

Managing Your Anger

By Alex Rocha

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Angry teen-agers oftentimes become angry adults.

And the 10-member team at Total Self Insight, a new Merced business, knows Merced County doesn't need more angry adults.

So Total Self Insight is dedicated to helping young people, and adults, manage their anger and make better choices in their lives.

The business, which opened on May 1, is headed by Valerie and Shannon Anthony, mother and daughter who are committed to helping teen-agers and adults in need of anger management.

Valerie says, "Our goal is to have individuals develop an understanding of self and to make better life choices by successful completion of our program."

The idea of running a private business has always been in the back of Valerie's mind. She currently works as a mental health social worker, running a dual-diagnosis program at an outpatient clinic in Modesto. But that will end Aug. 1.

She now works one day per week at Total Self Insight, and Shannon works the rest of the week.

Shannon, 24, is studying for her associate of arts degree in addiction studies at Merced College, and she will be facilitating the anger management group sessions for teen-agers.

When business is in full swing, the Anthonys will offer workshop-style sessions with 10 people each. There will be groups of teen-agers and groups of adults. Workshops will also be offered in domestic violence issues. Male- and female-only sessions will also be offered.

Valerie said there is a lack of anger management programs in Merced, and the idea of starting one came when she stumbled across Anderson and Anderson, a Southern California-based program, on the Internet.

Valerie and Tony Slaton, a Total Self Insight co-worker, attended an Anderson and Anderson seminar about one year ago and learned a nationally recognized anger management model.

The model, established by George Anderson, now a close friend of Valerie's, uses a series of workbooks that puts participants in control of their progress.

The workbook that Total Self Insight will use is titled "Gaining Control of Ourselves." It focuses on understanding why anger can control people's lives and explains how to reduce and redirect the stress that causes the anger.

The workbook, as well as the group sessions, will be offered in Hmong, Laotian and Spanish.

Shannon Anthony says, "Anger is usually just a mask to hide other emotions, such as disrespect and frustration."

The model also provides alternatives to violent outbursts and abusive behavior through lessons that challenge old and inappropriate ways of expressing anger.

Valerie says that anger is a learned emotion that can be "unlearned."

The groups Shannon will facilitate will also help teen-agers understand the different types of relationships they form with adults, including parents, teachers and police.

She says, "Those are the really vital relationships that help establish who they are going to be as adults."

The workbook is written in contemporary teen-aged lingo, and Shannon says it's easy for teen-agers to understand.

After a little more than 30 days in business, Total Self Insight has two teen-agers who are receiving individual help until more clients sign-up and one adult who was referred from Merced County Mental Health Services.

A 13-year-old client is already making progress.

Valerie started his sessions by telling him a "newborn baby" theory. She said that as a baby, he learned to cry and become angry to get what he wants, and he became a teen-ager who does the same thing. She told him, "We're going to learn how to switch that off."

And she says, "That hooked him 100 percent."

The courses are 16 weeks long and strive to put most of the work in the clients' hands. Shannon says, "We focus on personal responsibility... Kids lose sight of that."

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