



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Children and Stress - Part 1

Guest(s): Dr. Archibald Hart

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Roger Marsh: It's no secret that stress is a part of life for adults. Everyone knows it, especially when it comes to dealing with finances or work or relationships or even good things like the family. But you know our kids also deal with their own stress and anxiety from the pressures of life as well. It is a sad reality that more and more children must manage ever-increasing demands in today's world, and many kids are even battling depression, even suicidal thoughts, and they may have friends who are struggling with these challenges as well. Research now shows that stress has damaging effects on a developing child's mental, physical, and emotional health. As parents and grandparents, we must safeguard the wellbeing of our kids and grandkids and limit the amount of stress in their lives.

Welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. On today's classic program, we're going to hear from Dr. Archibald Hart, who is a very good friend of Dr. Dobson for over 40 years. Arch was on the program with Doctor many times. And on today's and tomorrow's programs, you're going to hear these two clinical psychologists unpack the different things that stress kids out. You'll not want to miss a moment of either of these insightful conversations. Now, since this program was originally recorded several years ago, we should point out that Dr. Arch Hart has since gone home to be with the Lord. He was just 89 years old at the time of his passing. However, the wisdom from Dr. Dobson and Dr. Hart is timeless. Their profound insights have been so helpful to so many parents over the years, including myself. I know when my kids were just entering high school, one of the first books I read on adolescence and stress was from Dr. Archibald Hart, and one of his interviews with Dr. Dobson really helped me understand why my kids were more stressed out than I thought they were or than I thought they should be.

Now in this classic interview, Dr. Hart and Dr. Dobson will break down the reasons kids are dealing with so much stress in the first place. They'll also explain how family life and peer pressure can be so damaging to children. Dr. Arch Hart certainly left a lasting legacy in the area of child psychology. He was a bestselling author of over 35 books and also a board certified psychopharmacologist. Dr. Hart worked at Fuller Theological Seminary as the dean for the School of Psychology and later served as Dean Emeritus as well as Professor Emeritus. Before his retirement, he taught classes at the seminary for the Doctor of Ministry program. Dr. Arch Hart has joined his wife Kathleen in heaven. Together, their legacy included three grown daughters and many, many grandchildren. Let's listen into this classic edition of Family Talk right now featuring Dr. Archibald Hart and our own Dr. James Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, let's talk about stress in your child. The notion of childhood as carefree and stress-free is really a popular myth today, isn't it?

Dr. Archibald Hart: It's a thing of the past. There was a time when you could view childhood as a very special time of life when you weren't bothered with the world, its cares, its troubles, but that's gone. And increasingly trauma, catastrophe. Increasingly, we are seeing life getting tough for kids.

Dr. James Dobson: It's getting tough for all of us.

Dr. Archibald Hart: It's getting tough for all of us, but the children are not escaping that toughness.

Dr. James Dobson: And yet parents often don't recognize the signs of stress in their kids.

Dr. Archibald Hart: Part of the reason is because they look for stress in the wrong places, Jim. They're looking for stress in some of the more serious of life's traumas, when in fact the pace of life, what we call the fast track child, is perhaps the most stressed child of all. The pressure is on children to perform, to be something special, to be super people. And out of that context, I think most of the destructive stress we see is coming.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, let's explore that just a little further. Most parents think of a stressful situation for a child growing out of divorce, death of a parent, one of those extremely traumatic things that the child will remember forever, but there's just an awful lot of stress in the routine experiences of living.

Dr. Archibald Hart: In everyday living, in the many expectations we lay on our kids, on parents who expect children to perform superbly in the school setting, in parents who want to give their children the best they can, but then over program their kids. To

such an extent that there's no time, there's no room in a child's life for recovery. And we are seeing increasingly the signs of serious stress disorder emerging in younger and younger children.

