

Ways we defend against painful feelings

Adapted from “*Experiential Treatment for PTSD: The Therapeutic Spiral Model*”
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Survivors of abuse and trauma defend against painful feelings with three levels of roles.

Primitive (automatic level of self protection that are survival mechanisms)

- Dissociation (mind leaving body)
 - Denial
- Multiple states of consciousness (splitting)
 - Idealization
- Projective identification (projecting feelings or thoughts onto others)
 - Identification with the aggressor

Obsessions, compulsions and addictions (these may start as efforts to soothe the self. As they are regularly used, they start to take over a person’s life and have negative effects)

- Drugs
- Alcohol
- Obsessive thinking
 - Over exercising
 - Overworking
- Binging and overeating
- Overdieting and/or controlling food
 - Hyper-sexuality
 - Risk-taking

Maladaptive roles (defensive roles that are often less disruptive in person’s life but still can cause problems in relationships and life satisfaction)

- Unnoticed caretaker
- Controlling parent
- Overachieving worker or student
 - The adult child
- The committed rescuer

Remember — these are roles, not permanent assignments. These roles can be changed with help, support and motivation!