



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Connecting with Your Kids in the Age of Digital Disconnection

**Guest(s):** David Eaton

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- 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: Hello, and welcome to Family Talk, the listener-supported division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. A quick note before we begin today's program. Some of the specifics on this show are really meant for more mature audiences, so parental discretion is advised. If you have young children around, maybe occupy them with something else right now, or come back to this presentation later at [DrJamesDobson.org](http://DrJamesDobson.org).
- Roger Marsh: In 2021, the birds and the bees talk alone is no longer sufficient for preparing your child to face the lies that the world tells about sexuality. You'll need to talk with your teen about the dangers of sexting, pornography, and so-called gender fluidity. In many respects, the culture is one big minefield for adolescents. In 1 Peter 5:8, we find this new meaning for parents and teens. We are warned to "Be alert and of sober mind. The enemy prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour."
- Roger Marsh: Our special guest today here on Family Talk is David Eaton, the president of Axis, a nonprofit organization he co-founded in 2007 here in Colorado. Each month, this ministry helps 200,000 parents and teens have conversations about pop culture and the gospel. David Eaton recently released his new book entitled *Engaging Your Teen's World, Understanding What Today's Youth Are Thinking, Doing, and Watching*. David has been married for over 10 years to his wife, Lindsey, and they have three children together. His singular passion is to empower parents to become missionaries to their own children. Let's listen now to this eye-opening conversation between David Eaton and our own Dr. Tim Clinton here on Family Talk.
- Dr. Tim Clinton: David, as we get started, the digital device, our phones, those things are basically dominating the world, and man, is it influencing family relationships.
- David Eaton: It's sure is. I was talking to a mom, she had 14-year-old twin daughters, and she got her twin daughters a smartphone. Can you believe that? So, she got her kids

a smartphone. They'd been begging for it. And she said to me, she said, "David, my daughters weren't looking for the darkness, but the darkness was looking for them." And what she was referring to is that her daughters were at a Christian school and within a month of her daughters getting an iPhone, there was an older junior in high school who started asking them for nude photos. So, she freaked out, clearly, because what's at stake here?

David Eaton: So yeah, the phones, the phones are here to stay, and Axis, the nonprofit that I co-founded with my buddy Jeremiah, we started the year that Steve Jobs created the smartphone. And I just remember he was holding that newborn baby smartphone on the stage. You guys remember that? It was so exciting and he was presenting, you know, almost like Simba was being presented in the Lion King. He was so pumped about this phone and he should be because it totally changed our world. It changed how we interact. And so what happens when you have this awesome 11 year old or this 10 year old, and then all of a sudden your 10 year old has access to the best parts of human nature on the internet and the worst parts of human nature on that internet?

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. When you think about having influence in the life of your son or daughter, think about the church just for a moment. How much influence does the church really have in their life? Now think about how much influence culture has in their life through this digital device. The issue, I guess, David, is just managing it. How do we manage it as a family?

Dr. Tim Clinton: Let's start with just some basic questions. David, I wanted to ask you, you've focused a lot of attention on kids and connectivity and building relationship and meaningful conversations. We're going to talk about that 60-year conversation you all talk about, but David, this device, when should we place this into the hands of our son or daughter? About what age do you think? What are you finding? What's the research showing?

David Eaton: That's the number one question you get. At what age should I get my kid a phone? It assumes that your kid doesn't have a phone already. And what I mean by that, and this is something a mom said to me, and it scared me to death, she said, "My kid is only as safe as their friend's phone. My kid is only as safe as their friend's phone." So even if you have a kid who doesn't get a phone until they turn 19, they are still interacting with their friends, and they're just a friend away from having their friend put a screen in front of their face and say, "Hey man, look at this picture."

Dr. Tim Clinton: Oh, yeah.

David Eaton: Or, "What do you think about this?"

Dr. Tim Clinton: Absolutely.

David Eaton: And so assuming that our kids don't have a phone is a bad place to start. So, we have to teach them to love righteousness and love what is good before they're ever given a smartphone.

