



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** The Relationally Intelligent Child

**Guest(s):** Dr. John Trent & Dr. Dewey Wilson

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Dr. James Dobson: Hello, everyone. You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and thank you for joining us for this program.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Welcome again to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm your host, Dr. Tim Clinton. Dr. Dobson remains out in California on a writing project. He'll be back here at the Dobson Institute soon. Hope to see him in the next month, and we'll all be together again.

Today I have two colleagues and fellow counselors in the relationship field, an old friend and a new friend. They're Doctors John Trent and Dewey Wilson. And they've co-authored a book, I think you're going to find fascinating, especially if you're raising children. The book is entitled *The Relationally Intelligent Child, Five Keys to Helping Your Kids Connect Well with Others*.

This is a newer concept. It's crucial, the notion of emotional intelligence and relational intelligence in life skills. It's how this next generation is going to navigate and survive in a wired, connected, culture. We're going to break down these five keys today so let's get started. Gentlemen, thank you for joining us.

Dr. John Trent: Yeah, well, thanks. It's great to be with you, Dr. Clinton.

Dr. Dewey Wilson: Absolutely.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hey, as we get started, you know what? Most of the parents I know love their kids. They want the best for them, and they want to see good things happen. We're going to talk today about a subject that I think is a little bit, well, it's really important. It's just kind of a new concept in the psychological literature on relational intelligence.

John, do you want to open this up and talk to us a little bit about what it means? I think we all get that we're all made for relationships. Bottom line, you better get them right. And you're going to be blessed if you do. If you don't, you're in a mess.

Dr. John Trent: Yeah. Well, that's so true. And that's a lot of what we get to talk about today because so many parents with this pandemic, Tim, as you know, so many kids have paid such a high price, and the parents are worried about what? IQ points. "Oh man, they're doing bad in math or their reading. They're not reading." Well, let me tell you where they're really suffering.

There was a new University of North Carolina study that just came out and it's ranking the lack of face-to-face relationships with anxiety disorder, with cancer, in terms of what are the things that are ruining kids' health. And one of them is what? It's being able to do relationships. So that's what we get to talk about today. I think IQ is overrated, all right, let me just say it. In the standpoint that I'm all for parents helping their kids do well with IQ, but Dewey, we talk about kind of this whole idea that they need to build their bridge. Tim, both of your kids were really good athletes, but think of when they walked up to a new team. Your son, for example, could walk up to a different group of people and walk right up to them and talk to them. I'm telling you, there's so many kids today that are so broken, they don't have bridges on how to build relationships, which is, so Dewey, go ahead and define it or help us understand really that whole relationship thing.

Dr. Dewey Wilson: Well, once again, Dr. Trent, when you think of IQ, and, Dr. Tim, I mean, what do you think of? You think of a capacity based learning.

Dr. John Trent: Yeah.

Dr. Dewey Wilson: In other words, it's something that can be measured. And then what we've been conditioned over the years to understand, "Okay, if the higher our score in IQ, then that must equate to me being a smart individual." Especially when you look at academically, it is very important to consider, especially when you're getting into a college later in life or being successful, even professionally.

But what we're talking about is not necessarily a capacity-based learning. What it is, it is more a relational or a more ability to be able to live out and exercise our God-given ability to relate well with others. God created each one of us for relationships, and He designed us to be able to live fruitfully in these relationships. I mean, if God created us for relationships, then doesn't it stand to reason and make sense that He has given us the ability to live them out well? But what seems like what's come off the rails, especially now that these kids have been isolated through this pandemic, is in many ways we've lost so much ground because we're not interacting face to face.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah.

Dr. Dewey Wilson: We're looking through the lens of a camera, whether it be in this virtual learning and God didn't create us to interact virtually.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Dewey, I wondered while you were talking how we got into this mess because probably everyone listening would agree that we're in trouble when it comes to relationships. And we're really in trouble when it comes to our kids and relationships. I think most people think that you're right. The COVID impact has been significant, but we also see a lot of the kids losing their way.

