



Meet Agapé Therapist Anna Bulfin, MA, NCC, LPCA



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I have had a passion for working with children for as long as I can remember. I began helping my mom in the church nursery when I was old enough and then I sought every opportunity to work with kids and teens through high school

and into college. I have served as a youth counselor for the YMCA, and program manager for a horse therapy program for at-risk young women. I went on several mission trips working with inner-city youth and assisted in dropout prevention and college prep efforts in several local schools. I always loved school and thought I wanted to be a teacher but when I took a psychology course and then an Introduction to Counseling course in high school, I knew that God was calling me to become a counselor instead.

With my blended love for school and helping others, I pursued a career as a school counselor. As a school counselor in addition to being a Licensed Professional Counselor Associate (LPCA), I have a great deal of knowledge about the school system and the many issues students face in the academic setting. This allows me to work with teens in a more comprehensive way since they spend much of their time in a school environment. It was a great privilege to work with teens in the academic setting, but after almost 4 years of serving in the school system, I knew something was missing. I wanted to have the opportunity to more intensively help these teens and families more than the school schedule and structure would allow.

I transitioned in 2016 to a private practice setting and have had the opportunity to further develop my skills working with teens and families. I also now work with couples. I became a

Prepare-Enrich facilitator, using this wonderful assessment to help couples to rebuild, reconnect, and restore their relationships. Working with couples has become a true passion of mine.

I am passionate about helping others, no matter their age, background, or circumstance, to find healing, restoration, and truth in their life. Life is hard and messy, and it is an honor to be able to partner with my clients in their journey. It is important to me to combine evidence-based approaches with prayer, Biblical truths, and humor where appropriate, and I look forward to serving the wonderful team at Agapé in this capacity. It is important to know the strength we each have inside of us to meet our goals, but it is vital to understand the fullness of joy and grace that Christ can give in even the darkest of circumstances.

I primarily work with teens, families, and couples but also have experience in working with adult individuals as well.

In addition to counseling, I enjoy spending time with my best friend and husband, David, our rescued greyhound, Penny, our amazing friends and family, being outdoors, traveling, reading and anything involving a good cup of coffee and a baked good.



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One summer in my early teens I decided I needed to improve my character. I painstakingly composed a list of “dos” and “don’ts” that matched my desired identity and created a table to track my progress. My list included items such as:

- Stop talking back to parents,
- Do chores as soon as I am asked
- No fighting with my brothers
- Stop hiding in the haystack reading books.

My goal was to become more polite, kind, patient, honest and helpful. I planned to clean my room daily without being asked and become a *good girl*. Several weeks passed and I found my enthusiasm waning as I began to realize that no matter how hard I tried I would not become the *good girl* I wanted to be.

Many of you may have embarked on similar self-improvement projects only to also quickly realize you would not reach your goal. January is almost over and I see fewer people out running—New Year’s resolutions to become healthy and trim have already gone by the wayside. We move on with daily life but there may be lingering disappointment and feelings of failure. We can try to ignore those feelings and even become depressed. There is another way to cope and that is to make the best of it and learn from our failings.

First, it is important to acknowledge and express your feelings. Are you sad or angry with yourself? Do you feel defeated or discouraged? Our feelings are designed by God to be a motivational force in our lives:

- Love toward others motivates us to care
- Fear motivates us to protect ourselves by fleeing, fighting or freezing;
- Loneliness motivates us to connect with other people

Our feelings can be compared to stored charges of energy that need to be released or they will remain within us in the form of tension, anxiety, depression or psychosomatic symptoms. Our feelings can be expressed through writing in a journal, talking to a safe person, prayer, and even crying. They are all good ways of expressing our emotions. King David is an example of someone who was comfortable experiencing his feelings. He often cried out to God in times of sadness and despair.

Secondly, our feelings can reveal our unmet needs. The feeling of disappointment after failing to stick to New Year’s resolutions might indicate a need for accomplishment. Our goals might also be driven by what we *feel* others are expecting of us: eating healthy, getting in shape, etc. This may reveal a need for belonging and acceptance by others. If you decided to go to the gym to meet other people, then your true need might be for companionship. If you desire to join a club or find a hobby because your life seems boring and lacks excitement,



the need behind your boredom might be to find a sense of meaning and a greater purpose for your life.

Thirdly, once you identified your unmet needs, make plans on how to meet them without having to make radical changes in your life. New Year resolutions fail because they are too drastic. If your need is for connection and belonging, rather than joining a group comprised of total strangers (which could be too intimidating) reach out instead to safe people in your circle or reconnect with old friends. If you are searching for deeper meaning in your life, think about what brings you joy and a sense of purpose and begin to go in that direction. As someone said, every failure means you are a step closer to finding the right solution.

Finally, whether we are successful in reaching our goals or fall short, we can be certain that, if we have accepted Christ as our Savior, our standing with God does not change based on our performance. Our successes in life do not make us more acceptable to God, any more than our failures make us less acceptable to Him. All we have and achieve is possible because of God’s goodness, love and provision for us. Our failures reveal our need for God. He has the power to change us and only His love will satisfy our need for acceptance and belonging. It is His will for us to discover His meaning and purpose for our lives.

Remember my summer self-improvement project? My failure helped me realize that even if I could check off all the items on my list, if my attitude was poor or my actions were done with the wrong motive, I would still be disqualified from achieving perfection. I could not “create” a new me. I learned from reading my Bible that I needed to admit that I failed trying to be good on my own and that I needed to accept the righteousness of Christ as the only way to be “right in God’s sight” (Romans 5:18).

Looking back, I do not feel bitter or discouraged about my failed self-improvement experiment. God used it to bring me to a deep relationship with Him and create a “new” me (Ephesians 4:24). I am still a work in progress but because I am confident that God finishes what He starts, it will be exciting to see His finished masterpiece.