David Eaton: And so what I would say, this is the number one piece of advice that I would give you, is to create a smartphone agreement, a smartphone contract, a smartphone ... whatever you want to call it. It just is a piece of paper that has some things written down on it that change from time to time that says, "This is what our family agrees to." My last name is Eaton, so it'd be like, "This is the Eaton family contract. This is what we agree to about our phones." Because when you get your kid a phone, and again, I know people who are listening right now, some of you gave your kid a phone forever ago. Some of you are holding out on it. When you give them a phone, you don't have to give them access to everything. You can actually limit it.

David Eaton: And we'll talk about some of those resources, but there's something that's amazing right now is that there is an entire industry that is arising based off of parent pain, where there are phones that are created to be your kid's first phone. So for example, the Gabb Wireless phone, a company out of Utah, it's an android phone and it is a phone. They can text. They cannot send pictures via text, but they can text, there's GPS, and they can call somebody. And so again, if you're like, "I really want to know where my kid is right now," there are resources that are set up to give you success so you incrementally give your kids responsibility as they prove that they're responsible.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hmm. And when I think of teens, my mind goes to Dr. Dobson's series called Life On The Edge, when he talked about how tough it was to be a kid. And then a couple of books that he wrote, Bringing Up Boys, Bringing Up Girls, was all about understanding them, being attuned to our son or daughter as they walk through the development of those years in particular, David.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And those are tough years because kids are struggling with a lot of issues. Who am I? How do I fit in? Maybe issues like their appearance. How do I relate to mom and/or dad? How do I deal with issues that I'm learning about? For example, sex and sexting you talked about, you mentioned earlier. That's what's really on the table here. This isn't just about at what age do I give my son or daughter a phone. It's at what age and how are we going to go about this process of insulating them and continuing to have a dialogue or a conversation. David, I want you to share with our listening audience a little bit about this concept of a 60-year conversation. What does that mean? And bring it all the way back to this conversation of this digital device and how it all plays together.

David Eaton: I mean, you mentioned this earlier, Tim. There's two points of the phone has incredible influence and church has some influence, but there's someone who has influence more than both of those and that's a mom or a dad, followed closely by a grandma or a grandpa. And so Axis is all about you having one conversation with your kid that lasts a lifetime. So as a parent, you're going to have a 60-year conversation with your kid. As a grandparent you're going to

have a 30-year conversation with your kid. And it's going to be continuous and it's going to be up and down. It's going to be when you're grabbing a burger in the drive-through line on your way to volleyball practice, okay? It's going to be when you're fighting over their smartphone. It's going to be when you're determining when you should let them have a Snapchat account or when you should take away their TikTok account.

David Eaton: And there's going to be so many nuances to this, but I say, just hang in there and have that conversation. No, you don't always have to have all the right answers, but I will tell you that one of the biggest conversations you're going to have with your kid is about the smartphone. And it's about when they should get one, how they should have it, how it's controlling them. You know, I've had so many conversations with parents when they have tears streaming down their eyes, saying, "My kid is addicted to their phone."

David Eaton: If you've seen this on Netflix, it's called The Social Dilemma, a really interesting film about dopamine and about the brain and about how the phone is designed to make all of us addicted to it. And so one of the great things is to talk to your kids about it and say how you're addicted to your phone. And for me, I love email, right? Email is what drives me in a lot of the work that I get to do at Axis. There's a lot of exciting things that happens in a boring email inbox. But your kids could be motivated in a totally different way, and I know they are, or you might be on Pinterest all the time, moms that are out there, or your kids might be on TikTok or Fortnite. So again, to understand the attention economy that comes from a phone is huge. And then as you're thinking about your kids, one of the questions we get to ask at Axis, we love asking good questions, and again, Axis exists to be your research assistant, by the way.

David Eaton: So you're the hero. You're the missionary to your kid. You're going to have the 60-year relationship. Our job at Axis.org is to be your back office, your research assistant, to help you know new trends. So who is Charli? Oh, she's the top person on TikTok right now. Or Travis Scott. All of these different cultural artifacts, we're here to help you understand what's going on there and help you have non-anxious conversations, so if you go to Axis.org, we'll help you with that.

David Eaton: But one of the questions we've been asking parents is, what's your biggest competition? We had a mom, so I was speaking to a mom's group, she raised her hand, she's in the back corner, her name was Susan. She was a self-proclaimed older mom. She said her greatest competition was support groups. And I'm like, "What?" So she said, "If I disagree with my kids in real life, IRL, they will go online and find someone who agrees with them and they will come back and they will make war with me." And so, again, that's the challenging side of the phone.

