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Growing up, I always thought family was important. I listened to my parents and looked up to my father. But since I was 18, my father's been in prison for things he shouldn't have done. And things have been rough. I'm 29 now, a single dad with a two-year-old daughter, Amelia. My ex and I share custody. We live with my mom, her boyfriend, and my younger brother, Joseph, who also has a baby. What happened with my dad made it difficult for me to trust people, I've been pretty depressed and it was hard getting through the day.

My doctor told me I was obese and said I needed to lose 50 pounds.

I was eating corn dogs and frozen food and drinking soda. My ankle hurt, it was hard to play with my daughter or even walk. At the start of this year, I decided I wanted to do better, because I intend to be 100% there for my little girl — she's my driving force.

I've cut out processed food and since January, I've only had two swigs of pop.

I'm making wraps and my mom taught me how to make great lasagna, switching out the pasta for zucchini and spinach, and we have salad every day. We all sit down for family dinners and talk about how our days have gone. My mom's a 911 dispatcher so she's got lots of stories to tell.

I go to the gym a few times a week.

I do the hill climber, ride the bike, then do free weights. I have more energy to help my mom out at home, vacuuming and taking the dog for walks. I try to do as much as I can for my mom because she works so hard. She's very supportive and says she wishes that she had half the determination I have, because I've lost 41 pounds.

My daughter is with me for half the week and I'm so happy when I'm with her.

We'll walk to the park and go to the playground. Amelia likes climbing on the monkey bars and getting to know the other kids. I'm working on words with her and she's learning how to spell her name.



I've reconnected with friends from high school.

My best friend, Kyle, and his wife had a baby and I go to see them every other Sunday. They've gotten me through some tough times. I do whatever I can for Kyle's family, I say: "If you ever need anything, just call me."

At work, I'm happier, I'm connecting with associates and customers.

I'm a senior meat cutter and I'll ask customers how their life is going. I'm always helping them find better deals with cuts of meat and giving them cooking recommendations, like my great recipe for Korean beef barbecue. I dice up top sirloin, sauté it in a skillet with garlic and celery, and add Korean sauce. My goal: to do the classes I need so I can become a store manager. I want to run the store making sure everyone is happy.

To help deal with my anger and emotions about my father, I go to therapy.

It helps a lot. I've had to cut myself off completely from my father and I'm learning how to let go of anger so it doesn't get the better of me. I've learned to use a five-minute breathing technique to calm myself down by breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth. In the evening, I meditate for 15 minutes which helps me lower stress. I think to myself, "What could I have done better throughout the day?" I'm also being as supportive as I can to my ex. Even though we had a rocky relationship, she still needs help and I'm fine with that.

I'm going to support Amelia with whatever she needs as she grows up.

If she wants to go to college, I will make sure she gets that opportunity. And I'm here for myself too. I'm enjoying life more. I used to hide, and I can't hide anymore. Things are still hard but I know that if I'm kind to myself and others and do my best, there are no limits and nothing I can't achieve.



THRIVE