

The *TOUGHLOVE*® program was founded by Phyllis and David York in 1972. The Yorks worked as family and youth counsellors in Pennsylvania for 13 years before they realised that while understanding and forgiveness may be commendable, when dealing with children who are constantly in trouble, this approach does not always work. This lesson was learnt through personal experience with their own children.

*TOUGHLOVE*® is a loving solution for families that are being torn apart by unacceptable adolescent behaviour. These young people may skip school, run away from home, abuse drugs or alcohol, get into trouble with the law, get involved with others only on their own terms, or act as though they are the only people to be considered when making decisions about their lives. *TOUGHLOVE*® encourages parents to allow their children to experience the natural and logical consequences of their actions. *TOUGHLOVE*® also teaches parents that constantly rescuing children from these consequences is not helping them to grow and mature. It is in fact hindering the growth of mature, responsible attitudes.

*TOUGHLOVE*® is tough on parents. It is recognised that it is hard work changing behaviour and habits that have developed over years and that we need the support of others to do this. Parents come to *TOUGHLOVE*® because they love their children enough to want to make positive changes in their own lives and in the lives of their children.

*TOUGHLOVE*® is not a parenting program. It is a crisis intervention program.

*TOUGHLOVE*® is a philosophy based on action. Parents join local *TOUGHLOVE*® groups for practical and emotional peer support. Parents provide understanding for one another without becoming involved in blaming. *TOUGHLOVE*® is non-judgmental. Where counselling or therapy is required, parents are referred to professionals while continuing to get support from the *TOUGHLOVE*® group.

*TOUGHLOVE*® is also confrontational. Parents are challenged to view themselves clearly, to examine their present behavioural responses and ideas and, where necessary, to make constructive changes. Practical solutions are provided to help change behaviour. It is accepted that the only people that we can change are ourselves and that others may, or may not, choose to change in response to the changes we make. Decisiveness and directness are encouraged. Parents are able to call upon other members of the group for practical support at any time. Members have been asked, at times, to take in children from other families and provide them with temporary shelter while a family tries to resolve a crisis.

*TOUGHLOVE*® recognises that it takes a lot of courage to ask for support and that asking is not a sign of weakness. It also requires a degree of commitment so that members give as well as receive. It is recognised that the best solutions to problems come from practical experience. People who have benefited from *TOUGHLOVE*® are asked to stay on and help others overcome their problems.

*TOUGHLOVE*® is a non-profit organisation offering self-help materials to parents, kids in trouble and professionals working with them. *TOUGHLOVE*® groups are not run by professionals. They are run by parents for parents. People in service roles in society may initiate groups but they only survive if the parents are committed to the group and to each other. For many people, *TOUGHLOVE*® provides an extended family of caring adults who are not only ready and willing to listen but who are also willing to become involved and remain involved.