

Getting tough

Parents' group lays down law

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TOUGHLOVE does not advocate or support kicking kids out of their homes. They give children options that protect their safety and the parent's responsibility.

TOUGHLOVE does not advocate or support physical or verbal abuse, in fact they work to get all anger out of confrontations between children and parents and deal with facts.

What TOUGHLOVE does is "whatever is in the best interest of the child, in the name of love, and sometimes that's tough," said Jan [redacted] a resource parent for the local TOUGHLOVE program.

Technically TOUGHLOVE is a support group for parents who are having problems with a child who is impossible, incorrigible, uncontrollable, addicted, abusive, in trouble with the law or school or is destroying the rest of his or her family.

The group helps parents develop the strength to stand by a contract, or set of rules to guide the child, said Scott [redacted] another resource parent.

Most of the parents who come to TOUGHLOVE meetings are "at wit's end," [redacted] said. They have already been through several programs or counselors. "They try to handle it themselves, they try to deny they have problems. The most difficult thing is just to go seek help, to go to the meetings."

Brandermill residents Scott and Seesie [redacted] were in just such a situation last year. Their 14-year-old son, the youngest of three children, a constant source of grief for their family. They found that he was an

alcoholic and had been drinking for two years.

"We had tried getting help through the schools, through the courts, we had tried everything. We were looking for answers, so we began getting books out of the library," said Scott [redacted]

After seeing the movie TOUGHLOVE they got a local phone number for the Virginia Federation for Drug Free Youth who got them in touch with other parents in the area.

"We had exhausted all other routes," said Scott [redacted] Finally they got in touch with Jan [redacted] who had worked with another area TOUGHLOVE program, formed their own group, and began meeting weekly in mid-November.

"Parents are here because their homelife is intolerable and they need help. They want to make changes and nobody likes changes so you have to be prepared for a crisis," said Seesie [redacted] "But sometimes that's the only thing that will work."

The process begins by setting up house rules. These revolve around behavior which the parent deems intolerable. Then they make a short list of the rules and the consequences of breaking the rules. The child is asked to read and sign the rules and they are posted in the house.

"We don't talk about punishment, but consequences. Actions have consequences. The rules are non-negotiable and when a rule is broken there is no anger, there is a set consequence and no pleading or changing," said Scott [redacted] "Society

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Toughlove group offers alternatives for teens

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has set rules you can't break, and so should a household."

When [redacted] had another TOUGHLOVE couple present the contract to her 15-year-old daughter four years ago she said she was astounded. "It's no longer mom's rules and dad's rules but *the* rules....A child has to choose to be a part of the family. I told her this was no different than the marriage contract her father and I entered into which told what we expected of each other."

Now, four years later after alcohol rehabilitation and several programs, [redacted] said she couldn't be prouder of her daughter, who now gives talks to other programs for problem kids.

"Our personalities are still the same, but now she doesn't try to get even with me or hate me. This bull-headed kid now has a very deep reservoir of caring for other people which I never thought she could have."

Coming to TOUGHLOVE doesn't guarantee any answers, said [redacted] and the [redacted] but it can give information and help to parents who are willing to work and make some changes and take a stand.

The [redacted] said they firmly believe their 14-year-old, who is now in an alcohol rehabilitation center, will come home to them, and when he does they feel sure that he will still need the TOUGHLOVE guidelines they will set down for him

in order to get through so get a job.

"I just wish we could have our son a contract at age 1 Scott [redacted]

The local TOUGHLOVE meets every Monday night 7 p.m. in the cafeteria at Joe Willis Hospital. For more information on the meetings call 74

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