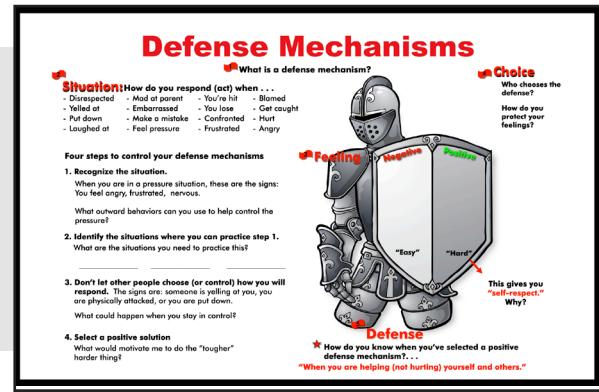


# Secondary Lesson 7: Emotional Regulation (Defense Mechanisms - Part 1)



## Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students explore emotional regulation—the ability to notice emotions and choose how to respond rather than reacting automatically. The Defense Mechanisms / Armor metaphor is used to help students visualize how people protect themselves emotionally in pressure situations. The goal is not to label students as good or bad, but to help them build awareness, choice, and self-respect.

Throughout the lesson, focus on:

- Normalizing emotional reactions
- Reducing shame around past behavior
- Highlighting choice and control
- Connecting the content to real teen experiences

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## Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Recognize how they typically react emotionally in pressure situations
- Explain the difference between reactions that help and reactions that make things worse
- Identify emotionally regulated responses they can use under stress
- Practice choosing responses that increase control and self-respect

## Key Vocabulary

### Emotional Regulation

The ability to notice what you are feeling and choose how you respond instead of reacting automatically.

### Defense Mechanism

An automatic reaction we use to protect ourselves emotionally when we feel stressed, embarrassed, or threatened.

### **Pressure Situation**

Any moment where you feel stress, discomfort, embarrassment, anger, or the need to protect yourself.

### **Impulse Response**

A fast, automatic reaction that happens without stopping to think.

### **Self-Respect**

How you feel about yourself after the situation is over, based on the choices you made.

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## **Optional Vocabulary Processing Activity: “React or Regulate?” (5 minutes)**

### **Purpose:**

This activity is optional and flexible. It can be used during this lesson or revisited throughout the week to reconnect students to emotional regulation concepts and reinforce learning over time.

### **Example Frame:**

“We’re going to slow this down and come back to some of the words from our lesson.”

“These aren’t just lesson words—they’re real-life words you’ll see show up every day.”

### **Instructions:**

1. Choose one vocabulary word to focus on for the day.
2. Read the word and definition out loud.
3. Use one of the prompts below to connect it to real life.

### **Processing Prompts (choose one):**

- “Where did you see this show up today—at school, online, or with friends?”
- “What’s a small example of this that people don’t usually notice?”
- “How would today have gone differently if this showed up more?”

### **Quick Options:**

- Think–Pair–Share: Students turn to a partner and share a quick example.
- Bell Ringer: Use one word as a warm-up question at the start of class.
- Exit Reflection: Ask students to name which word they noticed most that day.

### **Key Reinforcement:**

“Coming back to these words helps you notice patterns—and noticing patterns is how change starts.” ATTENTION GETTER / SETTING THE CLASS (5–10 minutes)

## Attention Getter / Setting the Class (5-10 minutes)

(Play music as students enter. Greet students by name when possible.)

### Example Frame:

“Before we jump into today’s lesson, I want to check in with the room. We all walk in carrying different stuff—school, friends, family, stress—and that affects how we show up.”

### Check-In:

“On a scale from 1 to 10, how’s your day going so far? One is rough, ten is great.”



“You can just say a number, you can share why, or you can say ‘pass.’ All of those are okay.”

(Go around the room. Thank students for sharing. No fixing, no commentary.)

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### Question of the Day:

**“What’s something that shouldn’t make you mad—but somehow does?”**

### Example Frame:

“You don’t have to overthink it. It could be something small—slow Wi-Fi, someone chewing too loud, getting left out.”

“Sometimes the smallest things get the biggest reactions, and today we’re going to talk about why that happens.”



### Processing (brief):

“What do you notice about how fast emotions can show up?”

“Does anyone ever surprise themselves with how strong their reaction is?”

## Facilitator Competency Practice: “Framing The Lesson”

Framing can be challenging—especially when you’re trying to find the right words to create buy-in with students. This lesson is designed to help you practice that skill.

Throughout the lesson, you’ll see examples of how ideas, questions, and transitions might be worded to engage students and make the content feel relevant. These are not scripts to follow word-for-word. They are models meant to show tone, approach, and intent.

