistakes people make in life.

"One of the biggest mistakes people make is letting others'

negative defense mechanisms control how they act."

Question

Think about this: If someone hits you and you hit them back, who is in control? (They are.)

Discussion

Too often we mirror back to others their negative defenses. If they yell, we yell. If they hit, we hit back. If they put us down, we put them down. The reality is, we are responding by doing what they do, and they are controlling us. For example, if someone is trying to pick a fight with you, what do they want you to do? (Fight back.) If someone yells at you, what do they want you to do? (Lose control or yell back.) These actions take our control away and lead us to crash. The goal in these situations needs to be to not give control to the person lashing out.

Point out that, yes, it can be very difficult not to lash out back, and it takes a lot of time, practice, and effort. But learning this is worth the effort, because it will give us tremendous control over our lives. If

students understand this step, they understand something that many people don't get or don't have the strength or desire to apply. Applying this step will give them a major advantage in life.

Ask students to try to summarize what you just taught. If they can do that, give them a reward that will remind them of the concept, like a laminated picture of the armor and shield.

IMPORTANT:

If you feel it is needed, point out that if anyone ever abuses them emotionally, physically, or sexually, they need to tell an adult whom they trust, such as a parent, counselor, teacher, school official, police officer, social worker, doctor, etc.

Step 4: Select a positive solution.

Question

What would motivate you to do the tougher thing and select a positive defense? How do you know when you've selected a positive defense mechanism? (When you are helping, not hurting, yourself and others.)

Select a positive solution.

What would motivate you to do the tougher (harder) thing?

What might happen if you stay in control?

Discussion

Review that their goals in life need to be part of their motivation. They need to identify what

is most important to them, and use that as their motivation to stay in control when the pressure situation happens. At this point, you may want to refer back to the Reality Ride, pointing out the consequences that occur when we do or don't control our defense mechanisms.