



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Hurting Kids and How the Church Should Respond- Part 1

Guest(s): Chap Clark

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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson, and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: Hello and welcome to Family Talk, the listener-supported broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. So glad you've joined us today. We have a very important conversation to bring you about the emotional state of teens and emerging adults in today's world. Our guest is author, speaker, and pastor Dr. Chap Clark. Chap has a Master's in Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary, a PhD from the University of Denver, and is the award-winning author or co-author of 25 books.

In 2001 and 2002, Chap took a sabbatical from ministry to spend eight months with kids on a high school campus in North Los Angeles. He actually worked as a substitute teacher there. He wanted to understand the world these teenagers were living in, what they thought about life, and also what they thought about themselves. The result of that immersive study along with his additional academic work was a book that he wrote in 2004 called *Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*. In 2011, Chap released an updated version of the book entitled *Hurt 2.0*. In these books, Chap Clark invites readers into the world of contemporary adolescents.

On today's edition of Family Talk, Dr. Tim Clinton will sit down with Dr. Chap Clark to talk about teens today, some misconceptions that they've been labeled with, and the emotional challenges they face. If you work with kids in any capacity, this is a program just for you. Let's listen into their conversation right now.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Chap, thank you for joining us.

Chap Clark: It is great to be with you, my friend, Tim. Been a while.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Chap, we're going to talk about something that I think raises a lot of concern. Certainly, people need to turn this up. By the way, if you've got teens in the home, if you're worried about them, you're struggling, I think you ought to share this program. I mean, call up some friends right now and let them know

what's going on, that we're going to be talking a lot about this. We've got one of the best in the world on the broadcast today. I can't wait to unpack this all with you, Chap.

Hey, the teen years, the emerging adult years, there's some wild turf that needs to be covered here. It's difficult for kids. It's difficult for parents. It's a tough season together.

Chap Clark: Well, absolutely, because every factor that we were studying three years ago, two years ago, has just been completely upended by what's gone on during the pandemic. There are just a tsunami of forces, like this kind of massive hurricane in the Bermuda Triangle, that are hitting on teenagers, young adults, and frankly, just about everybody.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Chap, it was about 3:00 the other morning at our house. Julie and I were awakened by a helicopter. It started buzzing our house. I thought, "Oh, they're just passing through." There's a flight pattern that goes kind of over our house for the medevac helicopter. The helicopter wasn't leaving. I'm thinking, "What's going on?" I look out the window. It has a big searchlight on. I'm thinking, "Oh, they're searching for someone. There must be someone on the loose in our area."

Then as I continue to watch, I saw the helicopter literally land on the dam. The searchlight was shining right down the road. It dawned on me. Something's going on over there. I ran over to that side of the house and looked. Lights flashing everywhere. Here, what had happened, I found out, was a carload of boys. There were eight boys packed into a little sedan. There's a curve there and I figured there must be an accident on the curve. They didn't make the curve, Chap, and the car got caught in some stone ditch and somehow it rolled multiple times.

Six of those boys were thrown. They were ejected from the car. Bodies everywhere. They had called in everybody in the area because it was listed, I think, as a mass casualty incident there. None of the boys were killed, and they're all recovering. I got to thinking as we were prepping for today's program about the teen years, those emerging adult years and the insanity, the chaos of all of it, the fear, the challenge, and so much more. You're out on the front lines, Chap. What are you seeing? What's happening out there?

Chap Clark: That is as horrible as that metaphor is, that reality that you guys experienced is. One thing that I would say is different in what's happening with teenagers and young adults is that they may go around a curve, miss the curve. The car would flip over, and they'd be ejected from the car and have great pain, and brokenness, and woundedness.

The differences is so often, there wouldn't be any flashing lights. There wouldn't be a helicopter. There wouldn't be anybody that even notices until it's way too

late because what's gone on, even before the pandemic, for several years, there was an increasing sense that something is going on with our kids. There is more and more anxiety, woundedness, fear, isolation. This is pre pandemic.

Ever since the pandemic, it has exacerbated everything. Everything's been really thrown up for grabs. It's not like they were doing great before, and now this is very difficult. It is much more horrific than that. Even though as stark an illustration as that is, it's really important for us to pay attention, to watch for the signs to see if they're going too fast, or too many kids in the car are going around the corner, because we got to help them from destroying themselves.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Chap, you spent a lot of your life looking under the hood, if you will, of today's youth culture, what they experience. Let's go back and just kind of remap this for a moment, remind ourselves of what it's like to live in that world. There's a lot going on. They're struggling with, developmentally, identity, Chap. Take us down that road.

Chap Clark: Well, what we've learned over several decades now is there are three elements of what it takes for a person to move from being a child where they're dependent on their family system into, ultimately, adulthood where they're connected to people in a deep, interdependent way. The first is, you mentioned, identity. What identity is for your child is a sense of self that makes me distinct from other people. What makes me a person that is worthy of notice, that has something to contribute?

