



CONTINUING EDUCATION THAT MAKES A CHANGE

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Course Name:	Life's Law #3: You Are 100% Responsible For Dealing With Your Life
Course Number:	LL3
CEU:	1.0
Instructor:	Philip Copitch, Ph.D.

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COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. You will study Life's Law #3.
2. You will read real life examples of how to work with angry young adult patients.
3. You will study ways to keep defensive walls down.
4. You will experience story telling as a therapeutic tool.
5. You will see ways to open up a discussion with a teen or young adult patient.

SUGGESTED PREREQUISITE COURSES

None

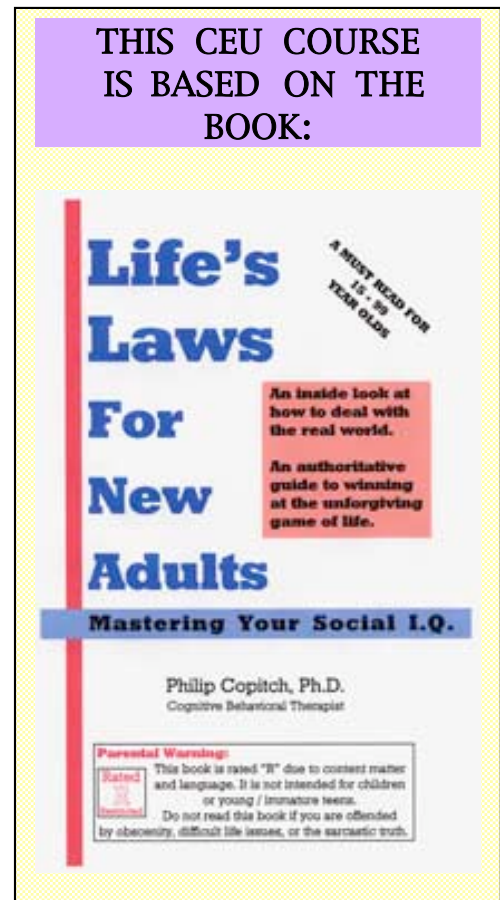
Introduction

I have developed ten life laws that I teach to teens and young adults to help them navigate the rough waters of young adulthood. I have found, over the years, that these life laws give my patients directional posts that guide them outside of our therapy sessions. It is my intent for the young adult to have a framework to build their social skills on. I tend to “teach” one life law a week. (Based on the individual’s abilities.) I find that my patients quickly begin to implement change and self control into their lives. In this CEU course we will look at Life’s Law #3: You Are 100% Responsible For Dealing With Your Life.

In my treatment of angry and “misunderstood” teens and young adults I take a cognitive behavioral approach and find that they appreciate my nonjudgmental frankness.

We are going to look at how to get teens and young adults to listen to you in an open minded way. The goal is to talk with your patient, not at them. This sounds easy, but unfortunately it isn’t. Over the years I have found that if I explain a needed concept to someone in a relaxed story format, it keeps their defensive walls down and lets them emotionally participate in the learning process. By sprinkling my conversation with humor and a little “I think it’s like this, what do you think” humility? I find that my teen and young adult clients readily play off my stories and seriously challenge their own ways of dealing with their world.

The following is the way I introduce patients to the fact that they have to take personal responsibility. And, by taking personal responsibility seriously, they can influence their own behaviors as well as the behaviors of others.



LIFE'S LAW #3: YOU ARE 100% RESPONSIBLE FOR DEALING WITH YOUR LIFE

Over the years Life's Law #3 has produced the most arguments with the new adults I work with. On the surface people are comfortable with this law, as long as they read 100% as 93% or 97%. So let me make this clear, you are **100%** responsible for how you deal with your life.

Carlos was in big trouble with the law. He was seventeen and arrested for shooting a fourteen-year-old boy. If that wasn't bad enough, when the cops searched him he had a pocketful of rock cocaine. Carlos' attorney asked me to look in on him to see if I could come up with anything helpful for his legal defense.

Carlos had been in jail four months when I first met him. He was handcuffed and dressed in an orange jump suit. You didn't need to be a shrink to understand his mannerisms. He was pissed.