David Eaton: Now, the awesome side of the phone is that your kids can FaceTime their grandparents whenever they want. But the challenging side is that there are

forces out there that are going to help your kids and really try to drive a wedge between you and your kids.

Dr. Tim Clinton: David, let's go into some of the subjects that our kids are exposed to online. Sex is one of those. And you said, "Yeah, they start participating in relationship stuff like sexting and more." Let's talk about kids and what can begin to happen when they're on their phone, especially a lot, and they're locked away and they're struggling. They can start developing secrets. They can start going places on that phone, or there's a connectivity happening on that phone that they don't want to share. What do you say to mom and/or dad when they start getting suspicious that I'm losing my connection with my son, I'm losing my connection with my daughter, and I know it's happening and I don't know what to do.

David Eaton: I'd say, take a deep breath. And then I would say, trust the Holy Spirit to guide you. Trust the Holy Spirit to guide you. If you sense that something weird is going on in your kid's world, if you sense that you might need to go check their phone, I'd say follow the Spirit's leading with that and then have great empathy, okay? Just remember what it was like to be 16. Remember what it was like to be boy crazy or girl crazy. Now imagine what you would have done if you had a smartphone when you were 16 years old, or if you were 14 years old, and all the temptation that comes with it.

David Eaton: What we encourage parents with is not only to have the sex talk with your kid, but to have the new sex talk, or sex talk 2.0. The sex talk my parents had with me was kind of like a one-time thing. We talked about the birds and the bees and how body parts fit together and where babies come from, and it was awkward and it was weird. And then I realized where I came from and it was just like, "Oh my goodness, what is going on? My mind is exploding."

David Eaton: Now, those were simpler days. The sex talk 2.0 talks about how babies are made, but then you have the gender conversation, you have the pornography conversation, and you have the sexting conversation. And so, one of the world's biggest pornography websites has over 32 billion visits per year. They have their own awards show. It's one of the top 10 sites that's visited on all of the internet. So, just to ignore the pornography conversation, it's out there.

David Eaton: I was talking to a dad the other day. He said, "My son showed no interest in girls," and he's a 13-year-old son, "and then he was on a bus with his baseball team going to a baseball game, and one of the kids on the bus showed him a bunch of porn on their drive there." And again, he's like, "My kid is showing no ... and then it comes out, I find out like six weeks later that my kid has been looking at porn every single day on his phone." And he went from not even being interested-

Dr. Tim Clinton: And David, let me add something to that, and what they're seeing on their phone is like 10.0 compared to where we were when we were kids. What they're exposed to is to the extreme, and it takes them to a place where, you're right, their brain gets hijacked. It's highly addictive and consuming for our kids.

And that's where the secret of peace comes in. They start drifting away. They get back in the corner. Why? Because this thing, I mean, it really, really messes with their mind.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And you're right, the fruit of it is really brokenness. They don't know how to connect. They don't know how to relate and everything is objectified. That's the concern I think mom and dads have. It's like, "What are we going to do?" David, in this peace, kids also have developed their own language online for a moment. They have all kinds of abbreviations, hashtags, emojis that they use, that they communicate with. You encourage parents to understand some of this. And by the way, it can be very ... edgy is not even the right word. It's like three-X. It's like all kinds of conversation, content about sex, drugs, and more. How much do we need to know about that kind of stuff

David Eaton: You should know about it because you want it to be a part of the conversation, right? You don't want to feel embarrassed or left out, and so just to be able to be confident and be a part of the conversation is huge.

David Eaton: At Axis.org, we have a lot of resources. We have a membership and it gives you access to everything we've created. We have this parent's guide, a 10-page paper called A Parent's Guide to Teen Slang, and it will walk you through what all of these different terms are. We update it every single year. Also when it comes to sexting, there is an entire vocabulary. So again, if you go to Axis.org, you can find this there. There's an entire emoji sexual vocabulary you can have. So, the eggplant emoji means male anatomy. The peach emoji means a butt. It's just, the creativity is kind of intense with all of this. There's always going to be some kind of new cultural thing, especially when it comes to sexuality, so I would say our culture translator email at Axis, we have over 60,000 parents signed up for this. If you go to Axis.org, it's right there on the homepage. It will say, "Here are three things to talk about with your kid," every single week about it.

