



# Denial Checklist

By Joe Parker – Every Brain Matters Climbers Support Group

## What denial patterns do you use?

(check as many as needed)

- Avoidance** “I’ll talk about anything but my real problems!”
- Absolute Denial** “No Not Me, I Don’t Have Problems!”
- Minimizing** “My Problems Aren’t That Bad!”
- Rationalizing** “If I Can Find Good Enough Reasons for My Problems, I Won’t Have To Deal With Them!”
- Blaming** “If I Can Prove That My Problems Are Not My Fault, I Won’t Have To Deal With Them!”
- Comparing** “Showing That Others Are Worse Than Me Proves That I Don’t Have Serious Problems!”
- Compliance** “I’ll Pretend to Do What You Want If You’ll Leave Me Alone!”
- Manipulating** “I’ll Only Admit That I Have Problems If You Agree to Solve Them For Me”
- Flight into Health** “Feeling Better Means That I’m Cured!”
- Recovery by Fear** “Being Scared of My Problems Will Make Them Go Away!”
- Strategic Hopelessness** “Since Nothing Works, I Don’t Have to Try!”

## Denial Pattern Descriptions:

Read the list of common denial pattern below and check any that apply to you.

- Denial Pattern #1. Avoidance:** I Say to Myself: “I’ll talk about anything but my real problems!”

*Somewhere deep inside of me I am afraid that I might have a problem with alcohol and drugs or that a loved one is having a problem with drugs and alcohol and that it is hurting me and those that I care about. But when I don’t think or talk about it I feel OK. So, I think about other things and try to keep people from prying into my life where they don’t belong. My problems are private and no one has a right to know anything about it. If someone asks about it, I change the subject and start talking about other things that have nothing to do with the chaos and unmanageability that is happening in my life. If nothing else works, I’ll start an uproar by creating a distraction and making sure that others get sucked into it. If all else fails I’ll play dumb and pretend that I don’t know what they’re talking about.*

- Denial Pattern #2. Absolute Denial:** I Say to Myself: “No, not me! I don’t have a problem!”

*When others try to corner me, I tell “the big lie.” I say that I don’t have a problem with alcohol or drugs or that my loved one doesn’t have a problem with drugs or alcohol. No! Not me! Absolutely not! I’m not addicted! It’s just a phase! They can control it! I am so good at convincing other people that there is nothing wrong that sometimes I actually start believing it myself. When they believe my story a part of me feels really good because I beat them. Another small part of me feels disappointed. There is a small part that wants others to know what is really happening. There is small scared part inside of me that wants help.*

**Denial Pattern #3: Minimizing:** I Say to Myself: "My problems aren't that bad!"

*Sometimes mine own or my loved one's alcohol and drug problems get so bad that I can't convince myself or others that I or they don't have a problem. When this happens, I minimize. I make the problems seem smaller than they really are. Yes, I or they had a small problem with my drinking and drugging. But it only happened that one time. It will never happen again or it's just a phase. Besides, the problem just wasn't as bad as people think it is. This is normal behavior for the phase of life I or they are in.*

 **Denial Pattern #4: Rationalizing:** I Say to Myself: "If I can find good enough reasons for my problems, I won't have to deal with them!"

*I try to explain away my or my loved one's alcohol and drug problems by making up good explanations for why I or they drink and what's "really" causing the problems. Sometimes I'll pretend to know a lot about alcoholism and addiction so other people will think that I know too much to have a problem. The truth is that I rarely if ever apply what I know to myself or to my own problems.*

 **Denial Pattern #5: Blaming:** I Say to Myself: "If I can prove that my problems are not my fault, I won't have to deal with them!"

*When the problems get so bad that I can't deny it, I find a scapegoat. I tell everyone that it's not my fault that I or they have these problems with alcohol and drugs. It's somebody else's fault. I or they only abuse alcohol and drugs because of other people, situations, traumatic events, etc. It seems that as long as I can blame someone else, I can keep living in the chaos until other people change. I don't have to be responsible for changing my behavior and how I contribute to the problems.*

 **Denial Pattern #6. Comparing:** I Say to Myself: "Showing that others are worse than me, proves that I don't have serious problems!"