As it turned out, Carlos was being unjustly accused. He explained that the cops were out to get him and the kid he shot deserved it. Carlos was positive he was the victim. What was most confusing to Carlos' attorney was that he couldn't get Carlos to stop confessing to the crimes. He told everybody. Even people who didn't ask.

Man it's like this. This *punta* came into the hood and he should know better than scope my house for his joy. He just tipped on down the street and flashed me as a nobody. So I had no choice. I didn't want to, ya know ... so I capped him. I even did him a favor. I only put one hole in his lost ass. He made me, ya know ... I ain't got nothin' against him or nothin'. I even pray for him to get better and to get some sense. If he don't learn, next time he going to get himself killed.

On the subject of the rock cocaine in his pocket:

It ain't like I use the stuff. My body is a temple ya know. A little beer with the boys, I ain't saying I'm a saint or nothin'. The Man don't believe me. Sticking me with Possession with Intent, that's bullshit and he knows it. I was just holding it for a friend. You can ask anyone, I stopped using that shit long ago...

I wasn't much help to Carlos' attorney, but this situation does point out an interesting fact; people lie to themselves about their responsibility to their life.

I assume most of us see that Carlos was responsible for what got him into jail. How about Lisa's story?

Lisa had been sent home from school three times in two weeks for *showing her midriff*. I was seeing her family due to the divorce of her parents. Lisa was very upset with the school for not letting her dress with style.

Lisa: It's not fair. Even my mother thinks it's fashionable. It's not like I'm dressing like a slut.

Dr. Phil: Did the principal call you a slut?

Lisa: No. He just gives you a copy of the rules and says that all students must follow them. But, I'm dressed tastefully, I'm not revealing too much.

Lisa's mother was trying to be supportive of Lisa and she agreed that Lisa wasn't inappropriately dressed. In fact, she was thinking about suing the school for embarrassing her daughter by implying that she was a slut.

What do you think? Was Lisa taking 100% responsibility for how she dealt with her life?

Nope, not 100% in my opinion.

Modern cognitive therapists confirm that much of the time, feelings are beyond our control. However, the decisions made in response to their feelings can be controlled. Learning how to respond to your feelings in ways that are in your own best interest is the critical skill in navigating your mental health. I'm not sure life is much more complicated than that.

Dean Edell, M.D.

Dr. Phil: Why do you go to high school?

Lisa: I want to be a nurse and help people.

Dr. Phil: The days that you were sent home, did you work towards your goal of being a nurse so you could help people?

Lisa: No, but I'm going to do the work that I missed during Saturday School.

Dr. Phil: Does the shirt the school required you to wear get in the way of your learning?

Lisa: No.

Dr. Phil: So how come you are making such a big deal about your clothes all of a sudden?

A long quiet minute later. In a low voice:

Lisa: I like the attention of the stupid boys.

At that moment, Lisa took 100% responsibility for her high school world. If getting the attention of the stupid boys was more important than getting her education, I guess she should have gone to school butt naked. Until she was arrested she would have definitely gotten the attention of most of the school (Maybe even some of the smart boys). If the reason Lisa was going to school was to become a nurse and help people, then her goal forces her to take a particular life path. Our goals force paths upon us. You can't get into a nursing program if you can't get a good high school education.

Taking 100% responsibility for dealing with your life is hard. It is multifaceted. It is often a pain in the ass. It would be much easier if you just got to blame others.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines responsibility as:

Involving personal accountability or ability to act without guidance or superior authority. Able to make moral or rational decisions on one's own and therefore answerable for one's behavior.

So, if you don't get the grade you want on the exam, you are 100% responsible for how you deal with it. If a girl stands you up, you are 100% responsible for how you deal with it. If your parents are hard to live with, you are 100% responsible for how you deal with it. If your car gets stolen, you are 100% responsible for how you deal with it.

At this point some smart individual likes to throw me a zinger. "You mean if a girl gets raped or my mother gets shot by a gang banger, they're responsible?"

I say yes! You are always 100% responsible for how you deal with it. Read on...

You will spend lots of effort fighting blame

As a therapist, many of your new adults (and old adults) deflect their

problems by blaming. It takes a careful ear to pick up subtle blaming techniques. Without confronting this issue, your patients cannot emotionally grow and learn about choice and responsibility.

