

In November 2015 my husband and I enrolled our son, Tobias, into Eustis BJJ Academy with coaches Dave and Annie Iturrino. This was a huge leap of faith for us. You see, our son is on the Autistic Spectrum. While he is high functioning he still has challenges most people would not want to deal with. He still has meltdowns and can get frustrated easily.

We have always been skeptical of allowing our son to participate in group or team activities for fear he would be misunderstood and the coaches would not know how to effectively communicate with him. At the same time it is our duty as parents to prepare him to survive in our world. It's a harsh truth but the reality is our world will not learn to work with him.

Mike, his father is a pilot. When he's working I am essentially a single mother for four to ten days at a time. Every now and then it will be for a full month. When his father is out of town we have noticed that on about day three Tobi has more meltdowns. He has more trouble in school. He's more apt to fight with his sister. He worries and fidgets more. He becomes angry more frequently. Even though we have gotten creative with our communication while he's away from home, sometimes Tobias just needs a man and I don't qualify. This is where Coaches Dave and Annie Iturrino and Grappling for Life come in.

We knew it would take a special person(s) to connect on his level. Someone who exhibited love and patience but at the same time firmness and discipline, structure yet freedom. Someone who could and is willing to accept a variety of emotions all at the same time and still love him without reservation. We knew he needed positive male role models in his life that would take Tobias under his wing and just "go with it". Coaches Dave and Annie and Grappling for Life have done just that for us!

Since Tobias has been involved with Eustis BJJ Academy we have seen vast improvement in many areas of life. I rarely see him angry anymore. He has fewer meltdowns and the ones he has are more easily redirected and short lived. He is able to focus on an activity better at home and at school. He is quite the social butterfly. On top of all that, he is learning appropriate social skills and trying new things. His new favorite is salad! Three months ago if you would have told me Tobi would be ordering salad I would have laughed at you and said "in your dreams". He is also more confident in who he is! He helps out with more chores around the house. In addition to all that His physical coordination has improved.

To the average person these milestones may seem mild or irrelevant, but to the parent of an autistic child we are ecstatic! We're thrilled when we achieve one baby step and now it's like we've run a marathon! Coaches Dave and Annie and Grappling for Life have blessed us beyond all measure. They have accepted the challenge and made my life much more manageable. They have provided stability for both of my children. They love and give of themselves unconditionally. They are not just a positive impact for me and my family. They are impacting many lives in our community. They take the time to

really get to know and love you! THEY ARE FAMILY and I am very pleased to have them as part our lives.

Sincerely,

Ralna L