*I start to focus on other people instead of myself. I find others who have more serious alcohol and drug problems than I do and compare myself to them. I tell myself that I or my loved one can't be addicted because it's not as bad as they are. I know what an addict is! An addict is someone who drinks and drugs a lot more than I or they do! An addict is someone who has a lot more alcohol and drug-related problems than I or they do. An addict is someone who is not like me or my loved one! I tell myself that I or they can't be addicted because there are other people who have worse problems with alcohol and drugs than I or they do.*

 **Denial Pattern #7: Compliance:** I Say to Myself: "I'll pretend to do what you want, if you'll leave me alone!"

*I start going through the motions of getting help. I do what I'm told, no more and no less. I become compliant and promise to do things just to get people off of my back. I find excuses for not following through. When I get caught, I tell people that I did the best that I could. I blame them for not giving me enough help. I tell people how sorry I am. I ask for another chance, make another halfhearted commitment, and the cycle of compliance starts all over again.*

- Denial Pattern #8: Manipulating:** I Say to Myself: "I'll only admit that I have problems, if you agree to solve them for me!"

*When my or others alcohol and drug problems box me into a corner, I start to manipulate. I try to use the people who want to help me. I try to get them to handle all of my problems and then get them to leave me alone so I can continue my self-destructive behavior. I'll let them help me, but only if they do it for me. I want a quick effortless fix. If I they can't fix it, I blame them for my failure and use them as an excuse to keep living in the chaos and unmanageability. I won't let anyone make me do anything that I don't want to do. If they try, I'll leave, allow my problems to get worse, and then blame them, and make them feel guilty.*

- Denial Pattern #9: Flight into Health:** I Say to Myself: "Feeling better means that I'm cured!"

*I or my loved one manage to stay clean and sober for a while, and things start to get a little bit better. Instead of getting motivated to do more and maintain the commitment to recovery, I convince myself that I'm cured and my loved one is cured and I don't need to do anything more. I tell myself that I or they may have had a drinking and drug problem, but I got into recovery and put it behind me or they put it behind them.*

- Denial Pattern #10. Recovery By Fear:** I Say to Myself: "Being scared of my problems will make them go away!"

*I began to realize that alcohol and other drugs can destroy my life, hurt those that I love, and eventually kill me or my loved one. The threat is so real that I convince myself that I can't or they can't ever use alcohol or drugs again. I start to believe that this fear of them destroying their life and killing themselves will scare them into permanent sobriety. And the drug abuser starts to believe it too. Since they now know how awful their life will be if they continue to drink and drug, they just won't drink or drug anymore. If it just stops everything will be fine. Since everything will be fine, treatment or a recovery program won't be necessary anymore.*

- Denial Pattern #11: Strategic Hopelessness:** I Say to Myself: "Since nothing works, I don't have to try"

*I start to feel that I'm hopeless. It seems like I've done it all and nothing works. I don't believe that I can change and big part of me just doesn't want to try anymore. It seems easier just to give up. When people try to help me, I brush them off by telling them that I'm hopeless and will never recover. When people do try to help me, I give them a hard time and make it impossible for them to help me. I don't understand why people want to help me. It would be easier if they just let my problems pile up on me.*

## Personalizing the Denial Patterns

We can become better at recognizing and managing our own denial if we personalize the denial patterns we selected. This is done by writing a new title and description for each denial pattern we selected in our own words.

Here are some examples of personalized denial patterns.

- Skating Off the Walls (Avoidance):** I know I'm using denial when I refuse to directly answer a question and keep trying to change the subject.
- Saying It Isn't So (Absolute Denial):** I know I'm using denial when I tell people that there is not a problem even though I know deep inside that there is.
- Saying It Isn't That Bad (Minimizing):** I know I'm using denial when I admit that there is a problem, but try to tell people that it isn't as bad as they think it is.
- Giving Good Reasons (Rationalizing):** I know I'm using denial when I try to convince people that there are good reasons for there to be problems and that because there are good reasons I shouldn't be responsible for having to deal with it.
- Saying It's Not My Fault (Blaming):** I know I'm using denial when I try to blame someone else for my problems and deny that I'm responsible for taking action.
- Criticizing Others (Comparison):** 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.
- Getting Over on Others (Manipulating):** I know I'm using denial when I try to get other people to handle the problems for me.
- Scared Straight (Recovery by Fear):** I know I'm using denial when I tell myself that the people in my life could never use alcohol or drugs again because they are so afraid of what will happen they start drinking and drugging again.
- Being A Good Little Boy (Compliance):** I know I'm using denial when I start telling people what they want to hear to get them off of my back.
- Suddenly Cured (Flight into Health):** I know I'm using denial when I believe that my problems have suddenly gone away without my doing anything to solve them.
- Why Bother (Strategic Hopelessness):** 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.