David Eaton: So, okay, we talked about pornography and you're freaking out right now because you should be freaking out. I would say there's a couple of things. One, if you're letting your kid have a phone in their bedroom at night, that's just really high risk. So, one of the biggest points of advice we give is have a place where your phone sleeps that it's not in your bedroom, and then at some point you have to absorb the awkwardness. You have to have the conversation. And again, don't ask them directly about it necessarily. You can ask them, say, "Hey, are kids looking at porn at your school?" Because you have to have this conversation. This has been a conversation you'll have probably once a month with your kid about sexuality.

David Eaton: And I want to tell you a success story. We were helping a group of parents talk to their kids about this stuff, and there was a pastor's wife. Her name was Inez and she's from Lima, Peru. And she has a son who's at home college right now because of COVID. She has a daughter who is 13 years old, homeschooled because of COVID. So she finally just said, "You know what? I'm just going to ask

her." And so she asked her daughter, she says, "Have you seen pornography before?" 13-year-old daughter, and her daughter breaks down in tears, and she says, "Mom, I've been looking at pornography on Instagram for the last six months, and I just didn't think I could ever tell you. I was ashamed. It feels good to look at, but then I just feel horrible afterwards."

David Eaton: And so this mom gathered her daughter in her arms, held her. They cried together and then her daughter actually thanked her mom. And she said, "Thank you so much. I thought you were going to yell at me when I told you this." And the mom was able to say, "God has forgiven me from so much. God forgives you. Now, this is serious stuff. Let's work together." And you know what her daughter chose to do? Her daughter chose to delete Instagram. Now, that doesn't mean that she doesn't have access to porn all over the internet anymore. But what that was is that was a step towards each other instead of being adversaries of like, we're a team. Let's work together as a team and instead of hiding or fighting each other or trying to become more strict, and your kid becomes more sneaky, saying, "Let's pursue God together. Let's pursue life together."

Dr. Tim Clinton: David, the heart of this conversation always comes back to one key piece, and that is, you have to have a relationship with your son or daughter. You can't just drop in on them and say, "Hey, let's chat. Let's talk." Oh, they'll probably engage you and they'll probably say all the right things. But then when you're gone, it's like ... and they drift back into their world.

David Eaton: Yeah, Tim, I've found that everything comes back to trust. Everything comes back to trust.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And how do you build that trust? Kids have got to feel safe and connected in their relationship with you, mom or dad. And I'm going to go back to that busy, preoccupied parent misses the cues, the opportunity to have the kind of influence we need to have to help them navigate this particular part of their life, this kind of onslaught of influence coming in from the outside. And if we don't have that, I'm telling you, our kids are so vulnerable. They're so weak and they need strength. They need structure. They don't need us going crazy on them. What they need is they need us pressing into them. And David, I want you to talk a little bit about your conversation starters, good questions, meaningful ways to connect, because I think mom and dad want to hear that. What is it that I can do?

David Eaton: Again, if you go to Axis, A-X-I-S.org. Axis just means that we live at the intersection of parents, teens, and Jesus. We have something called the Axis membership. It's nine bucks a month, and inside of that is a lot of different resources because it's a constellation of challenges, right? With Gen Z, your kid might be into sports. Your kid might be into music. Your kid might be into video games. Your kid might be into social media. They might be into all the above. And so how can you pick one of those and have great gospel-centered conversations with them? We have an incredible resource about social media,

and so it's a video series you watch with your kid and then you talk about it. And I will tell you, it will talk more to the parent than it will talk to the kid.

David Eaton: Now, as far as like, it will resonate with your kid because it's made for them, but it will make you think deeper. And then all of a sudden Axis becomes the third party, right? Instead of you and you say, "Well, do we agree with this? Do we disagree with this?" We have one on video games, very compelling. We have one on pornography, incredibly compelling. And that's why it's incredible to be drawn together. You're a team.

David Eaton: I'll tell you, there's this mom. She told me she was putting on makeup one morning and her son came up and just stood there and kind of stared at her. And she just looked at him. She's like, "What's going on?" She could just tell that something was broken in his soul. And she just said, "Hey, honey, what's on your heart?" and he's like, "I saw something." And she's like, "What?" She's like, "Well, what'd you see?" He said, "Well, a friend of mine sent me a video." And she's like, "Well, what was the video of?" And she said the video was of a man murdering puppies with a hammer. And this mom is like, "What?" And only on the internet are things like this possible, right? There's so many good things in the internet, so many challenging things, and so her son saw something so violent that it broke his spirit.

