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Parents Speak Out

Transcripts of videos of parents who struggled with the decision to send their children to a residential program. Their children attended one of Aspen Education Group's therapeutic schools.

“I’ll Miss Her/Him”

Father, seated, speaks to the camera: “Some people said, ‘gee, don’t you miss her?’ And I said, well, I miss her the way she used to be, I don’t miss her by what she became. And so that is why [I sent her away to school], and [for] the relief that when I go to bed every night that I know that she is safe. [It] is worth it for [her] being gone.”

“They’ll Hate Me”

Mother, seated, speaks to the camera: “In my case we were skidding along in the middle, and suddenly you fall off the edge and you’re looking for a place to send your child away to. And, you don’t believe you’re doing it. And you’re scared because you don’t know if it’s going to be okay. And people that are helping you say you’re doing it for [the child’s] benefit, but you think they’re going to hate you and you don’t know what you are doing. I was also scared to death that she was going to hate my guts forever. And that was....those two things were equally difficult: I failed and she’s going to hate me.

Fade out/fade in

Father, seated, speaks to the camera: “While there may be, *will be*, I’m sure, temporary resentment when you take away their freedom, my experience in seeing now two sets of kids come through two different therapeutic programs is that the first word they learn, after the kids buy into the system, is “grateful.” And the kids are grateful. So my encouragement to the parents would be, don’t short change them by giving them inadequate treatment.”

Beyond Guilt

Mother, seated, is speaking to the camera: “I failed. I failed as a parent. I had worked very hard to be a good one, and I was involved, and I went to the meetings, and I had meetings, and I had a therapist, and we had tutors, and I loved her but I wasn’t a good disciplinarian and I wasn’t good at ‘tough love’.

Fade out/fade in

Father, seated, is speaking to the camera: “Guilt is the number one [thing], you blame yourself for making mistakes and being a poor parent. You see your friends, their daughter is not going to have to leave and they’re doing quite well and what did you do wrong? What did you do wrong? Why did she reach this point where she has to go away into this situation? But then, you wake up. You say ‘Well, what difference does that make, what you did wrong?’ Maybe you didn’t do anything wrong. And what you did do wrong, maybe it wasn’t to the level that caused this to happen. But in any event you have to realize that even if you did make mistakes you have to go to a different level and correct them and get her back on an even keel. You have to forget about what you did wrong and what you can do to correct the situation.”

Fade out/fade in

Father, seated, is speaking to the camera: “You have to accept the fact that whatever stimuli, whatever problems, whatever deficiencies, whatever pressures have led your particular child to run off the tracks for some reason, it’s not your fault. Which is not to say that your behavior may not have contributed to it. But it can’t all be. You’re not powerful enough for it all to be your fault. It’s multi-factorial. And so you just need to get over the fact that you’re a lousy parent or that you’re a super parent that can solve it all, and accept the fact that help is sometimes required. I mean, you have no trouble accepting the fact when you’re kid has appendicitis that you can’t solve the problem. This is a different condition and it needs different kinds of specialists.”

“Can I Afford It?”

Father, seated, is speaking to the camera: “They asked me, they said, ‘Jeez, that’s a lot of money you pay. How can you afford it?’ I said, ‘Well, quite frankly, it’s a big sacrifice for all of us; my wife, my older son who’s in college. But if someone came to you and said, ‘Look, your daughter’s dying but there’s an operation that can save her, wouldn’t you get the money? Yes! And she was dying. So, I got the money. And I would pay twice as much, if that’s what it took.

Fade out/fade in

Mother, seated, is speaking to the camera: “When you’re first thinking about sending your kid away to a program, unless they’re really messing up, you can’t afford it. If

they're not really messing up, you can't afford it, because it's expensive. And then one day, you have no choice. One day, you see your kid and you think, 'Do I want this child to have the kind of life that I envision for them?' I can't make it happen, it's not happening. I don't care what I have to do, I am going to get them the help they need and suddenly, the money doesn't matter. And you're going to get it, you're going to find it, you're going to borrow it. That's not going to become your consideration anymore. And it's worth every penny. I never thought my daughter would go to college, and she may not, but we are going to be involved in another program after this one, for young adults, because Sarah's over 18 now. She's finishing her program at SunHawk voluntarily. And she is willing to consider another program for young adults, voluntarily. I would not be thinking about sending her anywhere now, if she hadn't figured out that you have to participate in your success. You have to do the work, you have to, you have to do it, you know. I used to think that I could make Sara be okay. Well, only Sara can make herself be okay. And the program gave her the tools. And she found self-esteem. It's worth everything."

“The Hardest Decision Ever”

Father, seated, is speaking to the camera: “It was very tough, doing it, sending her away. And when we first broached the subject of sending her away, her mother was leaning towards it and I said, ‘Well, I can’t do it, at this point. I’m not prepared to send her away. I think we can still work at it and we can do this and we can do that.’ And I said, ‘I can’t do it.’ And her mother wasn’t overly excited about doing it and didn’t want to do it either. So that’s all it took. So she says, ‘Okay, then we won’t, we’ll try something else.’ But then as things got worse and worse and as everything we tried did not work, then we reached a point where, we tried everything else, she has to, we have to try this. I’m sitting there in my room and I thought, ‘What am I doing?’ I mean, I’m sending my daughter away; I’m having these strangers take her?’ And my son comes in there and says, ‘I know what you’re thinking. But if you don’t want her like this forever, you cannot back down. She’s got to go.’ I said, ‘Okay.’ It was a hard battle and it was a hard battle sending her away. But, it ended up we did it. And the program that she finally got into was a complete, so far, success.’

“It’s Much Worse Than You Think”

Father, seated, is speaking to the camera: “In most cases, your kid is much worse than you think. You typically make excuses for your child because you love them, you kind of feel that they’re not that involved in whatever it is they’re involved in; drugs, sex, rock-n-roll. And because of that and because the idea of parting from your child and having limited access to your child is so abhorrent to every parent, you tend to jump at short-term band-aid fixes. It’s not going to be enough, and I think you have to be extremely aggressive, you need to. You need to believe in the system. You need to accept the fact that it’s bigger than you can deal with and you have to give up the control of your kid to someone else for a short period of time so that they can get back onto what you would consider to be the straight and narrow. And make no mistake about it, you think *you’re* in pain; these kids are in much worse pain. They

are suffering. No kid wants to be out of control. And all these kids feel totally out of control. All these kids have incredibly low self-esteem. And 9 times out of 10, their behavior is a cry for help veiled in and expressed in the only way they know how to do it.”