Dr. James Dobson: One of the sources of that stress that I've observed more now than when I started writing, was this get them started early and give them a headstart on life. And really make something out of them, a philosophy. So that you try to get them reading by three and you try to get them into good music and literature or some kind of athletic something or other, and you're really driving those kids towards some kind of goal when in fact childhood itself ought to meander a little bit.

Dr. Archibald Hart: There should be some lost moments, some bi-path meadows in childhood. Now, I'm not saying that one should not hold out high expectations for one's children. I'm not saying that one should not give them the best exposure that you can, but it's got to be balanced. And I think that part of the problem is that we do not balance that pressure. We don't teach children how to relax. We only teach them how to work. When they are relaxing, when they're taking things a little easy, when they're just lying on a bed listening to some music, we go at em and say, get off the bed. There are things to be done. You shouldn't sit around. Life's passing you by. Set balance.

Dr. James Dobson: Saturday morning, the 13-year-old sleeps in, it's 10:30 and the parent is just gnawing her tongue over it. And yeah, that 13 year old maybe ought to sleep till 10:30.

Dr. Archibald Hart: Yes, that may be what that child needs best to prevent the development of stress disease. Because the whole theme of the book, the whole theme of this program has to do with the fact that serious stress disease in later life has its origin in childhood. Stress doesn't begin in your twenties or thirties or forties. It begins in your tens and maybe your teens.

Dr. James Dobson: It occurs to me Arch, that our kids are a whole lot like us. We live in a high stress world where we can hardly breathe. Sometimes the to-do list is so long. And it's really kind of naive to think that our kids are immune to that and aren't caught up in it.

Dr. Archibald Hart: They're not going along for the ride. Of course, they're going along with the ride. And there are many factors that create stressful environments for children. There's the child, him or herself. There is the environment, there is the family. And it's wonderful to be talking about stress in the context of the family, because I think that that is the arena in which most stress occurs. And if the

family unit is not a functioning, efficient, warm, loving, caring unit, I think that stress there is going to be more serious on that child than anywhere else.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, before we look at the specific sources of stress and how we might deal with them, let's go back to the point we were making earlier that many parents don't recognize that their kids are under stress. What are some of the signs of stress? Let's break them into two categories, physical signs and emotional signs. Because really the emotional stress produces physical consequences. What are they?

Dr. Archibald Hart: Yeah. Well, some of the physical consequences of stress in children, you see the disturbances of the stomach, the tummy, tummy ache. The children complaining all the time about, "Oh, my tummy hurts." And often we say to a child, "You're imagining that." Or, "Just get off that kick." When in fact it could be a very, very important signal. In the area of sleep, for example, sleeplessness, children having difficulty going to bed. Physical symptoms would also include such things as headaches, frequent headaches beginning to come. So there are a number of these physical symptoms of stress that parents need to be attending to. I mean, fidgetiness restlessness as anxiety levels go up.

Dr. James Dobson: I've even read recently that elevated cholesterol levels in childhood and elevated blood pressure and other symptoms that you think of as being related to adult experience also relate to kids.

Dr. Archibald Hart: That's right. And the more serious of the physical consequences of stress is the emergence earlier in life now of heart disease through the blocking of the arteries. The autopsies of young children killed in car accidents and so on is showing increasingly high levels of fatty deposits in the arteries. Now, that should not be in young children. I mean, if the child's environment is what it should be, we shouldn't see the evidence of that severe stress reaction.

Dr. James Dobson: I get angry when we talk like this, because and I've said this on the air before, but how lousy that we've allowed such an uncomfortable world to be developed or to evolve here for children. I mean, it ought to be a safe place for kids of all things. I mean, if we want to do that to ourselves as adults, that's one thing. But kids just go through a really difficult time trying to grow up today.

Dr. Archibald Hart: I was reflecting at the time I was writing the book on my own childhood. The worst violence I ever saw was another kid, get a bloody nose from someone who gave him a punch.

Dr. James Dobson: Why'd you hit him?