Dr. Dewey Wilson: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It's like Lost Boys Syndrome. You've got kids who are really lonely, and they're wind up, locked up in their room, on their devices. And it seems like so much has changed, but it's even more than that. There's something about the core substance of being a kid as to when we grew up versus where we're at now. It's so different.

Dr. Dewey Wilson: Absolutely. Well, and one of the ways why this book came about, Dr. Clinton, is I set out to get my PhD and I finally got my undergrad and my master's and then I started my PhD work in 2014. And in 2016, I began working on my dissertation. And my dissertation topic, I thought it was just going to be a slam dunk because you hear so much in the news about how millennials are narcissistic. And so I thought, "You know what? I'm just going to pick a topic that I can get through real fast." And so I determined, okay, let's see if millennial narcissism is as prevalent as they say it is and their inability to commit to long-term relationships. So that was the title of my dissertation.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And then, Dewey, can you help us understand what millennial narcissism is just for a moment? Lost in their own world? Consumed with themselves? What?

Dr. Dewey Wilson: Yes. In fact, if you want to define it, that's a very good way to define it. I like to say that it's their world and everybody else lives in it. And on a clinical scale, narcissism is one of the personality disorders that is so difficult to treat because how do you tell a narcissist they have narcissistic behaviors? But at the same time, how many times have we listened to media and media tell us that these kids are snowflakes and it's their world and they don't care about anybody else but themselves. What we did is we developed an experiment and recruited a sample from a population of all across the United States.

What we found is that these kids are not sub-clinical or clinical narcissistic. What they are is highly entitled. And they have, the ones that we found out any way, they have a high sense of entitlement, but what's missing is exactly what you were talking about earlier, Dr. Clinton, is that they don't have interpersonal face-to-face relationship skills because most of them do life on their smart device.

Dr. Tim Clinton: John, I wanted to come back to you just for a moment. You had mentioned earlier about a number of studies that show relationships are important and when it doesn't go right, there's a real strong adverse effect from it.

Dr. John Trent: Oh yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah, with kids. Say you've got Mom, Dad, listening right now, and they're noticing some change in their son or daughter. Or they're noticing a disconnect. Bring it back, because somewhere we've lost our way together. Right?

Dr. John Trent: Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Now what are you finding in the research there again?

Dr. John Trent: Well, I mean, in terms of research, you're right, loneliness is at epidemic levels. The whole idea of anxiety disorder has just exploded. Well, you know how we've talked about millennials and narcissism and how they really need to understand what relationships are. They're not the only ones. Well, the Gen Zers are the ones too that are really the most un-parented generation ever. They're the most protected and least connected. And so now we've really had two generations, and they're both the ones that are doing this parenting. And all of a sudden, you see these kids where mental challenges are going crazy. Well, a big part of it is, is that, again, we don't know how to be relational. We don't understand the importance of attachment. And of course, I mean, for a lot of years, I feel like science is finally catching up with the Bible.

We talked about the blessing a lot, and that, boy, kids desperately need that. Well, that's really where relational intelligence begins is we go through these five measures that, okay, let's say you didn't grow up with those guiding principles that really helped you build relationships. So it's well, how do you do it? So that's what we did was just kind of boil it down to here's five things that can really help you get on track with your kid. And so many kids today are taking a step back. Well, life, remember, we're to choose life over death, blessing over curse. Life means movement. So how do you get moving toward them? Well, we need to model for them relational intelligence. And that's what we found, Tim, the feedback we've been getting. I mean, the thing, it goes out on Amazon and sells out and they've got it re-stocked now. But the interesting part is what we're really hearing from is parents saying, "I need to learn this."

Dr. Tim Clinton: You know, when I look at some of the things that make kids happy, one thing consistently shows up, and that is they want a good relationship with Mom and or Dad. Even in their teenage years, even when it's like hugging a porcupine, when it doesn't feel good or natural, or they're getting all their affirmation or whatever information from their friends or peers, they still want a good relationship with Mom and or Dad. And this relationship stuff becomes really important for us to maintain, no, to strengthen, in our homes. So let's go to what you were talking about, John. Dewey, let's kick this thing off. You guys talk about five keys and the relationally intelligent child. Five keys to helping your kids connect well with others. Let's get started with the first one, a *secure attachment*. What is that? That's a big word. A lot of people, I love the word. I know it comes out of relationship psychology, but what does it mean to have a secure attachment and bond with my son or daughter?

