

Counselor: Hi there! My name is ASE. What's your name?

Student: I'm Mia.

Counselor: Hello, Mia! It's really nice to meet you. What brings you to counseling today?

Mia: My teacher sent me to come see you.

Counselor: What might you think are her reasons to have you see me?

Mia: I don't know. Sometimes I just get mad.

Counselor: You experience anger. What kind of things make you feel mad?

Mia: When other kids don't listen to me or when I can't do something right.

Counselor: That sounds really frustrating. It's challenging when things don't go the way we want them to. What do you do when you feel mad?

Mia: Sometimes I yell or throw things. I don't mean to, but it just happens.

Counselor: To you, anger appears to take over your choices. I wonder if there are any things that you typically feel or think just as that anger is starting to take over.

Mia: Like what?

Counselor: It is different for different people, and it is normal for different people to feel and even do different things when they are frustrated and angry. Some people feel something in their body, like heating up or even pain while other people might have words or images appear.

Mia: Oh. Yeah, that can sometimes happen to me. I don't know.

Counselor: Maybe you can tell me about a recent time when you felt angry.

Mia: I don't know. I'm bored.

Counselor: Talking about anger might be a little frustrating too.

Mia: It's not the same.

Counselor: Can you tell me how talking about your anger is different than actually feeling angry?

Mia: I mean, you didn't really do anything to me, so I am not angry. I am just bored. Adults always want to talk to me after I get in trouble and that's boring.

Counselor: What is another way you'd prefer an adult like me to act after you get frustrated or angry?

Mia: Just leave me alone.

Counselor: So by leaving you alone, your anger will go away?

Mia: No. I just won't be bored talking about it.

Counselor: That makes sense, boredom probably doesn't seem like the feelings one would need to stop frustration or anger.

Pause

Let's not spend too much time on feelings that won't help with anger. I wonder have you ever felt or done something that made the frustration or anger settle a bit, without boring you?

Mia: Not really. I just get too mad.

Counselor: It does sound really hard to stop anger. Maybe let's not try and stop it completely, at least not at first. Instead, let's start with how anger eventually turns into something else. Can you tell me what it's like when anger changes to any other feeling for you?

Mia: I don't know. I guess it just changes. I don't really think about it. I forget about it.

Pause

Or I just think about something else. I can still be angry, but not all the way angry like before.

Counselor: That's a really cool ability you have. It is like you are stacking a new feeling on top of the old angry feeling. This is kind of the opposite of what you said earlier when you suggested that the anger just takes over. It is like the one feeling and with only one feeling, there is only one behavior that you can do – act with anger. But when anger goes away for you, there is more than just that one feeling and therefore there can be more than one way to act.

Mia: I guess. (Pause). Maybe anger just goes away.

Counselor: Does it go away for you?

Mia: Kinda. (Pause) I mean, not all the way away. I still feel pissed off at what made me angry. I just don't feel as mad. (Pause). I mean, I guess you're right that I feel a little mad but also other things too.

Counselor: What type of other things can you feel after you've experienced uncontrollable angry?

Mia: Anything. I guess. Sometimes I can even be happy, if people stop messing with me or I don't think about what made me angry or if I go do something fun.

Counselor: I'm learning so much about this ability that you have to control your anger. Earlier you said that you don't think about what made you angry, but it sounds like so much more than that.

What I hear you saying is that you join the anger experience with other experiences and feelings, and then some new feeling emerges that is a little bit the anger but mostly something new.

Mia: I guess that's true. I never really thought of like that.

Counselor: You never really thought about how much control you have over your feelings?

Mia: No, I just feel what I feel. Something happens and then it makes me feel something. I cannot always control that.

Counselor: Something bothers you and then you feel the anger.

Mia: Yeah. It is not my fault. People should just leave me alone and then I will not be so angry.

Counselor: This makes sense and I am learning so much. So something happens and then the feeling of anger comes on uncontrollably. And then later, other things happen and your feelings begin to change.

