

Choosing Your Path
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One crisp, cloudless April morning during my graduate school days, my friend Di and I decided to hike at Hawk Mountain, a raptor refuge located along the Appalachian Flyway in east-central Pennsylvania. When we arrived at the Visitor's Center, we were told they were out of trail maps and given these instructions: Choose your trail from the poster-sized map at the starting point and follow the blazes, the swaths of color painted on the sides of trees or on rocks to indicate the path. We decided to hike the Escarpment Trail, which was indicated by yellow paint. Armed with a small bag of trail mix, a handful of crackers, and two 16 ounce bottles of water, we figured we'd finish the loop before noon.

We were wrong. Neither the map at the Visitor's Center nor the staff warned us about the boulders that constituted much of the trail. Accuweather hadn't prepared us for the warm front that moved into the area by late morning. Our flimsy hiking boots, so perfect for the trails we usually hiked in Valley Forge Park, were inadequate for the rocks and drops we encountered on the Escarpment. After two hours, our muscles ached from scrambling up and down boulder hills, we'd consumed the water and food, our clothes were drenched with sweat – and we seemed to be alone on the trail with no end in sight.

Just when we thought we had nothing left, we reached the River of Rocks, a mile-long field of broken boulders, up to 40' deep in spots and inclined to shift underfoot. We had neither the energy nor the footwear to attempt the crossing. We scanned the woods for an alternate route.

“Over there,” Di said, pointing in the direction of a stand of pine trees. I noticed the broad stroke of yellow paint dressing one of the pines. Energized by adrenaline, we reached the endpoint of the trail within ten minutes, immediately forgetting the agony of the journey in the joy of our accomplishment.

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On May 4, 2009, I attended the annual graduation ceremony at the Philadelphia Child and Family Therapy Training Center. As I listened to the story of the most recent Intensive Program graduate's path, filled with detours and obstacles, my thoughts drifted to the Hawk Mountain hike and its parallel to my own licensure journey. I had set off without a map, ignorant of the tools needed to scale the boulders along the licensure trail. Sometimes I couldn't see the next marker. Faith and determination were my only sustenance.

When I enrolled at the Center, guides appeared in the shape of the director, Dr. Marion Lindblad-Goldberg and Ann Itzkowitz, my appointed supervisor. They gave me the map, a therapy model that turned me into an LMFT at the end of the trail, and taught me how to read it. They walked with me each step of the way to licensure. I never again felt alone in the woods.

Whether you're a student considering a career in couples and family therapy or a clinician wishing to learn an effective model or gain skills, the Philadelphia Child and Family Therapy Training Center has a program to meet your needs.

Let us blaze your career trail.