Dr. Archibald Hart: Why did I hit him? Yeah. But the average child today doesn't see bloody noses. Sees murders, sees crime of the order of which I never would've dreamt of as a child, and that stuff has got to be carried home by that child and become a part of their fear system and their emotional makeup. And so we get these physical symptoms. Then there are the psychological symptoms, depression marked increase in depression in children.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, let's stop with that one. How does a parent recognize depression in a child? Because he didn't often say, I'm depressed today. How does that look?

Dr. Archibald Hart: And the child doesn't go around crying or being sad as we would typically see it in the adult. But it shows up in children often with increased irritability. Suddenly the tolerance for frustration is down.

Dr. James Dobson: Volatile personality.

Dr. Archibald Hart: Explosive, very low tolerance for any pressure blowing up a lot. You see it in marked drop in energy level. They lie around a lot. They're not sleeping, but they just don't do anything and this profound fatigue and that really is clinically for depression is one of the more important symptoms.

Dr. James Dobson: And sleep disturbance again.

Dr. Archibald Hart: And then again, we see the sleep disturbance, and then of course we get anxiety problems escalating with increased stress. Up goes the level of anxiety, again, going back to the physical and manifestation of stress with increased stress, the immune system becomes compromised, and so kids get sick more often. Kid is always getting a cold, always getting the flu, and parents need to be alert to the fact that that could be a sign that the child is under too much stress.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, the nature of stress on children varies tremendously with their age. Preschoolers have a whole different world than a 13-year-old. Talk about the stress through the years.

Dr. Archibald Hart: Starting perhaps, before the child goes to school. A lot of the stress there is associated with the comfort of the home with things like separation, anxiety, with more and more couples both having to work in order to survive economically, children have to be left in daycare centers and the stress-

Dr. James Dobson: You see that as stressful?

Dr. Archibald Hart: Oh, yes. I think that there is no doubt in my mind that a child who has to be in

that foreign environment often not treated as lovingly or carefully as it would at home-

Dr. James Dobson: You're touching a lot of people at this moment.

Dr. Archibald Hart: Well, I know, and they're daycare centers and they're daycare centers. But no matter how good the daycare center, I think we just have to be honest.

Dr. James Dobson: Dr. Burton, white of the Harvard preschool study said, it's not my job to either increase anxiety or decrease anxiety in parents. It's my job to tell the truth. And the truth is that whole daycare arrangement has many problems associated with it.

Dr. Archibald Hart: I mean the child is confused. There's always the separation problem. How can we believe that that doesn't affect the child?

Dr. James Dobson: How about in the elementary years? What are the sources?

Dr. Archibald Hart: And we move to the elementary. As soon as you go to school, now you have peer relationships. Now you have the school setting. Now you have teachers. Now you have a whole new set of demands and expectations coming upon you. And at this point, a lot of the gastric sort of problems, the tummy problems will begin to emerge in the child at that stage. Has a lot to do with the outside world, interfacing with the outside world. It's like being led out of the cage now and beginning to explore the jungle around the nest.

Dr. James Dobson: Talk about the Super Bowl of all stress inducing activities of adolescence. Early adolescences basically.

Dr. Archibald Hart: Well, yes. Now you're back to yourself. Pre-adolescence, it's the outside world. Adolescence, the stress is yourself. It sort of comes from within. How am I doing? What do people think of me? It's the whole issue of image formation and the coming to terms with who you are and the fact that you're not the perfect person you thought you were. A lot of disillusionment, a lot of disappointment. Failure at this point becomes more frequent. You don't get the home run, you don't get the A grade. There's so much you can't achieve. That all spells stress back to the child.

Dr. James Dobson: The two greatest sources of stress in childhood that I would see are the broad categories at least. The first is conflict within the family, where a child is physically or sexually abused or sibling rivalry or one of those major problems within the family. The other, it comes for those youngsters who are specifically

rejected and attacked by their peers. I don't know if there's any stress, any greater than believing, fully believing that everybody thinks you're a fool. I mean everybody. And some of these kids, because of the way they look, they're scrawny, they didn't grow. They have acne all over the place. Teeth, funny teeth, whatever it is, every day of their life, when they present their body, their image to their peers, the information that comes back is that you are worthless. Absolutely worthless. And what that does to a person's self-concept and to the level of stress is impossible to over-calculate.