Use these examples as a guide, then adapt the language to fit your own style and the students you’re working with. Pay attention to how your wording affects engagement and adjust as needed.

Framing improves with practice—use this lesson as an opportunity to experiment and build confidence.

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### VIDEO: Parking Lot Rage (5 minutes)

#### Example Frame - Video Set-Up:

“I’m going to show you a short video. As you watch, don’t focus on who’s right or wrong.”

“Pay attention to emotions—how fast they show up and what happens once they take over.”

**(Show video.)**



#### Post-Video Processing Discussion

(Follow the questions in the presentation slide and incorporate some of the following optional discussion questions into your processing)

#### Ask questions conversationally:

- “Where do you see emotions taking control?”
- “What was the very first moment this could’ve gone a different direction?”
- “What do you think each person was feeling but not saying out loud?”

#### Bridge:

“What we just watched is a good example of what happens when emotions are driving and nobody hits the brakes.”

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# METAPHOR WALKTHROUGH: ARMOR & EMOTIONAL REGULATION (30 minutes)

Introducing the Metaphor

## Example Frame:

“Before we talk about school or real life, let’s talk about this image.”

“What is this person wearing?”

Guide discussion with prompts:

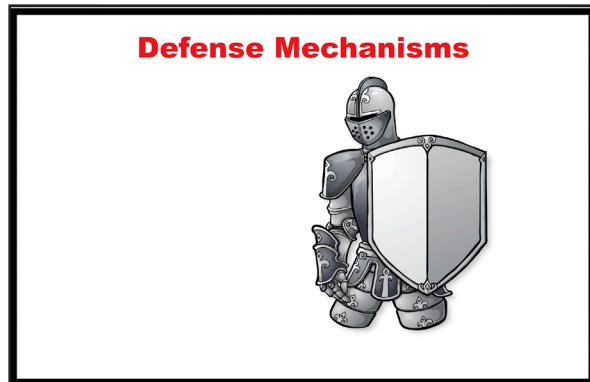
“Why would someone choose to wear something that heavy and uncomfortable?”

“What kind of situations would make that worth it?”

## Connect to Students:

“That armor is probably hard to move around in—but it protects him.”

“In real life, we all have things we do in situations to protect ourselves that can be a little extreme. Most of the time, we don’t even think about it—we just react.”



## Defense Mechanisms = Emotional Reactions Under Pressure

## Example Frame:

“When people feel embarrassed, disrespected, stressed, or overwhelmed, something automatic kicks in.”

“That automatic reaction is what we’re calling a defense mechanism.”

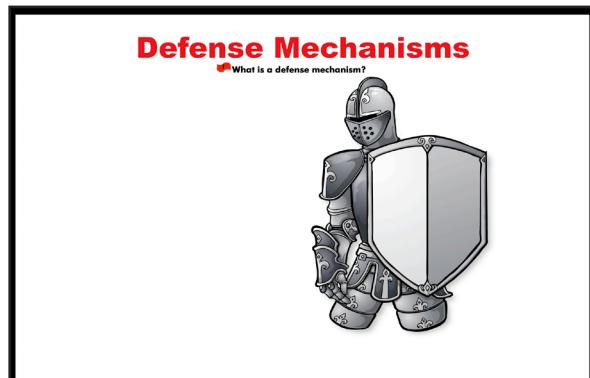
## Clarify:

“This isn’t about reacting to a situation in a way that is dramatic or acting tough or trying to hide your feelings.”

“It’s about protecting yourself emotionally.”

## Share a brief example if helpful:

“When someone feels called out, they might joke, shut down, snap back, or act like they don’t care.”



## Shield Activity: Pressure Situations

### Example Frame:

“I’m going to name some pressure situations.”

“As you hear them, think about what people usually do—not what they should do.”

List situations and write students responses on a whiteboard (If you can, draw a simple shield shape on the board and split it down the middle. Write the positive above one side and negative above the other side. You could also write on the shield in your presentation deck slide if you are using an electronic whiteboard.)

### Placement:

As your students share how they think someone would respond in each of those situations, write their response on either the positive or negative side.

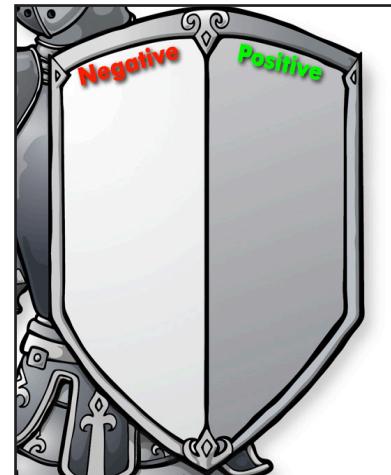
**Example:** if you ask your students, “what would you do if someone yelled at you,” if they respond with “yell back,” then you could write that on the negative side.