Responsibility does not mean blame

Responsibility is a person's accountability. When I was fourteen, my friend Bigbird (a name not given by his parents) threw an ice ball at my head. It missed me by half an inch, luckily for my noggin. It hit the window of our school with laser accuracy. I laughed as the ice ball flew by. Tenths of a second later, I worried if Bigbird was going to be roasted alive by our humorless principal.

Bigbird was responsible for breaking the window and the principal made that very clear as he growled at us in his office. But, to my surprise, the principal didn't blame Bigbird for the accident. Everyone knew that Bigbird was clumsy. Everyone knew that Bigbird was a follower. So, can you guess what happened? The damn principal blamed me!

A liar that speaks the truth
is not believed
Chinese Proverb

"Mr. Copitch, you need to take greater responsibility for your horseplay. Mr. Cleveland (Bigbird) looks up to you. I expect more out of you. It is inconceivable how someone with your potential can end up in my office so often." (It went on from there for another twenty minutes!)

I was dead meat. You know you're dead meat when you get called Mister by an authority figure. The principal was correct however. Bigbird did look up to me, even if he was twelve inches taller than I was (he was also as skinny as a post, but what a great guy). The fact was that I had set Bigbird up. I was to blame. I plastered Bigbird in the thigh with a slush ball. He ran after me to get even. I ran in front of the school office's picture window because I knew no one was dumb enough to throw a snowball at the front of the school. I was wrong.

In this use of the word, blame is the state of being culpable. I deserved the blame because I caused a wrong. Bigbird caused an accident. He was responsible for an accident. I was to blame because my behavior was an intentional act.

Let's look at this in a more serious situation. Stephanie was molested when she was six years old. She didn't tell anyone because her uncle was the molester. She was very confused and deeply blamed herself for many years. She came to my office when she was twenty-four years of age. She had recently told the man she loved that she could not marry him. But,

she could not tell him the reason why—Stephanie was afraid to have sex. This was not a huge problem while she was dating. Both of them were saving themselves for marriage. But she knew that she could not go on a honeymoon. You can't save yourself for marriage after you say "I do." At that point you have to "do." It took a lot of courage for Stephanie to reach out for help.

Over the course of a year, Stephanie worked very hard in therapy to combat her fears. During our last session, I asked her to sum up her therapy experience.

I learned that my uncle was to blame for betraying my trust in him and that I was not responsible for being a victim at the age of six. But, I am responsible now if I feel like a six year old victim at the age of twenty-five.

After a long pause she continued.

I also know that if I let my life get ruined because of my past, that would be my fault. I am 100% responsible for how I deal with my life! I want a family. I deserve a family. And, I'm looking forward to getting pregnant.

We both cried with joy because we both knew that she was a powerful woman who understood Life's Law #3.

You are 100% responsible for dealing with how others treat you

Most people assume that they have little, if any, control over how others treat them. I believe the opposite to be true. I believe that you are 100% responsible for dealing with how others treat you. That doesn't mean that you have 100% control of how others act. It simply means that you are responsible for how you deal with how they act towards you.

Recently a friend and I went out for our normal late Tuesday night dinner. Usually the restaurant is almost empty. This particular night the place was a mad house. It was packed with fire fighters just off the fire lines thirty miles away. The two waitresses were running all over, frantically trying to get the loud hungry mass fed.

The bus boy noticed us and said he would clean a table for us in a few minutes. My friend and I sat reading the menu. He said, "We're never getting served today!"

“It’ll be OK,” I said.

When the waitress made her way to our table she looked like she had been put through a blender. Her hair was a mess, her little purple decorative apron was stained and she seemed all jittery.

“Wow, you seem to be really overworked tonight. Are you OK?” I inquired.

“Hungry ... rude ... fire fighters,” She gasped. “They all want steak at the same time.” She wiped her brow with her forearm.

She told us that since four o’clock the place had been packed with hungry fire fighters. The kitchen was not set up for cooking this many steaks at one time and two waitresses were not enough.

“It sounds unfair how you’re being treated. When you have a minute for me let me know.” I said.