Dr. Archibald Hart: And they are scars that many people will carry the rest of their lives. I was just last week talking to a man in his early thirties who is in a deep, deep depression, and all he could talk about was the teenage years and severe acne and the effect that that had on his self-image. And now that he's perfectly normal, he can't shake that image. And that attitude that he believes others have towards him. Then the teenage years I think begin to develop a whole new set of stressors. I mean, sex becomes an issue. The opposite sex becomes an issue. In the schooling situation, the temptations, the drug culture-

Dr. James Dobson: Alcohol.

Dr. Archibald Hart: The alcohol, all of that puts stress on the child. And the child is under stress if you say no, and is under stress, if you give in to the peer pressure. And at that stage that I think the child needs a tremendous amount of understanding and there's got to be someone in that child's life to provide an outlet for the confusion and the stress that the child builds up.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Arch, this is a topic that's going to take us two days to deal with and we've talked about the problem to this point. I know there are parents out there who's saying, I have suspected all along that my child was depressed or was going through stress. Now I'm convinced of it. And they're waiting for us to tell them what now? What do I do now? That's really the theme of your book, isn't it?

Dr. Archibald Hart: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: It's not just to say kids are under stress, but it's saying there are some ways that we can do better. In fact, your title here, the title before *Stress in Your Child* says *The Hidden Reason Why Your Child May Be Moody, Resentful, or Insecure*. And then the subtitle is, *It Causes, Dangers and Prevention*. You believe there's a lot parents can do to help.

Dr. Archibald Hart: Oh, there is. Yes, there is. And if parents don't do it, who is going to do it? And

there is a lot we can do to train up our children so they go into adulthood without the stress proneness that we have. And there are important ways in which you can protect your child. There are ways in which you can develop an environment that can protect them, a way you can stress proof your child. And a way that you can teach your child how to recover from stress.

Dr. James Dobson: First of all, how can you know when you need professional help?

Dr. Archibald Hart: Well, that depends on the severity of the symptoms. I mean, if you have a young child and a cholesterol level is high... And I do advocate that parents have a cholesterol test early in the child's life, certainly by the time a child goes to school somewhere in there where you should run a cholesterol test to see whether or not there are some serious problems, to begin with.

Dr. James Dobson: To add again with, a physical exam, blood pressure.

Dr. Archibald Hart: And physical exam, blood pressure, make sure the child is physically all right. But it really depends on whether the symptoms are incapacitating and a child who is not sleeping, a child who seems to be depressed, moody, morose, a child who's got a lot of anxiety, who suffers from a lot of tension. It may mean that you've got to get some professional help. But for the vast majority of parents, my guess is that it's something you can work on yourself.

Dr. James Dobson: You don't have to be a professional.

Dr. Archibald Hart: You don't have to be professional.

Dr. James Dobson: All right, what do they do? I look at my child, I say, boy, I'm worried about him. I mean, he's not sleeping well, he's not eating right. He seems bottled up. He seems to be holding things inside. What do I do first?

Dr. Archibald Hart: I think the first thing to do is to do a survey. Begin to sit down with a sheet of paper, and there's a work page in the book to do this. But just sit down with a piece of paper and begin to identify the sources of stress. Develop a little analysis, write it down where you can see it. Write down all the pressures that are on the child. Maybe you're a single parent, maybe the school situation is bad. Maybe there's conflict with peers. Maybe dad is not as loving or as kind understanding as he should be. Just to make a list of all those many stressors that are aggravating the child. And then you can begin to get an idea of which you can work on which can change. And there are some stressors you can't change much, but there are a whole bunch that you can make some changes.

