Center for Integrated Healthcare

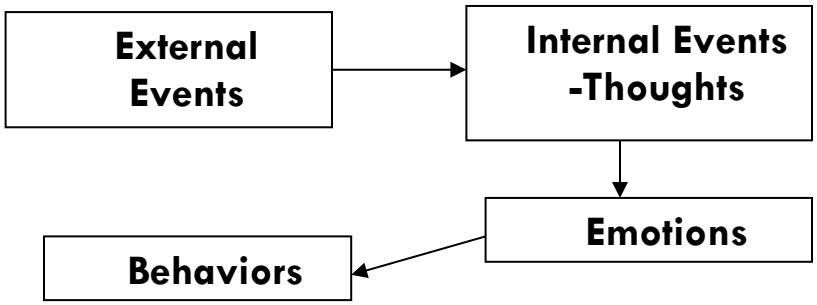
VA HEALTH CARE | Defining EXCELLENCE in the 21st Century

Information from your Patient Aligned Care Team

Anger Management

What is Anger?

Anger is a complex and confusing emotion that you may experience in response to specific stressors. It is a feeling, an *emotion,* and is quite different than aggression, which is an *action* and intended to cause harm to others. Anger is created by how you think about external events that are occurring, therefore you can have control over your anger. Consider the diagram below and the following example:



Example: As you are driving home from work one late afternoon, you get cut-off by a person in another car *(External Event)*. You begin to think, "What a jerk!" *(Internal Event/Thought)*. You become frustrated and angry *(Emotion)*. Finally, you begin to yell out your window at the person, plan revenge, and speed up to try to catch them *(Behavior)*.

What are the Functions of Anger?

Anger may have both positive and negative effects on you. When you learn how to appropriately express your anger, it can lead to beneficial consequences.

Some examples of positive functions include: ☺

1) Anger can serve as a signal to you that you are becoming frustrated or annoyed.
2) It can be an energizer and may help you to deal with conflict and solve problems.
3) Anger can prompt us to communicate with others to resolve a conflict.
4) It may create a sense of control and allow us to be more assertive.

Some examples of negative functions include: ☹

1) Being in a state of anger may cause increased heart rate, blood pressure, and tension headaches (among other negative physical effects).
2) Excess anger may disrupt thoughts and make it difficult to think clearly.
3) It may help us to avoid other feelings like sadness, anxiety, or embarrassment.
4) Anger can lead to aggression *(like in the example above!)*
5) It may cause problems in relationships, if it builds up.

What Causes Anger?

Anger is an internal response to things in your environment that happen (external factors), based on how you experience and think about those things. It is important to remember that while you may have no control over the external factors, you do have control over how you think about and interpret them. The following are examples of external and internal factors, which may cause you to become angry.

1) *Frustrations:* When you try to do something and you are prevented, blocked or disappointed.
2) *Tension:* When you are feeling "strung out" and your stress level is high, you may be quicker to anger.
3) *Ill Humor:* When you take things too seriously and are unable to "roll with the punches"; when you become moody or crabby and are more inclined to become angry easily.
4) *Withdrawal Avoidance:* When you actively avoid conflict and walk away without resolving an issue, you tend to internalize the feelings and become angry.

How Can You Control Your Anger?

Controlling your anger means learning how to manage the frequency and duration of your anger. Anger that happens often and lasts a long time can be a heavy burden. The continuous increased emotional state can drain your energy and affect you physically. Learning anger management will help you to become aware of your triggers to anger and will teach you more productive ways to respond to the feeling. It also provides you with skills to learn how to control those internal factors which you have control over. There are several strategies you can use to help you gain control over your anger.

They include:

- Relaxation Techniques
- Quick Stress Relievers
- Time - Out
- Humor
- Thought Stopping
- Conflict Negotiation
- Problem Solving
- Challenging Negative Thinking
- Choosing Assertiveness vs. Aggression