“No, it’s OK. What do you want? I’ll get it for you. I don’t care if they starve!” She said with a smile.

We were taken care of very well. The reason was because I treated the waitress with respect and empathy. I let her feel like a nice person and she subsequently acted towards me like a nice person. I’m sure that she was choosing to treat my table nicely, because she surely had no trouble growling at the loud table in the far corner.

As you go through your world you need to take responsibility for getting your needs met. If I was grumpy with the overworked waitress I would have been seen by her as one of the loud mass of humanity that filled her restaurant. But, recognizing that she was being put upon by her situation let her see me as a nice guy she wanted to feed. We both won. She felt appreciated, I got fed.

Teaching self awareness

Next we open up the personal subject of self-awareness and choice. It is important that new adults understand that they influence how others treat them. I have found that patients with alcoholic parents have a very hard time comprehending this concept. For them, it is possible to have vast experience dealing with the toxic behavior of others that is not often influenced by own their actions. It is important for this patient to understand that now, as an adult they can and should avoid toxic people.

What do you present to the world?

I told the above story to a sixteen-year-old boy who had been referred to my office because of his argumentative nature in school.

Benjamin: It's not fair. If I go into a restaurant and the waitress is having a bad day, she has no right to treat me like shit. She works for me, doesn't she?

Dr. Phil: I guess she works for you, but she is a person, isn't she?

Benjamin: So ... she's a person with a job. I shouldn't have to kiss her ass just for her to do her job.

Dr. Phil: Is that what I was doing, kissing ass?

Benjamin: Most definitely. 'You're working hard.' 'You're being mistreated!' He mimicked. She shouldn't take a job she didn't want. She is getting paid to get food for people and not to bitch.

Dr. Phil: I'll give you that what you are saying is true. But, none of that really matters to me. I wasn't nice to her because I had to be nice to her. I was nice to her because I wanted to be. In fact, I wanted to be served food in a timely manner. And, I didn't want her to growl at me. I was getting my needs met. It was also nice for the waitress, but that wasn't the reason I went to the restaurant, to be nice to a waitress. I went to the restaurant to get dinner. The way I interacted with the waitress got my needs met.

Benjamin: Oh, that's great for you with all your *psychology*. But I run into people that dump on me all the time.

Dr. Phil: Like at school?

Benjamin: Right. My first period teacher is a bitch to everyone. She doesn't care if I'm tired or if I

have a headache. She just is on me, “Where’s your homework,” “Don’t talk to me with that attitude!” I hate her and she knows it. So she takes any opportunity to jump on my back.

Dr. Phil: You mean if you turned in your homework, and were talking to her politely, she’d complain?

Benjamin: No. Of course not. She would probably find someone else to bitch at.

Dr. Phil: So, you’re saying you’re involved with her bitching at you?

Benjamin: I didn’t say that, she just hates me.

Dr. Phil: It sounds to me that she will find someone else to hate if you don’t fuel her fire by not turning in your homework.

Benjamin: Yeah, I guess. But, she works for me and she just bitches at me.

Dr. Phil: Let me understand this. Your teacher works for you? Her job is to get you to learn stuff? She thinks that *you* doing *your* homework will help you learn? It sounds like you have a pretty good employee for first period.

Benjamin: (with a smile) I hate when you make this all my stuff.

It was Benjamin’s job to learn. Instead of taking that responsibility on his own shoulders, it was easier for him to blame his teacher. In fact, it was easier for him to blame his mother, his ex-girlfriend, and his grandparents for the problems in his life. He was the king of blaming others for his crappy relationships. It wasn’t until he started to take personal responsibility for how he treated others and how others treated him, that his life became rewarding.

It is not until you accept 100% responsibility for dealing with your life that you will start to have a positive influence on how you treat others and others treat you.

People can learn and grow

It is important to leave the patient with the understanding that they personally can learn and grow. I advise patients to take notes between sessions of their observations concerning life laws. This gives the patient much more than my time with them.

POSTTEST

When you're ready, take the posttest to obtain your CEU certificate. Your test consists of 5 multiple choice or true/false questions per Continuing Education Unit (3 CEU course = 15 questions).

