

Coping Styles Examples

Less skillful means

When the less skillful defense mechanisms are in use, we usually feel as though we have no control over our environment. These coping mechanisms are often semi-consciously employed. In an attempt to gain control, we might resort to these defenses. Unfortunately, they often create more chaos.

Less Skillful Defense Mechanism	Example
Aggression/Anger	An overly stressed and frustrated individual responds by punching a wall or person.
Denial	Ignoring the consequences of a dangerous behavior like unprotected sex, or binge drinking.
Displacement	Taking out frustrations from work on a family member.
Somatization	Mental stress and anxiety are ignored, but manifest as physical symptoms.
Dissociation	Mentally removing oneself from a stressful situation losing connection with people or physical surroundings.
Wishful thinking/fantasy	Adopting an unrealistic view of a situation rather than facing disappointment.

More skillful means

As we gain more life experience, we often learn more skillful coping mechanisms that help us feel more in control and capable of achieving independence and connectedness. At times we need mentors to help us move toward more skillful coping styles. A person who is using denial and ignoring the consequences of heavy drinking might start to consider the more skillful means of moderation. Someone who is ignoring mental stress but experiencing physical symptoms might identify with a friend who takes daily walks to manage stress and can start building his own awareness of the connection between mind and body.

More Skillful Defense Mechanism	Example
Moderation	A young adult who is struggling with spending too much time playing video games with friends decides to set a weekly time limit.
Patience/Acceptance	Instead of bringing frustrations from work into the home, a roommate decides to talk to her trainer at work.
Identification	Instead of letting unmanaged stress cause physical symptoms, a person in recovery identifies with the story of an ex-heroin addict who takes up running.
Sublimation/Altruism	Rather than feeling sad about not having a significant other, two single friends sign up to volunteer at a local charity.
Humor	Realizing that final exams are causing stress and low mood, a group of friends decides to watch a comedy on Netflix.
Anticipation	Foregoing a weekly dinner out to save for an upcoming vacation.
Suppression	Instead of lashing out and becoming consumed with a recent break-up a young musician waits until after an important performance to process the difficult emotions.