



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Raising Worry-Free Girls – Part 2

**Guest(s):** Sissy Goff

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**Dr. James Dobson:** Well, hello everyone. I'm James Dobson, and you're listening to Family Talk, a listener-supported ministry. In fact, thank you so much for being part of that support for James Dobson Family Institute.

**Roger Marsh:** This is Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, and I'm Roger Marsh. So glad you've joined us today. We are bringing you the second half of a very important conversation about anxiety in girls of all ages, from pre-adolescent all the way through the teenage years. Our guest, Dr. Tim Clinton, has been leading this conversation with our new ministry friend, licensed family therapist and Christian counselor Sissy Goff. Now, as you know, Dr. Clinton is the resident authority on mental health and relationships here at the JDFI. He is also the president of the American Association of Christian Counselors. He's a licensed professional counselor and a licensed marriage and family therapist, as well.

Joining him, as I mentioned, is author and licensed professional counselor Sissy Goff. What a special lady she is, with such a big heart and a smart approach to helping our kids. Today, these two mental health experts will continue discussing Sissy's new book, called *Raising Worry-Free Girls*. Here now is Dr. Tim Clinton to introduce his guest on this edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

**Dr. Tim Clinton:** Sissy Goff is the director of child and adolescent counseling at Daystar Counseling Ministries in Nashville, Tennessee, where she works alongside of her counseling assistant, pet therapist, Lucy. We heard about her yesterday on the broadcast. So much fun.

**Sissy Goff:** Yeah.

**Dr. Tim Clinton:** Almost 30 years, three decades, she's been helping girls and their parents find confidence in who they are and hope in who God is making them to be, both as individuals and as families. Sissy is a sought after speaker for parenting events and the author of 12 books, including the best-selling *Raising Worry-Free Girls*, and *Braver, Stronger, Smarter*, and a new release, something we've been talking about, too, *Brave*. If you don't have these resources, you need to get them, especially if you have girls in your family. She's also a member, I like this, of the American Association of Christian Counselors. A little organization I know a little something about. Sissy is a regular contributor to various podcasts and

publications. She has her own podcast called *Raising Boys and Girls*, and an amazing website, [Raisingboysandgirls.com](http://Raisingboysandgirls.com). Such a delight to have you back. Thank you again for joining us.

Sissy Goff: Thank you so much, I'm so honored to be back with you. Yesterday was so fun.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Let's pick up from where we left off yesterday. Sissy, I wanted to ask you, I don't know what it is, but prior generations, maybe there wasn't such an emphasis on performance and peers and friendships and so much more, but it seems like that's at the heart of a lot of what we're talking about here, especially with young girls.

Sissy Goff: I think it is. The pressure has risen exponentially in the last few years that girls feel. And some of that is external pressure, and a lot of it for girls I think is internal pressure. I will sit with parents and girls often and the girls will say, "My parents want me to make straight A's." And the parents will come in and say, "We don't really care what her grades are." But she has somehow internalized this voice of pressure and decided it's theirs, but is taking it on for herself.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. And I want to do this next piece carefully because it's so important, and that's the whole issue of families tend to reproduce themselves. We often talk about multi-generational flow or transmission. So in other words, as counselors, we take a look at the family system and look at patterns that have, quote, established themselves throughout their history. Whether we call it a family genogram exercise, what have you, but Sissy, you know that as you do that, you tend to see anxiety flow through a family. Would you begin that conversation for us and help us understand what you often see behind that closed door in a counseling office?

Sissy Goff: Well, I'll tell you a story that feels very indicative of what it is like with kids. So, if you go to the Raising Boys and Girls website, you can see photos of Daystar, where I work, and it is ... I mean, honestly, if you were going to ever have a counseling practice, it's about as cute as it can get. It's a yellow house with a white picket fence and we have a porch swing and the offices look like living room. And, like we talked about, we have all these dogs on staff. And so when a child is coming in for their first appointment, I know Daystar itself is going to do a lot of the work.

