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Common Unhealthy Self-Protective Behaviors and Opposite Virtues/Dispositions

Common Self-Protective Behavior	Opposite Virtue/Disposition(s)
Cynicism / excessive negativity and doubt	Hope; gratitude; praise
Romanticism in relationships	Valuing a relationship because it is good, virtuous and holy for both persons, rather than for the mere feelings or benefits you get out of it
People pleaser, including potentially promiscuity or unchaste relationships	Honesty; truth in love; appropriate assertion; courage, especially to risk healthy conflict; chastity
Perfectionism; self-condemnation; spirit of judgment	Doing things for charity (for the good/love of others and yourself, rather than doing things for perfection); humility; proper self-love and self-care
Avoiding committed relationships, marriage, or resisting closeness with others; avoiding parenthood	Vulnerability; courage; trust
Avoiding interpersonal conflict	Courage to risk healthy conflict; appropriate communication and conflict resolution skills
Refusing to receive love from another by doing everything for the other person without a concern for one's own needs and a proper love of self	Receptivity; love of oneself; mutuality of love
Victim mentality; overly fixated on your needs; a hypersensitivity to lack/wounds; self-indulgent and selfish behavior and not being appropriately concerned with another person's needs in a relationship	Proper acknowledgement of harm and concern for wounds; appropriate grief; hope that things can change; self-sacrifice; love of the other; mutuality of love
Controlling people, feelings, and situations; especially "controlling" joy (i.e., picturing the worst-case scenario when in a joyful situation and trying to prepare or control for all the negative outcomes, stealing a person's joy)	Trusting the other to do this or that for you in their own way; humility; delighting and enjoying in the gifts God has given you; gratitude; joy

Cohabitation out of a concern for whether this person is the right one to marry, testing the relationship	Appropriate discernment of relationships
Settling for temporary relationships	Courtship with an aim to marriage; courage; appropriate discernment of relationships
Substance or alcohol abuse	Temperance or abstinence (depending on the gravity of the situation)
Excessive anger	Gentleness/meekness; patience; surrender; healthy conflict resolution skills; forgiveness
Workaholism / fixation on one's career	Temperance and balance in work, relationships, and prayer
Excessively seeking the pleasures of worldly goods to anesthetize pain (lust including pornography, greed/over-buying, endless distraction on the internet and use of cell phone or video games, emotional over-eating, etc.)	Self-control; self-denial; temperance; finding joy in healthy goods and relationships.
Withholding forgiveness, bitterness, and resentment	Forgiveness with an aim to reconciliation.

Important Notes:

1.) **The first step** in healing the above behaviors (after identifying them) is spiritually healing the wounds or fears that underlay and fuel these behaviors. Do this by firmly establishing your identity as beloved, worthy of love, capable of love, and beautiful in the eyes of God through a relationship with Him in the Sacraments, personal prayer, and holy friendships. As we slowly accept these truths, we know more and more that we are not irreparably damaged but can practice great love. There becomes hope for change. We begin to build trust in God so we can have a sure foundation for trust and vulnerability toward others. We discover God's meaning for our life's suffering and give ourselves more and more to Him. All these effects of prayer help us to let go of our defenses because we recognize that we are not empty-handed after all.

2.) **The second step** is to attempt to replace your unhealthy self-protective behavior with a virtue, disposition, or skill. What the opposite virtue should be does depend upon the reasons for why one acts, so this is only a general guide and should not replace careful discernment with friends, mentors, spiritual directors, priests or religious, and/or psychologists.

Once the virtue is named, then it is important to learn more about how to live that virtue practically in day-to-day living, which benefits from more conversation with mentors and peers who have similarly struggled. The talk is meant to get you thinking about these important topics and begin a deep path of healing at the fundamental levels of identity, relationships, etc.

Virtue is neither instant nor perfection. We will always have some of the defects of some bad behavior. Virtue means habituating your soul slowly to these good ways of responding to difficult situations.

3.) **A third step** may be needed of getting professional, psychological help if you have recurring problems over a long period that greatly affect your life, or if you struggle with addictions.