

Strengthening Families program starts tonight

By **ELIZABETH MARTIN**
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A little bit of love and setting limits can go a long way.

The Strengthening Families Program, **Claremont** which starts

Tuesday at the Claremont Middle School, gives a foundation for parents to show love and set limits to keep their kids from risky behaviors.

"It's a balance between the two that becomes very important at this age, because it's a transitional age, moving into middle school," said Gail Kennedy, extension educator, family and consumer resources for the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension.

The 10 to 14 year olds work on goal setting, understanding parental stress, discussing cigarettes, alcohol and drug use and peer pressures. Parents work on warm, nurturing and firm parenting techniques and how to talk to their children about smoking, drinking and drug use.

The two-hour program from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., splits up the youth and parents for the first hour then brings the families

together for role playing in the second hour. To sign up for this program or future programs call (603) 863-9200.

"It's really a fun, enjoyable atmosphere, but there's also some good work going on in these groups," Kennedy said.

Teaching pre-teens to early teenagers concrete skills is an important step in future planning, said Nancy Berry, extension educator for the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension in Newport. The program talks to students about scholarships and a college education to get them focused on a positive outlook without negative behaviors.

"The more kids see a goal for the future, the more it is easier to resist the negative peer pressures," Berry said.

The program also works on strengthening the bond between families by letting parents realize they are experiencing universal issues and kids to identify with their parents.

"Families don't take the time to have fun together and this gives them two hours to take time together and talk," said Berry.

When those conversations start, the families might surprise each other.

"It's amazing how much kids understand what's going on with parents," she said.

The techniques are a part of an international program originally started at Ohio State University. The University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension runs programs throughout the state.

"It gives parents the confidence they need, but it also gives kids the confidence they need to make good decisions," Berry said.

The programs are "evidence based," and have been evaluated to show their effectiveness, Kennedy said.

The course runs for seven weeks and offers a free dinner before each session at 5:30 p.m.

Another incentive for families that attend six or more sessions get a \$25 MasterCard. There are also door prizes and free child care every week. The funding for the free program is provided to Sullivan County by New Hampshire Division of Public Health Services, Bureau of Prevention Services, Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Abuse Prevention Services.

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