

Recovery Testimonial

The following is a testimonial of a woman who has made the journey from the insanity of anger to a better way of living and relating to others. As you read this account, know there is hope, help and healing for you in your journey to recovery!

I was raised to believe that my actions have a direct link to the ways others react. I believed that my behavior as a teenager, 20 or so years earlier, was a direct link to the way family was treating each other now. I carried an 800 pound weight around for years. My therapist told me to try anger management. Maybe this could help me manage my feelings better. So I called, class started that night. No way for me to talk myself out now.

The first class went just the way you would think "Hi my name is..." We began to talk about anger management on a general level. I was surprised how I was not the only one who felt and reacted this way. That was my first shocker. The next one came soon after. The therapist turned to the class and said "You are not responsible for someone else's angry response." What on earth was this guy saying? Was he saying that the weight I was carrying around was for nothing? Surely he was wrong! It hit me right in the gut. I began to cry in class. It was as if the therapist walked over to me and took the weight and handed it to me. You decide if you want to carry this or not. Even now, I am still tearful at the thought. Each class got better. Everyone could tell me what they thought I needed to do but the therapist gave me the tools to do it. He gave me a way to control it all. The theory I liked best was the Stimulus Response. The space between is your to control. I think of a tape measure every time I hear this. The niches in between Stimulus and Response are time. You can lengthen that time or shorten it. I didn't know this. I was scared of the space. I didn't know it was mine to control. The therapist taught us things like fogging. It gives you just enough time to think. You don't need much.

My Husband was so good about helping me with these ideas. One day I was going shopping with my Mom. He walked up to me and slipped a small measuring tape into my hand. "Here is something from your tool box you might need it," he said. It was wonderful knowing I had him in my corner. The measuring tape was a great reminder that I was in control of the space.

It wasn't long that the therapist spoke about "bait." Well this one was well-used in my home; not by me, but my mom. Guess what, you don't have to take the bait! I bet you thought you did; I thought I had to as well. My mom was due to come down for a visit. I went on the web and printed off a picture of a bass about to take the bait on a hook. I colored it with my kids and we hung it on the fridge. No one knew what it was there for but me and my husband. If he thought there was bait out there, he would walk by the fridge and point to the bass. It worked because it made me stop and think about what was being said and could choose not to take it. We had one of the best visits with my mom in years.

Since then she has tried to bait me more, but even she has noticed a change. She said I was no fun to bitch with anymore. I decided I would not let it get to me. I decided that if she doesn't like my thoughts or actions, that is on her not me. I decided if she gets mad at me, she will get over it. I am NOT responsible for her anger. She is in control of her own actions and reactions.

We also learned about our own “early warning signals.” When I feel my anger growing inside, I listen and that gives me the control again to take the time to claim down or remove myself from the situation. That worked for me too. I even can say to my husband or kids, “Mommy needs a minute to calm down,” and I walk away. They now understand that I need space at that moment. I will come back; I just need a break. I have learned to talk better with my kids so they feel they are being listened to when they are mad.

The L.E.A.R. strategy helped me with this. It took me awhile to understand this one because we didn't go over it much. I read and re-read to get it. Now I am able to put myself in their shoes and hear what is truly wrong when they are really mad. The same theory has worked with my mom as well. She has been going through a lot with her own mom and sister. I am able to HEAR her and be there for her without getting pulled into it with her. I used to take on other people's anger. Not now. I am able to actually listen and help, but not take it on. I couldn't watch the news without becoming so over-taken by the anger and other feelings coming through the TV; now I can. I do what I can do but otherwise I know I have to choose to leave it. My husband and I talked about the concept of making a genuine apology (another strategy) and how to say you're sorry. He can hear "I am sorry" and that is all he needs. I want to hear an "I am sorry and what do I need to do to fix this?" and I am ok.

I hope everyone who takes this class draws insight and strength from the therapist and others around them. Change can happen. I drew pictures in my handouts to help understand everything in my own way. I asked questions (often) and I shared the insights with my husband. All of this helped me and I would be glad to help others change their life like I did.

I really enjoyed the classes. You will never know the impact it has made on me and my family. I will be forever grateful to the therapist and Coastal Counseling Center for sharing your knowledge with me. Thanks again, for the 100th time.

Addendum . . . This past holiday weekend my husband's aunt and uncle came to visit. Let's just say they think he could have done better than marrying me. Usually I am running around the house like a chicken with her head chopped off, trying to get the house and the kids absolutely “perfect.” I don't eat in front of them because they think I am lazy and need to lose weight. I try to stay far away from them when they come. It is only once a year, so I didn't mind this time.

They came and his aunt made a remark about how I could go get a job if I really wanted to (I am a stay-at-home mom). My husband chose a profession and I had no idea what to do with me. Yes, her comment stung for her to say that, but I knew she had no idea that my husband and I agreed that we decided I would stay at home and raise our kids the way we wanted to. At that moment, I just smiled and said, “You may be right; I could” (a strategy I learned in group). I ate when they did and did my usual thing.

When they left to go to their hotel, my husband grabbed me and gave me this big hug. I asked, “What was that for?” and he said "I am so proud of you." He told me that he has seen so much change in me and that he knew I was going to be just fine. I knew all I had to do was remember: I am NOT responsible for anyone else's reactions. The 800 pound weight is still gone and I never want it back.