**Emphasize:** “This isn’t about judging. It’s about noticing patterns.”

**Defense Mechanisms**  
What is a defense mechanism?

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

- Disrespected
- Yelled at
- Put down
- Laughed at
- Mad or angry
- Embarrassed
- Make a mistake
- Confronted
- Feel pressure
- You’re hit
- You lose
- Get caught
- Hurt
- Frustrated
- Angry



## Feelings Drive Reactions

### Example Frame:

“Every pressure situation comes with feelings.”

“What feelings show up right before people react?”

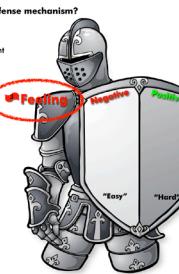
### Highlight:

- “Feelings influence reactions—but they don’t control them.”
- “Most reactions happen fast because we’ve practiced them without realizing it.”

**Defense Mechanisms**  
What is a defense mechanism?

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

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## LEARNING ACTIVITY: NAME WRITING (5 minutes)

### Set-Up:

"This activity shows how hard it is to change something your body and brain are used to doing."

(follow the activity instructions found in the pdf document included in the lesson resources)

### Processing:

Follow the processing questions on the presentation slide or the activity instructions.

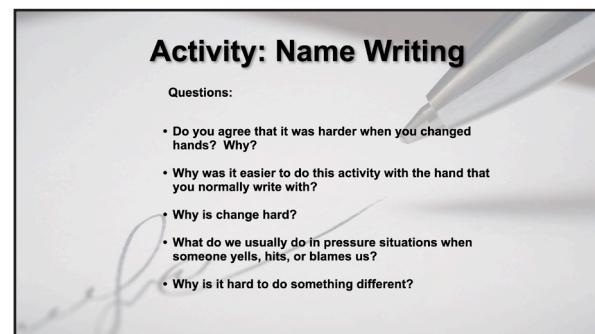
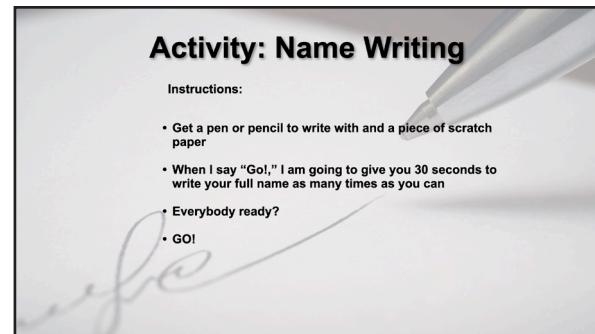
Optional Discussion questions:

"Why was it harder when you switched hands?"

"How does this connect to how we react emotionally?"

### Key Point:

"Change feels uncomfortable at first—but discomfort doesn't mean impossible."

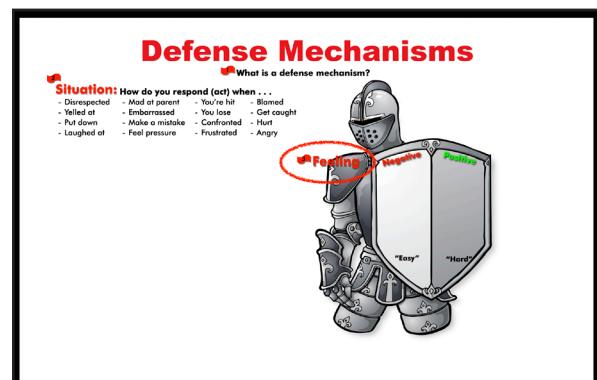


## CHOICE & EMOTIONAL REGULATION

point to the word **Feelings** in the visual metaphor

### Example Frame:

"OK, I'm going to show you something right now and if you can just pay attention for the next couple of minutes, you will see that this is something that many people around you struggle with. You might notice other students that have a hard time with this, you might notice adults that struggle with this. But, if you can understand what I'm going to show you and learn to apply it in your own life, this will give you a huge advantage in lots of situations that you're going to find yourself in down the road and in your future."