So, I had this girl who came in, and we didn't mention this yesterday yet, but the average age of onset used to be eight for anxiety, now we're seeing it drop to six. But this little girl was seven, so she was right in the middle, and I knew from looking at our computer program that we used called Therabill that she was coming in for anxiety before I even met her. And so, my office is upstairs at Daystar and I came down the stairs of the Daystar house and I could tell across the lobby which one she was. You can tell from having this conversation with me, but I have an enormous smile. And so I smiled and waved at her and walked over and said, "Hey, I'm so excited that you're here. I want to give you a tour of

the Daystar house and then we're going to go upstairs and meet my little dog, Lucy, who is going to be thrilled to get to meet you."

And this adorable little girl popped up to follow me on the tour, and her mom grabbed her arm and said, "Do you feel comfortable with that?" And it had never occurred to her, "I don't think that I shouldn't feel comfortable in a counseling practice." Until that moment. And her sweet, very well-intentioned ... Let me say very well-intentioned mom, followed us on the whole tour and then, when I was with her daughter, rather than sitting downstairs, she sat on this uncomfortable chair right outside of my office. And so, when I finished with the daughter, I sent her out and I brought her mom in and said, just like you would say. I said, "Tell me about your family history. Do you happen to have any anxiety in your family?" And she said, "Yes, I had anxiety when I was growing up and my parents never understood what was going on with me, so I'm determined to know what's going on with her."

And I think that is really reflective of this generation of parents who not only weren't talking about emotions and mental health when we were growing up. We weren't passing feelings charts around the dinner table saying, "Tell me three things you felt today." So misunderstood growing up, and now I think parents are almost overeducated in this way that there's so much pressure on them to get it right and to make it look beautiful on social media. And so, if as a parent you have anxiety, your kids are seven times more likely to deal with it.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And you know the sad piece here, and that's this. Adults understand what it feels like to be anxious. We often forget that our children are experiencing the same signs and symptoms, too, and they've got it bottled up. And they don't know how to express it or what to do with it. And so it comes out in a lot of different ways. And we often as adults misread the expression of their anxiety and sometimes think they're being unruly, behavioral problems.

Sissy Goff: Disrespectful.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah, you bet.

Sissy Goff: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And we come back at them shutting it down when what we need to do is say, "Hey, wait a second." In our world of counseling, especially around the issue of trauma, the language is changing. It's now not, "What's wrong with that kid?" It's become more of a, "What's happened to that child?" And Sissy, in that mindset, I think getting parents to begin to see that in the moment with their own kids. If they picked up on some of these signs and symptoms and they realize, "Hey, wait a second. We've got a problem." You don't just shout it down. You don't just control it and think it's going to go away. No. There could be, again, a lot of factors feeding the anxiety in your child's life. It could be biological. It could be neurochemistry. It could be a lot of different things that

are making them get amped up. And so, Sissy, that kind of awareness and then seeing what is happening in us and how that's flowing through us into our kids becomes critical.

Sissy Goff: It does. That's a great word. It becomes critical. And critical that we deal with it ourselves, because I think when we haven't, our love for those kids becomes more about rescuing them and trying to prevent them from feeling this feeling, rather than what all of us would know who have worked with kids with anxiety is, to work through their fear, they have to do the scary thing.

Dr. Tim Clinton: They do. Sissy, what's the long-term implication of anxiety in a child?

Sissy Goff: Anxiety I don't think really ever goes away because it is so based on our temperament, it's based on the fact that we're conscientious and bright, and kids are all of those things. And so what I see it do is that it's like Whack-A-Mole and it comes up as one topic early, and then it shifts to another topic, and then it moves to another topic. And I think without an understanding, it's only going to get worse. Without learning the tools to deal with it, it's going to get bigger every time it comes back. Whereas, when we empower kids with tools to fight it, it can get smaller, where they understand, "Oh, I'm feeling some worry and anxiety. This is normal. Here are the things I know to do to make a difference." And so I think looking at it that way and, like we talked about in the introduction of yesterday, I'm seeing anxiety that's left untreated that's spilling over into depression, because I think there's a sense of, "I'm so tired of feeling this way. This is miserable. Nothing's changing this for me." And then it moves into the realm of depression.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Let's stay with that just for a moment, because we use a word called comorbidity.

