

Topic Page: [Freud, Anna \(1895 - 1982\)](#)

Definition: **Freud, Anna** from *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*
Austrian-born founder of child psychoanalysis in the UK. Her work was influenced by the theories of her father, Sigmund Freud. She held that understanding of the stages of psychological development was essential to the treatment of children, and that this knowledge could only be obtained through observation of the child.

Anna Freud and her father left Nazi-controlled Vienna in 1938 and settled in London. There she began working in a Hampstead nursery. In 1947 she founded the Hampstead Child Therapy Course and Clinic, which specialized in the treatment of children and the training of child therapists.

Summary Article: **Freud, Anna**

From *Encyclopedia of Religious and Spiritual Development*

Anna Freud (1895-1982) was the youngest of Sigmund Freud's six children and the only one among them who made her father's ideas into her own life work and mission. In 1918, Anna entered psychoanalysis with her father, published her first paper on psychoanalysis in 1922, and finally started practicing as a psychoanalyst in 1923. Being psychoanalyzed by one's own father would not be done today, but in those early days of psychoanalysis it was possible, while causing quite a few murmurs of disbelief. Becoming a psychoanalyst while having no formal education beyond high school would be unbelievable today, but it is to the credit of the public school system in Vienna in the early 20th century that Anna Freud was clearly a well-educated woman, displaying vast knowledge in various fields. Her own intellect, talent, and creativity are beyond dispute.

Sigmund Freud was diagnosed with cancer of the jaw in 1923, and during his 16 years of illness Anna tended her father, and took over many of his functions as he became less able to take care of things. She became General Secretary of the International Psychoanalytical Association and director of the Vienna Psychoanalytical Training Institute. The Freud family fled Austria for England in the summer of 1938, following the Nazi takeover of Austria. Anna lived for the rest of her life in London, where she became more and more involved in the psychological treatment of children. She was more of a practitioner than a theorist, and most of her contributions to the study of personality come out of her work with young children.

Anna Freud followed her father in regarding humans' long dependency in infancy and childhood as the setting that creates both the normal personality and pathology. The dependent child is exposed to the fear of object loss, love loss, and punishment. This creates the conscience and the capacity for compliance, but also neurosis. This long period of dependency, which characterizes humans, is responsible for the capacity for love and attachment to others. It makes the child human and social, and it also creates the capacity for religious and magical practices and beliefs. What the child experiences, together with dependence and helplessness, is love and care from adults, which can lead to the creation of religious ideas (e.g., heaven, salvation).

Anna Freud was among the pioneers of what has become known as *psychoanalytic ego psychology*. According to classical psychoanalytic theory, the structure known as *ego* is the executive center of the personality. It keeps in touch with reality and has to balance and control internal drives and reality

constraints.

The ego-psychology theoretical orientation emphasizes not only sexual and aggressive drives but also adaptation and defense, i.e., personal adaptation to the environment and the defense of the ego from internal anxiety and external dangers. Successful adaptation to reality is achieved through both unconscious defense mechanisms and realistic actions. Defense mechanisms act by distorting the nature of a real threat or by avoiding it, thus reducing anxiety. Some ways of using defenses are successful, while others are maladaptive.

Important defense mechanisms are identification, i.e., the unconscious fantasy of internalizing the desired qualities of another; displacement, i.e., the redirection of drives toward more accessible goals; and reaction formation, i.e., the redirection of socially undesirable drives toward socially beneficial goals.

Turning against the self is a very special form of displacement, where the person becomes their own substitute target. It is normally used in reference to hatred, anger, and aggression rather than more positive impulses, and it is the Freudian explanation for many of our feelings of inferiority, guilt, and depression.

Defensive projection, which Anna Freud also called *displacement outward*, is almost the complete opposite of turning against the self. It involves the tendency to see your own unacceptable desires in other people. In other words, the desires are still there, but they are not one's own desires anymore.

According to the ego psychology approach, most human behavior is made up of reactions to anxiety and attempts to cope with them to the best of the ego's ability. Various rituals and magical practices are ways of providing the ego with relief from stressful situations. The ego has to find ways and devices to control anxiety, and religion can be such a way.

Defense mechanisms that play a major role in the development of religious activities include sublimation, i.e., the channeling of aggressive and sexual drives to socially approved activities. Unlike repression, which produces only neurotic symptoms whose meaning is unknown even to the sufferer, sublimation is a conflict-free resolution of repression, which leads to positively valued cultural works. The mechanism of undoing involves magical gestures or rituals that are meant to cancel out unpleasant thoughts or feelings after they have already occurred. It clearly has a major role in many traditional rituals.

According to Anna Freud, adolescent preoccupation with religious ideas is a way of coping with instincts. Sometimes, it is a reflection of adolescent rebellion and its resolution. Religious conversion may be a symptom of such an adolescent crisis and its resolution. At the height of the crisis, the adolescent is in danger of withdrawing from those around him and becoming totally narcissistic. He escapes this danger by convulsive efforts to make contact once more with external objects through passionate identifications.

Psychoanalytic ego psychology has suggested that there is a natural limit to rational reality testing and that the constant tension of keeping in touch with reality may be relieved by opportunities for regression in the service of the ego, e.g., controlled, limited regression from reality that is found in art and religion. This relatively new concept intends to remind us that not every regression is pathological, and this kind of limited regression may reflect flexibility and creativity. Regression in the service of the ego may play an important role in religious behavior.

See also

Freud, Sigmund, Object Relations Theory, Psychoanalytic Approaches

FURTHER READING

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