Dr. Dewey Wilson: When you think about these five elements, Dr. Clinton, the first one being secure attachment is foundational to all of the other four that come behind it. And as an old home builder, the foundation was the most important part of the house, because if you didn't get the foundation right then the rest of the house was not going to fit properly, or it was going to be skewed. Well, this is same in regard to these relationships as well.

So secure attachment begins that it's from attachment theory, which one element of that is that once a child is born and they identify and recognize their caregiver. And when they reach out to this caregiver when they have a need, then if there's someone there to reach back to them, that's the beginning of a secure attachment.

And it's knowing that the parent is there with them, to guide them, to help them along. And it's easy to think about this with infants and toddlers, but what if I've got an older child? How does it show up in their life? Well, a perfect example is with our oldest daughter. She got engaged to a guy that neither one of my wife and I really agreed with. As she grew up, we had provided a secure attachment in an environment that she could know that she could come back to. And what happened was is that God answered our prayers in this particular situation, not to say that he was a terrible individual. He just wasn't suited for her.

And God answered our prayers. And she recognized and realized that this wasn't the individual. So where did she go? I mean, who do you think she called? She called her mom. And when she called her mom, because she knew that she wasn't going to get judged. She wasn't going to get her nose thumped, and somebody saying, "See, I told you so. You should have never gotten into that relationship." But in the long run, what it is, is just connecting with our children in such a way that they know that you are there.

Dr. Tim Clinton: John, through the years, we've learned that part of being secure in your relationship is having a healthy view of yourself and a healthy view of others. A secure attachment is a place where you feel safe with the people around you. They're going to be attuned to you. They get you, and you, by the way, meaningfully engage back. When a person has that, and so important to build that, that creates an environment where people then are free to be themselves, right?

Dr. John Trent: Yeah. Then they're ready to go explore their world. They're ready to start moving forward. What relational intelligence does by setting down that attachment is it's like the kid knows we're not perfect, no parent is, but we've got our hand on their shoulder and it shrinks those high hills they have to face

Dr. Tim Clinton: When you have that kind of connectedness.

Dr. John Trent: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: What it does is it sets you up then for this second skill that you guys really are focused on, and that is *fearless exploration*. When you feel free, when you feel safe, when you feel connected, what it's done is it's freed you up to go ahead and "Hey, put me down. Let me go. You know why? Because I feel anchored. I feel rooted."

Dr. John Trent: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And when you don't have roots, you're in trouble. But when you have them and Mom and Dad, when you give that gift to them, this is where we're going that builds, well, it's sculpts life and strength into them.

Dr. John Trent: Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Dewey Wilson: Well, that's so true, Dr. Clinton, because when you think about it, a toddler, when they stand up for the first time and then realize that they've got strength in their legs. I mean, what is the first thing they start doing? They just start running all over the house. What's happening from a cognitive perspective is they're realizing that their world is expanding. Well, fast forward that to the point where let's say that they're a teenager and then they get their driver's license. Your prayer life changes. I mean, you realize that, "Man, I've got to start praying for this child in a different way." But the same thing happens when they're 16 years old. Now they're in control and, and who among us doesn't have a sense of control? We need to be in control.

But look at it from on the other side of the coin. Here you've got Mom and Dad. I mean, you think, my toddler, when they get up and start running around the house, what do we do? I mean, we lock down every door. We make sure that all of the corners of the coffee tables are padded. We can't afford them getting hurt. And it's the same thing. When, when they get their driver's license. We want to put a navigational device where we can know where they're at at all times. We even want to know how fast they're going, because it's so hard for us as parents to give up that sense of control.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So we've got connectedness. That's that attachment piece.