Sissy Goff: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: In other words, you're seeing multiple issues now surface in a child's life.

Sissy Goff: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So often, when a child is anxious, you're right, there's a real strong potential you're going to see clinical depression come with it, too. Explain again to us why that happens.

Sissy Goff: Well, I think it's the same as someone with a chronic illness. We often see comorbidity between chronic illness and depression, and it's just that sense of, this is never going to go away. I'm going to wake up every morning feeling like I have this weight on my chest, feeling like I'm incapable. Everyone else is doing better than I am, succeeding in all these spaces, making the better grades, doing better in sports, creating the more beautiful art, whatever it is. It's never going

to change. And it's that sense of hopelessness and resignation to the state of things internally that I think causes the depression.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You're listening to Family Talk, a division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, co-host here at Family Talk. Our special guest is Sissy Goff. She is a professional counselor. Actually, she's the director of child and adolescent counseling at Daystar Counseling Ministries in Nashville, Tennessee. We joked a little bit about her counseling assistant, a little dog named Lucy. It's just amazing by the way how that kind of therapy really impacts work with kid. But she is the author of multiple books, I think 12 books in total, and some special books that we're talking about today that you ought to put in your library called *Raising Worry-Free Girls*, another book called *Braver, Stronger, and Smarter*, and a new release, just for teen girls, called *Brave*. Excellent piece of work.

Sissy, in this, I want to go back to families just for a moment. In attachment theory, which is really, in psychology, known as relationship psychology, best easy way to understand it. In it, they often talk about developing relationship styles. It's about how we do or how we don't do relationships, okay? One of those attachment styles is called ambivalent. In other words, an anxious style. In that, there's this internal working model or this mindset, if you will, where I have a poor view of self and an overinflated view of others. And often, anxiety is associated there because I can't ever do enough, be enough, or get control enough in my world, and the sad thing is I don't think I have the skills or capability of doing that. And that's what makes me go insane in my mind.

Sissy Goff: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And so, think of a young girl growing up and battling with that in her mind. And helping calm that, if you will, and get that thinking straightened out, that's a lot of work.

Sissy Goff: It's a lot of work.

Dr. Tim Clinton: How important now are mom and dad? Because both of them have influence and power here in her life in that area.

Sissy Goff: Yes. And I love that you brought that up because one of the things that surprised me in the research was that, often, not always, please don't hear me say always, but often, in kids who are anxious, there is a lack of parental warmth that I think feeds that attachment issue. And, when we're thinking about parents who are aware of their own anxiety, the one group of parents that I sit with that I don't think are as aware as often, and I'm calling myself out on this, I think are the perfectionists and the Type A personalities. And we aren't as aware sometimes that we're anxious because we're so productive in light of it. We just move fast and we get a lot done, rather than feeling the anxiety well up. And so I think to lean into that, even more importantly with kids, is something

both parents can do. And to speak to the importance of parents, one of the other things I read. There's so many amazing things out there in terms of research, but is that, in a two parent household, there's often an anxious parent and a non-anxious parent, and the non-anxious parent is dismissed typically. They're not paying attention, they're not listening. They didn't even notice.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Aloof, you don't really care. Yeah.

Sissy Goff: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Just going through life. Yeah. Don't ask them to get something done or we'd never go on vacation.

Sissy Goff: Exactly. Exactly. And I think the non-anxious parent, and I feel like, moms and dads, y'all just bear with me for a second. I mean this so graciously, but often, it's the mom. Every once in a while I'll meet with a dad who's the anxious parent, but often, it's the mom. And your kids, sons and daughters, need his voice in those moments, because I think the non-anxious parent, but particularly dads, we women carry an intensity with us in everything that we do that I don't think men do as naturally. I think you all have this sense of lightheartedness and playfulness about you that is so good for kids who are anxious.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Dr. Dobson said the most important relationship that a girl has that impacts who she will choose and what she will seek in a romantic relationship is the relationship that she has with her dad. Sissy, what do you see and how significant, again, is dad? In that affirmation and that ability to, quote, "bring the thermostat down," if you will, and calm or deescalate.

