

10/3/22 Example of handout from Creating Change (Respect Your Defenses topic)

Handout 1 Emotional defenses

Humans and animals are built to survive. They'll naturally try to defend themselves to protect against pain, attack and threat.

✧ **When you think of the word *defense*, what comes to mind?**

- ◆ a military
- ◆ a boundary
- ◆ a fort
- ◆ a wall
- ◆ a weapon
- ◆ a moat
- ◆ an escape
- ◆ *others?*

A defense is a *survival strategy*— it's an attempt to keep you (or a country) safe.

Emotional defenses are as important as physical ones. They protect against psychological danger.

-- If people around you are untrustworthy, *isolation* may become your defense.

-- If painful feelings are too intense, *numbing* may become your defense.

Everyone has defenses. They're only a problem if they're too extreme, too frequent, or too rigid (preventing growth).

In trauma and addiction you needed defenses to survive. They may have helped you to:

Protect from further harm... Keep going... Forget the past... Tolerate pain you couldn't escape... Feel connected to others... Have moments of good feeling... Save someone else

Defenses are usually unconscious. They're automatic, not willful.

Become aware of your defenses. Listen at a deep level, not judging or blaming. Every defense says something about what you experienced.

There are many types of defenses. See Handout 2 for examples.

Defenses are sometimes "asleep" and sometimes "awake." On a good day, your defenses may not kick into gear. On a bad day they can take over. They tend to activate if you're stressed. The letters "HALT" are good to remember-- **Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired**-- these can trigger your defenses.

Respect your defenses for having protecting you. If you grew up in a violent home, staying silent may have been a wise choice, for example. But you can try new approaches now. There's a saying, "What got you here won't get you there." Some defenses may no longer be healthy for you; they may get in the way of recovery.

Culture impacts defenses. You may have learned to "keep a stiff upper lip" or "not air dirty laundry in public." Your culture may emphasize physical rather than emotional pain (tiredness rather than depression).

Handout 2

Ways of surviving

Be proud that you survived trauma and addiction. But also take stock of the costs of survival. This table describes emotional defenses you may have developed (left column) and healthier options to try now (right column).

Rate yourself on each below from 0% (not at all) to 100% (greatly).

<u>Emotional defense</u>	<u>Definition</u>	<u>Why it makes sense</u>	<u>Examples</u>	<u>Rate</u> (0%– 100%)	<u>Healing alternative</u>
<i>Shrinking (too small)</i>	You go underground, hide and try to stay invisible and out of the way.	You made yourself <i>small</i> to survive. It wasn't safe to say what you really thought or to be who you really were.	"I never get angry." "My mother was alcoholic; I had to walk on eggshells or she'd fly into a rage."		Learn who you are. It takes time to grow into your full self after it's been pushed down for so long. Give yourself time; figure out what you like; experiment with showing up.
<i>Expanding (too big)</i>	You don't show weakness. You fight to protect yourself.	You made yourself <i>big</i> to survive. "Kill or be killed."	"It's a jungle out there; you're on your own." "When I'm gambling I'm a big shot, king of the world."		Let your guard down. Earlier in life you did what you had to do, but now you can choose people and situations that let you relax.
<i>Myths and rules</i>	You want to control your behavior (or others') so you keep creating rules but they don't actually work.	The situation has been out of control for a long time but the rules create an illusion of control.	"If I do better he won't hit me." "I drink beer instead of liquor, so I'm not an		Face the truth. However difficult, the truth is so much healthier than illusions that keep you stuck. Ask others for a reality check: does what you're saying add up?

<i>Too much too soon</i>	You move too quickly and intensely into relationships, jobs, etc.	You may be so desperate for relief that you don't see the red flags. Or you may be addicted to adrenaline (quick-fix excitement).	alcoholic."	Remember <i>slower is faster</i>. It's understandable to want to make up for lost time after trauma and addiction. But real rewards come from pacing, planning and patience.
<i>Over-endurance</i>	You're <i>too</i> good at tolerating pain. You tough it out, accepting discomfort longer than is healthy.	This allowed you to survive awful situations.	"My counselor says I watch too many trauma movies. It's like picking at a scab." "I'm in love with a guy at detox. We're moving in together when we get out."	Set limits. The task is to set stronger boundaries within yourself and with others. Identify what you need and want, deep down. That may feel hard but brings growth.
<i>Looking for love in all the wrong places</i>	You escape inner emptiness by repeated attractions to untrustworthy people or superficial activities.	If you didn't get enough love growing up you may be seeking it now in unhealthy ways.	"After the child abuse I lived through, my partner beating me up seemed normal to me." "I'm a workaholic." "I know she's toxic but I can't break up with her." "It's 'retail therapy.' I shop even though I can't afford it."	Seek depth. Learn how to develop real love through emotional intimacy, meaningful work, creativity, spirituality, and other deeper pursuits.
<i>A secret life</i>	You appear strong, you say you're fine. No one	Secrets are part of trauma and addiction, often from	"I get straight As in school but keep	Let someone know. Find at least one safe person—a counselor, sponsor, friend—to open

	knows what's really going on.	shame or guilt.	thinking of killing myself."	up to. Living a double life, pretending, keeps you stuck in the past.
			"I can't tell my wife I gambled away our savings."	
<i>Losing steam</i>	You start and stop, don't finish tasks, give up too easily.	You may have grown up in a chaotic environment, lacking support. You lose faith in yourself and expect failure.	"I was criticized so much that I never feel good enough." "I can put together six months sobriety but then relapse again."	Navigate hope. When you feel hopeless, explore what's underneath. Fear of not being good enough? Difficulty accepting where you're at in life? Not knowing how to set realistic goals? Ask others for support in those moments.
<i>Walking into harm's way</i>	You go into dangerous situations even when you don't have to.	Danger may feel normal if you lived with abuse or neglect. Or you may never have learned how to take care of yourself.	"I take risks like jogging alone at night. I don't know why." "I test myself by going into bars."	Become conscious. The first step is awareness. Get feedback from trustworthy people. Develop "radar" for unsafe people and situations. Acknowledge red flags as early as possible.
<i>Turning against yourself or others</i>	You act destructively out of desperation.	You're so lost in weakness or pain that you become pure impulse at times.	"I didn't plan to hit him. It just happened." "I binge-eat when I feel rejected."	Create a pause between feeling and action. Identify consequences. Wait an hour; set a timer; sleep on it.