Dr. John Trent: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: This fearless exploration piece. This is what we're trying to give as gifts to our kids.

Dr. John Trent: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And then the third piece, this *unwavering resilience*. John, it makes sense then, because if they feel anchored, and they're fearless in the sense, then they've got some bounce back in them when life gets brutal. Because life is tough. It's going to hit them. It's going to knock their legs out from underneath them.

Dr. John Trent: Oh man. And again, that's why I think the Lord has used you so much because talk about a great summary, that's exactly right. And then that leads to that kid that falls down like you did, like I did, like Dewey did. But you realize, "Okay, I can get back up." And it's all about recovery shots. Boy, you nailed it with your summary is with attachment, then they're free to explore, but when they explore, they are going to fall down.

So then when they fall down, it's that, "Oh my gosh, are we going to be so anxious? Or are we going to have kind of that calm presence?" A lot of parents think, "Well, man, my kids, that does it. They're not going to go to the college of their choice. They're just broken." Well, we're all broken, but it's when we get back up that I think the Lord, and it's a great model, the prodigal, where we've all been there. So, then that helps you make *wise decisions*, which is that next one.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You're listening to Family Talk, a division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, your host. Our special guests today, Dr. John Trent and Dr. Dewey Wilson, brand new book, *The Relationally Intelligent Child, Five Keys to Helping Your Kids Connect Well with Others*. Really pioneering, they're out there on the leading edge here, talking about what I think every parent understands, and wants. They desire this for their kids. We're talking about unwavering resilience. And John, you mentioned the issue of wise decision-making. This stuff flows is what's happening here. When you're connected this stuff begins to flow naturally, if you will. Right?

Dr. John Trent: Yeah. Go ahead, Dewey.

Dr. Dewey Wilson: Well, I mean, when you consider wise decision making, I mean, what parent doesn't want their child to make wise decisions? When we were doing research on the book, based on some of my cognitive studies, Dr. Clinton, I learned that the area of the teenager's brain, the prefrontal cortex, is constantly developing.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Right.

Dr. Dewey Wilson: The thing about it is, is it matures a little bit quicker. In other words, the-

Dr. Tim Clinton: By the way, that makes us crazy and hopeful at the same time, right?

Dr. Dewey Wilson: Yeah, exactly. It does. It does because there's something always going on there. In that prefrontal cortex, an individual's, especially a teenager's, that's where that's where they take risk. I mean, that's where the risk taking aspect of the brain is at. And so that matures at a quicker speed than guess what? The area of the brain that determines consequences. And because it doesn't fully mature until we are sometimes 25 years old. And even nowadays they're finding out that that could even be as many as 30 years old. And have you ever wondered, you looked at your kid and "Go, man, what in the world were they thinking?" It was well, they were thinking, but what they weren't thinking about is the

consequences. And so what we teach in the book is we take them back to cognitive processing of how do we make a good logical decision? How do we weigh the environment? What are the options?

And you go back to Deuteronomy 6. I mean, isn't that, what Moses is commanding the nation of Israel, the parents to, to take these life skills that, oh, and by the way, once again, that God created us to have, and take these life skills and pass them down from one generation to the next to the next. And yet here we are one and maybe two generations removed from those being done on a consistent basis from their parents and grandparents, because the family has been fractured.

Dr. Tim Clinton: What I find fascinating is this multi-generational flow. That often we talk about the sins of the fathers being visited to third and fourth generations. And I think also, John, the blessings of the fathers are visited to the third and fourth generations.

Dr. John Trent: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Getting this stuff right becomes really, really important. Let's close up this way. Let's go to this fifth kind of key to relational intelligence, and that's *future focused serving*. I think what I understand you to say is when you get this going in this direction, when you get it flowing in this way, the natural outcome is strengthened relationships that flow generationally. Is that where you're going?

Dr. John Trent: Well, and they flow generationally, and they're not, again, we started off talking about millennial narcissism and is it really true? And again, so much of it isn't necessarily just they're more narcissistic. It's the idea of, "I don't know how to create relationships." And Tim, I want to go back to something you said earlier, which is what's called neuro-plasticity. You didn't use that word, but the fact that they can learn this, even if they didn't, it used to be people said, "Oh, you know what? Well, everything you got, you got by five years old, and don't try to learn anything new."