Sissy Goff: Yes. I think dads, I love that quote, and I would 100% agree with that. And I think in terms of anxious kids, dads do have an ability to deescalate. I mean, I think six times a day in my office the mom will say, "Well, she mostly does this with you." And the dad will say, "Well, she pretty much only does it with you." And I think girls feel so connected, and seen, and known, and safe in a lot of ways. Not that they don't feel safe with their dads, but I think by their mom that often the moms get the worst of their behavior, whereas there is typically a little more respect for dad, a little more healthy fear, I think, that, "I can't lose it to the same degree with my dad."

And with those moms what we're seeing is that rather than developing coping strategies, these kids just let their moms become the coping strategy. So, I'm going to explode all over you, you're going to eventually explode back at me, and then we're going to get all this emotion out. And I just don't think girls feel the same freedom in a great way with their dads.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Sissy, with the time that we have left, I want to talk about home and we've got a real challenge going on. I've listened to the broadcast for the last two days now

and I'm thinking, "Okay, my daughter, we need to do something." Can you talk to us, first of all, about, when is it significant to consider professional counseling? And I'm going to take our listeners on a journey of what happens there and what the goals are and how it becomes really a gift to our kids.

Sissy Goff: When I wrote *Raising Worry-Free Girls*, I joked about, the book was meant to work people like me out of a job, because it is basically ... I mean, it's full of cognitive behavioral therapy tools, which are kind of the most widely researched tools in terms of working with anxiety. And my intention was, there are some really practical things you can do at home, to try at home first, and then, if it feels like that's not making a difference, then, at that time, I do feel like it's helpful to seek professional counseling.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And so, Sissy, when a mom and dad bring their daughter in, I know as a counselor you're going to do an assessment up front and try to ask yourself, "What are the factors that are feeding this?"

Sissy Goff: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: "Can it be biology?" Because people are going to ask, "Are there certain people who may need some type of medication or something?" Just because they're going through a season of hormonal change or what have you.

Sissy Goff: Right. Yes. Absolutely. And we talked about the age of onset. I see a huge spike in girls somewhere around 11, when they're starting their periods, and I think hormonally it can send them right back into an anxious place. And yes, I mean, I typically recommend that families start with counseling and then, if I'm, as the therapist, in three to four months, if I'm not seeing any movement, then I'm going to often recommend that they do pursue medication, because there are times it's just hijacked our brains to the degree that it's become a chemical issue.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. And in that journey you talked about cognitive behavioral strategies. I want to help our audience understand what that means. So a lot of what you're focusing in on is, what's happening with my thought life and getting it under control and getting rid of that negative thinking, learning to do thought stopping, learning to do thought insertion type things. "Hey, think on these things," is what the Apostle Paul talked about in Philippians 8. What does that look like in a session with a 12, 13-year-old girl?

Sissy Goff: Well, it's a little bit different. But I think the biggest way that I will work on it with kids is to give the worry a name. And so calling it something. With younger kids we'll call it the Worry Monster, unless they're worried about monsters, and then that doesn't help, or, in the teenage book I called it the Worry Whisperer because that's what it feels like. He just whispers these things. And so thought stopping in that scenario is understanding, "Oh, the Worry Monster is back. He

always lies to me, he's never right, and he's always out to get me, and I'm not going to listen to him anymore."

And in the beginning, I think we role-play that with kids. So I'll do a lot of role-playing. "Okay, you be the Worry Monster, I'm going to be you, and here's what I'm going to say." And with younger ones, they can even use words like stupid that they're not allowed to use in any other place but with the Worry Monster. And so practicing that. And then, obviously, we want to move towards replacing the thoughts with positive things. And I think even that verse you just mentioned, Scripture memorization is a great thing for kids to do to help them replace the thought with something that's good.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Sissy, I wanted to work in the word relationship here for a moment.

