

Conflict Resolution and Anger Management

MCC Medical Patient Education Module

Conflict Resolution and Crisis Intervention

If the patient presents with an urgent, addiction-related problem like marital dissolution or financial problems as a result of the addiction, the counselor should try to address the problem. Emphasis should be placed on how the problem is related to the addictive behavior. Considerable effort should be taken to help the patient develop strategies for dealing with the problem in a manner consistent with recovery, including identifying how to obtain appropriate assistance from social services.

If the patient presents with a true crisis, such as having spent all of his or her money on a cocaine binge, and as a result, feeling suicidal, the counselor should address this issue immediately. The counselor may have to organize a team effort among the appropriate treatment staff to provide any medical or psychiatric services that the patient requires in order to remain safe.

Anger Management

Many addicts have problems managing and expressing anger. For some, drug use simultaneously both numbs and exaggerates emotions. Addicts often use drugs to suppress the anger that they feel, over time becoming numb to their true feelings. Because of the failure to recognize when one feels angry and to understand the reason for the feeling, this unacknowledged anger may explode. Addicts may also have trouble dealing with their anger because, due to their addiction, they may not have learned to express anger in a healthy, productive way. They may have learned unhealthy ways to express their anger from their parents or other role models. Further, addiction impedes the individual's self-learning and emotional growth, so the recovering a person with substance dependence may feel unable to deal with feelings. Also, addicts may be angry at themselves for their addiction but place the blame on others, so they misdirect their anger and vent it on those who are close to them.

The counselor should discuss how the patient experiences and expresses feelings of anger, including what things cause the patient to get angry and how and with whom the patient expresses anger. Frequently, managing anger is closely related to identifying and meeting needs. For many, simply recognizing when one's rights are being violated is the first step in managing anger. Then, one can try to respond assertively and avoid a less productive angry response. There are appropriate and inappropriate ways to express anger, and how the patient typically expresses anger should be discussed. The counselor should help the patient to identify more positive ways to express anger. Healthier ways of expressing anger may include assertive communications, possibly taking a "time-out" from an argument and returning to the discussion later, or having a physical outlet, like going for a run, lifting weights, or even hitting a pillow. The goal is for the patient to become able to manage feelings of anger more productively, without resorting to drug use or hurting oneself or others.