Well, neuroplasticity, all those studies just blew that up. So parents that didn't know this can learn it, and so can their kids. How encouraging is that? And then they can go rock their world. Everybody wants to do that. But the reason you do it from freedom and from life and to go serve the Lord is when you've got those other things behind you.

Dr. Tim Clinton: What a fascinating discussion. At the end of the day, we're talking about relational intelligence, getting this right so that it impacts my relationship with God, it impacts who I choose to love, it impacts how I relate to my parents or my kids. How I relate to siblings, how I do school, how I do work. It's everything. What a beautiful piece of work. Let's close this way. I'll give you guys both a closing statement to our listeners here. Here's the 'aha', take this home, don't miss this, thought. John?



Dr. John Trent: We can't do any better than keep looking at Jesus in terms of relational intelligence. The night I came to know Christ, I got tricked into going to a Billy Graham movie. I didn't know who Billy Graham was, but they give an invitation, but I remember the guy that was standing up there that leads you to Christ afterwards. He handed me this verse and he said, "For he himself has said, in Hebrews, 'I will never leave you.'" This is Jesus. "I will never leave you nor forsake you." And I needed attachment so much. And that's where it began. So let's start off by understanding, man, we've got a God that models this for us, every bit of this. Well, now we can learn it and get busy giving it to our kids.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. And Dewey?

Dr. Dewey Wilson: Yeah, absolutely. Hope changes your perspective on everything in life. And when here have a parent that's thinking, "Man, how in the world am I going to parent this child when I feel like I'm off the rails myself?" What John talked about earlier with neuroplasticity, and it's basically a brand new science that has evolved really since 1980. I mean, that's relatively just a few years back, but to know scientifically that I'm able to re-learn and to learn new things and to rethink new things. So that in itself ought to give these young parents hope.

But other than what we're talking about this book is them being able to understand and find the love of the Father. As you said a while ago, Dr. Clinton, that when we can understand the love of God through Christ, and to know that He wants us to fearlessly explore our world? Well, ultimately what He also has called us to do is to serve others. Well, gaining empathy enables us to be able to do that. And we find that, man, what a better way to learn empathy, than to learn relational intelligence. And above all we just want these parents to understand that they can have hope because it is possible for them to do this.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You know, Dr. Dobson always says that in the end, all that matters really, is who you loved and who loved you. If you can get this love and being loved piece right, you have everything. On behalf of Dr. Dobson, his wife, Shirley, the entire team at Family Talk, you guys, we want to salute you. Always thank you for making contributions into our lives. We appreciate you guys joining us. Dr. John Trent and Dr. Dewey Wilson, thank you again.

Dr. John Trent: Thank you.

Dr. Dewey Wilson: It's our pleasure.

Roger Marsh: Well, thank you so much for joining us here on Family Talk for that conversation between Dr. Tim Clinton and Doctors John Trent and Dewey Wilson. As much as we may hate to admit it, we might not be equipping our children for success in all areas of their lives. They might be excelling academically or athletically, but if our kids don't know how to do relationships well, they're going to have a rough time for at least parts of their adult lives. However, there are things that we can

do to better prepare our kids for healthy relationships and a good place to start might be our guests book called *The Relationally Intelligent Child*.

To learn more about Dr. Trent and Dr. Wilson and their book, *The Relationally Intelligent Child*, just visit our broadcast page at [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). That web address once again is [drjamesdobson.org/broadcast](http://drjamesdobson.org/broadcast). Remember, you can also call us anytime at (877) 732-6825. We'll be happy to answer questions you might have about the broadcast, the ministry of Family Talk, or the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. Again, that number to call is (877) 732-6825. Thanks again for listening to Family Talk today, and every day for that matter. From all of us here at the Dr. James Dobson family Institute have a wonderful weekend.

Announcer:

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