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# ANGER

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Anger is a powerful emotion and is experienced for many reasons. Anger may be expressed with physical and emotional agitation, frustration, indignation, exasperation, hostility, or extreme displeasure. Anger can be expressed physically or emotionally towards oneself or others. Anger can be used as a distraction from sadness and helplessness. Sometimes couples fight to avoid sadness.

Aggression may surface as a result of the anger causing one to engage in destructive behavior toward self, others, or property. Aggression may manifest in verbal attacks, violent behavior, general hostility, threats toward self or others, or agitation. Anger is a powerful emotion that can take control in the strongest of individuals and seems to have a life of its own.

Anger is experienced in varied degrees from mild to extreme rage. When anger is expressed appropriately, the outcome can be positive, promoting growth and facilitating change. When expressed in a negative or dangerous way, the results may include hurt feelings to self, family or friends, injury, and physical or emotional illness. Depression is a common outcome of anger. Depression can be a form of anger turned inward.

Many veterans have angry feelings about which they are not aware when they first return home. There may be a need to discuss and express their feelings in a safe way. It is better to express angry feelings appropriately than to keep them inside. Sooner or later the angry feelings will rise to the surface and the volcano will blow. It is better to let those feelings out with those who understand, those who have been there, have walked where you have walked, than to keep them inside where they can make you sick. There is safety and understanding in sharing your anger.

A veteran can learn to *control* anger by redirecting the angry feelings. Anger management is a positive choice and an important one in treatment. Individuals can learn to express their anger in a safe and constructive manner with support from others.

Anger may affect your relationships at work, within the family, and around you. It is important to let someone, such as a counselor, friend, or family member lend a listening ear.

Veterans can practice thinking before they act. Anger often leads to impulsivity, causing one to say or do something he regrets later. It is important to learn to walk away, calm down, and think about the possible consequences. How can you express your angry feelings in a safe and constructive way?

It is important to learn the specific triggers to your anger. What leads to or "triggers" your angry outbursts? It is usually not about the thing, event, or person at whom you are directing your anger at that moment! This awareness can be enlightening and lead to healing.

Learn to do something distracting instead of attacking. Use empathy to understand why someone seems to be attacking you. Develop healthy coping skills to use right away when you sense angry feelings stirring; engage in a sport you love, take a walk, listen to music, take a self time-out, talk to a support person, write in a journal, or draw what you are feeling. Try to see yourself as calm; believe you will make positive, healthy choices before you do—and then do. Your Vet Center counselor will help you develop a safety plan to have ready whenever you suddenly experience a trigger that could lead to an angry outburst. In time, your fuse will lengthen.

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