Sissy Goff: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: We know that the quality of our relationship with our children even impacts the effectiveness of our discipline strategies and more. That, if you can get 20 minutes or so a day and you're in their world and you're hanging out with them in that world. And what starts taking place there, it's incredible because you begin to learn things about them that's significant. Eventually, if they feel safe or the moment's right, they'll begin to share with you maybe an episode that happened at school or where they're struggling with something or maybe they just feel overwhelmed with loss in their life, or that breakup and what it did to their heart really, they couldn't express it. Maybe they're just locked in. That doesn't mean they're bad kids, it just means they're on a journey.

Help us understand how you've seen that relationship piece become a real asset and a strength in family systems to help curb anxiety.

Sissy Goff: Yes. Well, your kids want to please you. No matter how old they are, no matter how much they roll their eyes, they still want to please you and want to be connected with you. And I had an adolescent girl who told me one time that her mom was more nurturing to her when she had panic attacks than any other time. And I think she allowed herself to go to more extreme emotion and didn't do the work to stop it on the front end because she wanted to be connected to her mom. And so I tell parents a lot, "Whatever you pay the most attention to is what's most reinforced." They need us to pay attention, they need us to connect with them, eyeball to eyeball, down on their level, being a student of the things they love. And that has as much ability to help them learn to regulate their emotions as anything else we can do.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And we hear so often, "Well, wait a second. My kids, I don't know, they don't want to hang out with me anymore," et cetera. But, boy, I'll tell you what. Thematically, if you look at parent-teen relationships, the number one thing that still makes kids happy is a great relationship with mom and/or dad. What a fascinating discussion we've had. This whole piece on stress and anxiety and our



girls, it's so important. Maybe you've got a mom or dad out there listening right now. I'd like you to encourage them and maybe they're in the throes of this right now. Where can they learn more about you and how to go deeper here and maybe take some courageous, bold steps on saying, "Hey, you know what? Not in our house anymore. For her sake and ours," everybody's sanity, if you will. But in a good way, you and I know that the beauty or the gift of doing that very thing.

Sissy Goff: Yes. Yes. My favorite story about ... We always have the question, "How do I get my kids to go to counseling?" And my favorite story was a kid who said to me, "My mom told me that her biggest job was to build my team. And so she had people who were helping with my body at my doctor's office, she had people who were helping with my mind at school, and she said, 'Of course, I'm going to have someone who helps with your heart and your emotions, and that's why we're going to counseling.'" Beautiful story. This is one of the things I get to do for you is provide you with another voice who's cheering you on. In a really simplistic way, I think that's what we're doing is we're getting to cheer kids on.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And, if they show up at Sissy's office, they might have Lucy jump up on their lap and play a little bit.

Sissy Goff: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Our special guest, again has been Sissy Goff. Fascinating discussion on fear, and stress, and worry, and anxiety with our girls. Again, she's the director of child and adolescent counseling at Daystar Counseling Ministries in Nashville, Tennessee. Her website again, you need to go up and check out the resources that are up there, but it's [Raisingboysandgirls.com](http://Raisingboysandgirls.com). Again, I want to recommend your books, *Raising Worry-Free Girls*, another one, *Braver, Stronger, Smarter*, and by the way, her new release for teenage girls, it's called *Brave*. If you don't have those resources, get them. And what a gift, again, of conversation together. I love your love for today's generations, and God help us to raise up Godly, secure, strong women for such a time as this.

Sissy, on behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife Shirley, the team at Family Talk, thank you again for joining us. So look forward to future broadcasts with you, and God bless you on the amazing work you guys are doing. Thank you for doing this.

Sissy Goff: Thank you so much.

Roger Marsh: And that was the conclusion of an insightful two-part conversation on the topic of anxiety in girls. You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. For the past two days, our cohost, Dr. Tim Clinton, has been joined by author and licensed professional counselor Sissy Goff. They've explored Sissy's new book, *Raising Worry-Free Girls*, and what a valuable conversation it has been. If you are interested in learning more about Sissy Goff, her many books, including workbooks for anxious girls and teens, visit [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk).

When you're there, you can also listen to any part of these past two days of programming that you might have missed, or share these episodes with someone you think might be interested in this topic.

Again, our web address is [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk). Well, we're all out of time for today. Thanks so much for listening to and supporting the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I hope you'll join us again next time for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, have a great weekend.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.