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'Because I Love You': Support Group Connects Parents Raising Troubled Youth

"I found out in order for my kids to change, the first person that had to change was me"

By Kim Baldonado • Published November 26, 2017 • Updated on November 27, 2017 at 9:56 am



The parent support group "Because I Love You" helps parents connect with troubled teens. Kim Baldonado reports for the NBC4 News at 11 on Sunday, Nov. 26, 2017.

When faced with troubled youth, parents often don't know where to turn for help or simply can't afford it. The parent support group called [BILY](#) became that source for help. The group connects parents from different backgrounds who are facing the same issues.

Dennis Poncher started BILY, which stands for "Because I Love You," when he was faced with his own parenting issues.

He first found out his 15-year-old daughter was pregnant and shortly after he found out his son was in trouble.

"Two weeks later I got a call from my son's junior high school saying that the police were coming to arrest him. He was selling marijuana on campus and he was high," said Poncher.

He says, like many parents, he was in denial and thought he had the perfect children.

"Getting together with other parents who were having the same issues, they weren't judging me, and they weren't pointing the finger at me, and blaming me. It was a whole new thing. I felt free to share," Poncher said.

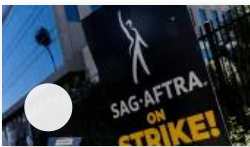
"I found out that in order for my kids to change, the first person that had to change was me," he said.

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Part of that change was starting the group called BILY.

"Because I Love You" stems from what "we say to our kids when we have to give them a reason why we're doing whatever we're doing," Poncher explained.

The group helps others with troubled children develop solid parenting skills. They meet weekly, it's open to anyone and it's completely free.

"Nobody gets paid, we're all volunteer parents who love the program," Poncher said.

That includes Jody Waxman, who credits BILY for helping her cope with her son's heroin addiction. She's now a group leader.

"People understood me and got my story and were there for me when I was afraid to talk to my family," Waxman said.

Both she and Poncher say they made the same mistake with their kids in being their friend instead of their parent.

"I needed to know who they were going out with, where they were going, I needed to set rules, and it wasn't a popularity contest," Poncher said. "If they didn't like me, then I was doing the job I was supposed to be doing."

BILY also offers a session for 12 to 21 year olds to help to enforce positive behavior.

"We are not a drug program, but we can't get away from drugs because it's running so rampant here," Poncher said.

BILY's leaders are encouraged by President Donald Trump's focus on the [opioid crisis](#), but they're still hoping for increased access to treatment programs. In the meantime, they want parents to know, support is available.

"There is some place to turn. There's a lot of help out there and there's a lot of free help out there," Waxman said.

BILY started in 1982 with 8 parents and has grown to 24 locations across the country and Canada.

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