Dr. James Dobson: You have a whole chapter of the book on discipline. Apparently, discipline and stress can be very much related.

Dr. Archibald Hart: The wrong sort of discipline will escalate the stress level in a child. And it's important that parents know how to discipline appropriately. And if you are too slack, you're in trouble. And if you're too strict, you're in trouble. Somewhere. It's somewhere down there, there's a middle road.

Dr. James Dobson: That's a tough target. It's in the middle ground.

Dr. Archibald Hart: There's a middle road you have to go.

Dr. James Dobson: In that chapter on discipline, in fact, you suggest three little sentences that may be helpful. We're almost out of time, why don't you review that real quick.

Dr. Archibald Hart: Well, the three little sentences, the first one is because I say so. Everyone else is doing it, mom, everyone else is going to this disco and so on. Why can't I go? What's the reason? Give me explanations? Because I say so. Another good discipline phrase is do it now. Procrastination, I think drives the average parent-

Dr. James Dobson: Up the wall.

Dr. Archibald Hart: And Mary comes downstairs and you ask, Mary, did you make your bed? No, Mom, I'm in a hurry. I'll do it later. And you know Mary isn't going to do it.

Dr. James Dobson: Do it now. Just do it.

Dr. Archibald Hart: And stop what you're doing. Put down everything else. Stand there and say, do it now. Then Mary comes up and we could do it now. And by giving it the attention, the immediacy of that attention, you can do a lot to increase. And the third sentence is, "I say no." I say no." And so often parents are afraid to say no. They're afraid that the child won't like them. And you just... I say no. Period.

Dr. James Dobson: You know, I've talked about in my own books the importance of setting up boundaries that are very clear. You just draw them in a way that the child knows exactly what it is you want and it reduces stress for both of you if that's very clear and if you're willing to back them up. I find that true at business. One of my most important jobs here is to draw the territories, the responsibilities very clearly for these fast moving high energy race horses who work here. And in areas where I'm a little bit uncertain, if I leave any confusion as to whose job it is to do something, there will be friction at that point. And stress for the people involved. I don't know if that's clear. But it means a lot to me.

Dr. Archibald Hart: And you see the key then I think to good discipline is mean what you say and say you mean what you mean.

Dr. James Dobson: Say what you mean. And back it up.

Dr. Archibald Hart: And then be consistent. Be absolutely consistent.

Dr. James Dobson: And not only reduces stress for the child, but it does a whole lot for you.

Dr. Archibald Hart: Your own stress...

Dr. James Dobson: Way, way, way down. Arch, we really out of time now. But I want to talk more about the prevention factor in this issue of stress in childhood. The name of the book appropriately enough is Stress in Your Child, published by Word Publishers, written by Dr. Archibald D. Hart. Stress in Your Child. It's Causes, Dangers and Prevention. I think this is a book that's going to be very, very helpful to parents and I do recommend it.

Roger Marsh: This is Roger Marsh once again. And I pray that today's Family Talk broadcast has had a real impact on your life and your family. Stress is a real part of everyone's life, both young and old alike. And it's up to us as parents to comfort and help our kids process and overcome anxiety. I encourage you to get your hands on Dr. Arch Hart's book mentioned in the program. Again, it's titled, Stress and Your Child. You'll find a link for that book as well as Dr. Hart's Ministry on today's broadcast page, at drjamesdobson.org. Again, just go to drjamesdobson.org and then click onto the broadcast page. In addition to listening to our program on the radio or on your phone, you can also use your Amazon Alexa. This hands-free device allows you to listen to Dr. Dobson anytime with a simple command. Once you enable the Family Talk skill, say, "Alexa, play today's broadcast of Family Talk."

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Well, that's all the time we have for today. Be sure to join us again tomorrow as Dr. Dobson and Dr. Archibald Hart continue their discussion on addressing the

topic of stress in our kids. You'll not want to miss that informative broadcast coming up next time right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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