

Exercise #3: Recognizing Your Denial Patterns

This exercise describes twelve common denial patterns that people tend to use to deny they have serious problems with alcohol or other drugs. You will be asked to review a denial pattern checklist that explains these denial patterns. You will then be asked to select and personalize the denial pattern you tend to use. The twelve denial patterns are:



- 1. **Avoidance:** "I'll talk about anything but my real problems!"
- 2. **Absolute Denial:** "No, not me! I don't have a problem!"
- 3. **Minimizing:** "My problems aren't that bad!"
- 4. **Rationalizing:** "If I can find good enough reasons for my problems, I won't have to deal with them!"
- 5. **Blaming:** "If I can prove that my problems are not my fault, I won't have to deal with them!"
- 6. **Comparing:** Showing that others are worse than me proves that I don't have serious problems!"
- 7. **Compliance:** "I'll pretend to do what you want, if you'll leave me alone!"
- 8. **Manipulating:** "I'll only admit that I have problems, if you agree to solve them for me!"
- 9. **Flight into Health:** "Feel better means that I'm cured!"
- 10. **Recovery by Fear:** "Being scared of my problems will make them go away!"
- 11. **Strategic Hopelessness:** "Because nothing works, I don't have to try!"
- 12. **Democratic Disease State:** "I have the right to destroy myself and no one has the right to stop me!"

Before you start reading the following list of denial patterns, take a moment to calm down, get centered, and relax. Take a deep breath. Hold it for a moment. Then slowly exhale and let yourself become deeply relaxed.

Then go on to the next page and read the description of each denial pattern out loud to yourself. Listen carefully to what the description of each denial pattern is trying to tell you. Then answer the questions that follow each denial pattern.

Go to the next page to read about Avoidance.

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Exercise 3-2: Learning How to Personalize Denial Patterns

In order for us to learn how to recognize and manage our own denial, we need to learn how to personalize the denial patterns that we selected. We personalize denial patterns by writing a new title and description for each one in our own words. For example, I could rewrite the title for *Avoidance* as "*Beating around the Bush*" or "*Skating Off the Walls.*"

The next step is to write a description of the denial pattern that begins with the words: "I know that I'm using denial when I...". Notice the word "I" at the end of this phrase: *in the first person*. This means that the person who is personalizing the denial pattern should always be the subject of the sentence.

Here are some examples of personalized denial patterns. These examples are meant to show you how I would personalize each denial pattern. The examples are written in my words not yours. If you just copy my words you are not personalizing the denial patterns. For this exercise to work for you, you will need to use whatever time and energy it takes to write the titles and descriptions in your own words that really mean something to you and that will be easy to remember.

This workbook only asks you to personalize three denial patterns. I've given examples of all twelve to make sure you have an example of the three that you selected.

1. (Avoidance) **Skating Off The Walls:** I know I'm using denial when I refuse to directly answer a question and keep trying to change the subject.
2. (Absolute Denial) **Saying It Isn't So:** I know I'm using denial when I tell people that I don't have a problem even though I know deep inside that I do.
3. (Minimizing) **Saying It Isn't That Bad:** I know I'm using denial when I admit that I have a problem, but try to tell people that it isn't as bad as they think it is.
4. (Rationalizing) **Giving Good Reasons:** I know I'm using denial when I try to convince people that there are good reasons for me to have the problem and that because there are good reasons I shouldn't be responsible for having to deal with it.
5. (Blaming) **Saying It's Not My Fault:** I know I'm using denial when I try to blame someone else for my problem and deny that I am responsible for dealing with it.
6. (Comparison) **Criticizing Others:** I know I'm using denial when I point out how bad other people's problems are and use that as a reason why my problems aren't so bad.
7. (Manipulating) **Getting Over On Others:** I know I'm using denial when I try to get other people to handle the problems for me.
8. (Recovery by Fear) **Scared Straight:** I know I'm using denial when I tell myself that I could never use alcohol or drugs again because I'm so afraid of what will happen if I start drinking and drugging.

9. (Compliance) **Being a Good Little Boy:** I know I'm using denial when I start telling people what they want to hear to get them off my back.
10. (Flight Into Health) **Suddenly Cured:** I know I'm using denial when I believe that my problems have suddenly gone away without my doing anything to solve them.
11. (Strategic Hopelessness) **Why Bother?:** I know I'm using denial when I tell myself that I can never solve my problems and that other people should just leave me alone.
12. (Democratic Disease State) **I Have My Rights:** I know I'm using denial when I tell other people that I have a right to use alcohol and drugs regardless of what happens and that they have no right to try and stop me.

Take a short break. Then go to the next part of the exercise to identify the three denial patterns you used most frequently in the past.
Remember—copying the examples above won't be very helpful.