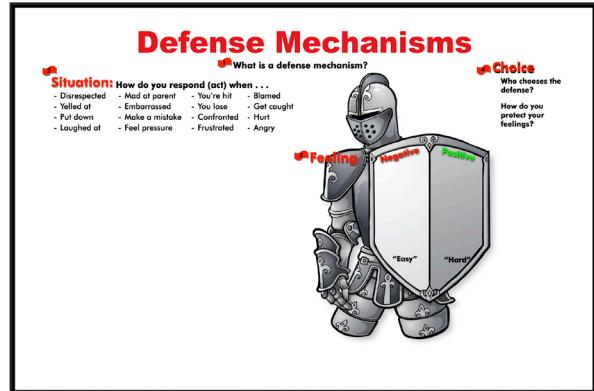
*(Note: This is an important example of trying to create value in the way you frame this to your students. If you can say that in your own words, and with conviction, you will find that your students will be paying attention. This is critical because we are teaching the key concept next and we want their engagement. It's also important because that statement is true! It will be a huge*

*advantage for them if they can understand and apply this principle in their life.)*

## Example Frame:(continued)

“Here is the important thing we need to understand... Everybody has pressure situations on a daily basis. In those moments of pressure, we have strong emotions that build up inside us and most of us react to those feelings by doing what comes natural. Did you notice in the situations that we have discussed where most of the natural responses end up?” (point to the negative side of your list)

“But here’s the key: you don’t have to do that. You don’t have to do what comes natural in each of those situations. You actually get to make a choice and you can choose to respond differently if you want to. You can choose to have a positive response instead of a negative response... If you want to” (point to the word “choice” on the visual metaphor)



## Emphasize:

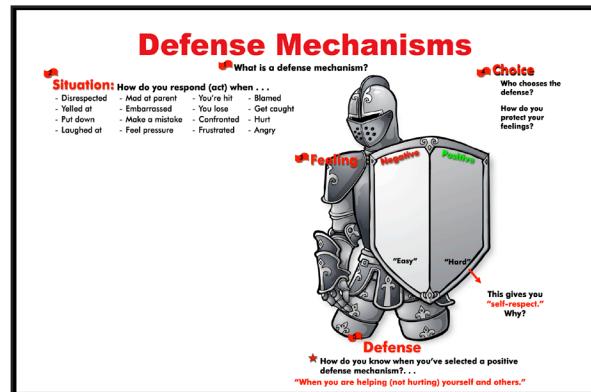
- Our “Defense Mechanisms” are how we react in those pressure situations
- “Emotional regulation” is the pause between feeling and reacting.
- “That pause is where your power is.”

## Positive vs. Negative Responses

## Facilitator Framing:

“So everything that we have written on our shield are examples of defense mechanisms. Some of them are on the negative side and some of them may be on the positive side. How do you know if you have selected a positive or a negative defense mechanism?”

Wait for some responses from your students and then make sure to emphasize that there is a simple way to tell the difference:



“Did your response hurt you or hurt another person? if so, then I think we can agree that would be a negative response... Right?”

If it doesn't hurt you or another person then I think it's safe to say that was a positive response."

## Emphasize:

- “Negative reactions often feel easier.”
- “They might help in the moment—but they usually make things worse.”

**Normalize:** “Everyone uses negative reactions sometimes. The goal is progress, not perfection.”

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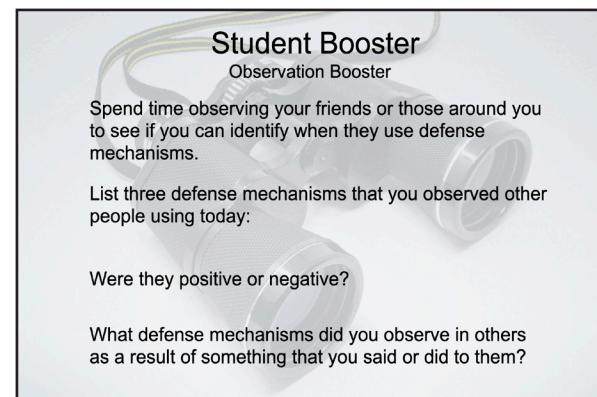
## RESILIENCE BOOSTER: OBSERVATION BOOSTER (5 minutes)

### Instructions:

Give your students the following verbal instructions or provide for them. A printed copy of the resilience booster included in the lesson plan. This can be completed on their own after the lesson as an assignment for them to bring back the next time you meet.

### Example Frame:

“Between now and next time, I want you to notice moments when emotions show up in others. List three defense mechanisms that you Observed your friends using today. Make sure to write them down and then ask yourself where they positive or negative?”



Then ask yourself; “What defense mechanisms did you observe in others as a result of something that you said or did to them?”

Explain expectations clearly and briefly. Have your students write their responses down and bring them for the next time you meet.

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## CLOSING & AFTER THE LESSON

### Facilitator Wrap-Up:

- “Today wasn’t about fixing everything.”
- “It was about noticing how you react under pressure.”

**Preview:** “Next time, we’ll focus on The four steps to control your defense mechanisms, and how to actually change those reactions.”

“Thanks for being real today. I appreciate your effort.”

(Play music as students exit, if appropriate.)