Mia: Yeah. Like everyone. I am not the only one who gets angry or acts this way.

Counselor: That's certainly true, generally all people get angry, even if only occasionally and for short periods of time. But there is more to your story and it sounds like you're not giving yourself enough credit here. First, something happens and then you are controlled by normal feelings of anger. Second, other stuff happens and then you're not so controlled by the anger. The anger might still be there, but now, later, you can apparently pick and choose to not be fully controlled by it.

Mia: I mean I guess so. I am not always angry, but I am a lot of the time.

Counselor: Things can be challenging. If the anger is controlling, except when you start to feel other things, I wonder what would occur if you used this ability to mix other feelings in when you start to feel angry?

Mia: Like what?

Counselor: Well, maybe tell me a little about the last time you were angry with your teacher who had you come to see me today.

Mia: I was talking to my friend in class and the teacher was rude to me. She made me so mad.

Counselor: You felt angry when she interrupted your conversation with your friend. Let's not let go of that feeling of anger, because we can agree that it is normal to feel angry when a conversation with a good friend is stopped. But can you tell me a few of the additional feelings you might have after this normal anger changes?

Mia: I don't know. I will still be mad at her. But I guess later I will feel bored in class.

Counselor: Yes, and when you're bored, are you controlled by the anger?

Mia: (chuckles) You want me to be bored?

Counselor: Boredom is as normal as is anger. But this truth shows us that we are not fully stuck in one feeling, even if we still feel that emotion. It also shows us that we are not fully controlled by that one feeling.

Mia: But its hard when you are feeling that mad.

Counselor: Agreed. When you have one feeling, it is difficult for most people to control. Control suggest that you have multiple options. So maybe to get a bit of control of anger, you need lots of different feelings when something happens that frustrates you.

Mia: How can I have lots of feelings when I am just mad?

Counselor: You said that it is hard to control yourself when you are angry, what would it be like if you didn't try and let go of the anger but once you recognize that feel anger, you can try and add in some other feelings and thoughts?

Mia: But what if I do something to get myself in more trouble before I have another feeling?

Counselor: That sounds like what is happening to you now. I am guessing that it won't always be easy to do all of the time, but I do wonder if you practice now with me adding more feelings to your experiences, if you might be less controlled because you have more choices how to feel and act?

Mia: Like what? What if I just want to be angry?

Counselor: That is a great question. What I am asking you to consider, you still get to be angry. Again, it is normal to be angry. What we are considering is how much more choice you might have if you can be angry plus some other feelings.

Mia: I don't like to be controlled. That also makes me angry. So maybe.

Counselor: I can see how challenging that would be; something makes you angry, and then that feeling of anger controls your feelings and actions. Then you probably even get angrier because you've been controlled or how to do with the consequences of being controlled by anger.

Mia: Yeah.

Counselor: Anger and control can be difficult to challenge. Like we agreed, it is normal. So maybe it would be helpful to find someone or some time to practice when it is safer and when you have a bit of control of the situation.

Mia: Like what?

Counselor: You and I can try this when we meet in future weeks. But in the meantime, I wonder if you can practice with feelings that are not so controlling. You mentioned boredom earlier, or maybe even a positive emotion. Any time is fine, but each day, take a moment and pick out a specific

feeling, take a breath, and then simply examine how you are affected when you try and control your feelings by adding new feelings to that situation.

Mia: What if I don't remember?

Counselor: Yeah, don't try and over control this exercise. Let's you and I think of a safe and easy thing coming up in your life that you can try this out.

Mia: Well, I have to go back to class, I guess I could try there.

Counselor: Just to clarify what you suggested, when you start to notice that you're feeling some emotion that about to control your actions, simply accept that feeling, don't push it away, but add to it some other emotion and see how it affects your control.

Mia: Yeah, I can do that.

Counselor: And maybe next week after we check in to see how that affected things, and if it helped we can come up with some other things to make this strategy easier and something you can do often; or if it doesn't work, what adjustments can we make to add yet something else to loosen the control of anger on you.