David Eaton: So she held him, right? And she cried, and she was patient, and then she said to him, she said, "I need your help." She's like, "I'm not really good at all this tech stuff, and you are, and you're the older brother. I need your help with our family in putting great boundaries for you and for your younger brother and your younger sister." It's like the chairman of the board of Axis. He says this. He says, "Playing soccer is not very fun when you're playing soccer by a cliff without a fence on it." So soccer is great, but if you're playing where you can fall to your death because there's no fence next to this cliff that you're playing on, you're so distracted by just staying alive. But when the proper fences are there ... And sometimes you need concrete retaining walls. Sometimes you just need a line in the sand. Sometimes you need just a chain-link fence. When the right boundaries are there, it brings life, and it allows you to enjoy the relationships that you have.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I love that. That's how we press in. That's how we stay close. That's the substance, by the way, that no matter where life takes them, and the decision-making that happens in their life, they're going to always kind of spin right back and anchor themselves back home. David, in all the research, everything you guys have done, when you scan the landscape of it all, and you even look at your own children as they're growing up, what's the one big, big takeaway? Say, "Mom, dad, don't miss this."

David Eaton: Mom and dad, you have more influence than you know, and you are going to be the chief advocate for your child. It feels like a lot of pressure, and the world says that you're not valuable, that you're irrelevant, that you're behind, that your kid is embarrassed to be around you. I just want you to know there's no



one more powerful in your kid's life than you. You have what it takes. Trust the Holy Spirit in your life. Bring your church community, your friend community around, be open with them and pursue your child's heart.

David Eaton: Everyone else is going to try to raise your kid if you don't disciple them, and everyone is going to try to influence them, but there's going to be one voice that outshines them all, and that's yours. You're going to be there for 60 years. You are a one-conversation parent. You're going to have one conversation with your kid that lasts a lifetime, so hang in there. There are going to be lots of ups and downs. Don't outsource your parenting to someone else. Let Family Talk, let Axis, let us resource you to be face-to-face with your kid and disciple your kid. As Deuteronomy 6 says, "When you lie down, when you rise, when you walk," in all the aspects of your life, having that one conversation that lasts a lifetime.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I love that. They say 90% of success is showing up. Mom and dad, what that means, it means stepping into their world every day. You don't have to be perfect. You don't have to have all the right conversations. You just need to start by what? Showing up. I'm here. I love you. I'm crazy about you. You know, hey, what I like about you? When you get that piece right, and they know that, they're going to what? Open up their hearts and share what they need to share so they can receive what they need to receive.

Dr. Tim Clinton: David, what a meaningful conversation. Thank you for sharing that, and I'm still amazed at the good work, the ministry work, of Axis, and we're going to salute you guys and pray that God continues to expand your borders for His influence. Thank you for being with us.

David Eaton: Thank you, Tim.

Roger Marsh: You've been listening to David Eaton discuss his new book called Engaging Your Teen's World in a conversation with Dr. Tim Clinton here on Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. And to learn more about David Eaton and his brand new book, Engaging Your Teen's World and the ministry of Axis, visit our broadcast page at [DrJamesDobson.org](http://DrJamesDobson.org). That's D-R, [JamesDobson.org/broadcast](http://JamesDobson.org/broadcast).

Roger Marsh: Here at Family Talk, we know that parenting is no easy task. That's why we've dedicated the entire month of March to providing parents with helpful resources. And one of those resources is the book Night Light for Parents, a daily devotional written by Dr. Dobson and his wife, Shirley. Not only is it filled with encouraging insights and spiritual wisdom, but you'll also read heartwarming stories and practical parenting advice as well. Night Light for Parents is available as our way of thanking you for a suggested donation of \$20 or more to support the ministry of Family Talk. So, get your copy today when you go to [DrJamesDobson.org/nightlightforparents](http://DrJamesDobson.org/nightlightforparents). That's D-R James Dobson.O-R-G/[nightlightforparents](http://nightlightforparents).

Roger Marsh: For all of us here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for joining us today and be sure to tune in again next time for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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