It comes from this sense that when I look in the mirror, when I lay down at night, when I wake up in the morning, who is the person that I am, and how I'm going to live into that and express that. Secondly, there's been debate about this for the last 10 years, especially, is every kid needs a sense of purpose as they grow up. Really, historically, what we've known is that you need a sense of self-power. It used to be called autonomy.

You need to believe that you have something to offer before you can contribute to purpose because unless I've got something to give and unless I have anything that somebody sees as valuable beyond my identity that comes out of my identity, I can't have a sense of purpose because my purpose is to try to suck in all of the voices around me for me to go, "Yeah, I am worthy. Yeah, I am valuable. Okay. Now I'll take that sense of self, and I'll put it into purpose." Tim, this is going to have everything to do with everything else we talk about.

Lastly, it's who cares about me regardless of how I live, how I perform, what I say, what I do, when I'm good, when I'm bad, when I get a good grade, when I get a bad grade, when I miss an extra point, whatever. Who cares for me and my story beyond and beneath all of the things that I do and accomplish? That's identity, sense of self, autonomy leading to purpose, which is a sense of my worth and my value, and lastly, my belonging. How do people see me?

What's happened over the last two to three decades is there's been an erosion of people that are already adults, who are already independent, have gone through that journey that are actually present in the life of kids with helping them know who they are, helping them know that they're valuable and worthy, and helping them to know that they belong and love them.

That erosion has shifted into we used to take our kid out to the park to throw the baseball and get some fries at McDonald's, but then we shifted. It was more important for them to be able to hit better than I can teach him. Let's get him a batting coach while I sit and watch the game. The shift has been, we're really not present. You cannot grow up unless you have people around you that are reinforcing what has to happen on the inside.

Dr. Tim Clinton:

Chap, I wrote down in my notes the identity thing from the physical changes, a lot of the... I had a lady say the other day that... We're in mass. She said, "I'm 60 years old, and I'm having problems with zits again. It's crazy."

Think about those adolescent years, the changes in your body from hormone just flooding your body to trying to figure out who you are in your, quote, "community," of friends and peers around you to, what if my family's a mess? How do I navigate that? How do I deal with maybe some conflict between Mom and Dad going on or sibling rivalry, the pressure around sports and having to perform?

Hey, the pressure about having to perform academically in school, getting everything done, the challenge with sexuality, and the whole sexting craze thing that's out there, Chap... I'm writing down social media and how it's just changed everything. There are milestones or transitions also in this, Chap, that I'm seeing. Maybe the transition from being a kid into my teen years, going into high school, maybe the transition of leaving high school.

I had a mom this week say to me, "My son, Tim... His behavior's changing. He's graduating from high school he doesn't know what he wants to do and he feels lost. He's going quiet on me, Chap, and I'm really worried about him." Those transitions are big... They're big pieces, aren't they, for us to look at?

Chap Clark:

Yes. You loaded so much. I had about four notes ready to... Boy, we could really go into this. We have the eight hours. We bought into something that is not quite accurate as a culture. That is, once a kid gets into roughly, middle school then it's so important they're in the right peer group because it's actually the peer group that helps them develop. That's not accurate.

A little quip that I use is "two kids in a mud puddle can't clean each other up." The problem is as young people are growing up, all of them are so craving attention, affirmation to help them to know who they are. There's in such a sea, grabbing on to kind of just a piece of wood that if you got a whole bunch of kids... Let's say middle school. Your brains haven't shifted abstraction yet. You're

still a child, but your brains are just not really sure how to be abstract, really can't understand your world. You're thrown into these peer groups.

Well, your peer groups don't care. This is where bullying is so awful. We actually did something on bullying a couple years ago together because kids will destroy each other if adults give them the room to do that because they're not concerned with being nice or concerned with being loved. Then the transition where the brain shifts, right about 14 or 15, into more abstraction, kind of that pre-adult ability to see the gray areas of life, first person to third person.

The problem is if your only real group of influence is your peer, that's when it gets more destructive because peers are trying to say, "Your job is to love me. My job is not to love you. This gets into the center of where we were never designed by God to be a group of individuals that are just thrown together, especially when we're growing up with people in exactly the same space in life as we are. We are multi-generational. God designed us to be in community so I can relax a little bit, let other people love on me as I learn what it means to give myself away.

Dr. Tim Clinton: As you're a kid growing up, you often begin to think that Mom and Dad really don't understand. They don't get it. They don't-

Chap Clark: Well, yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: In the mindset, it's like, "This world is so different than your world, Mom and Dad. I'm just telling you." Chap, what is different about growing up in today's world? Why is it so radically different? There are a lot of pieces that are the same. There are milestones you got to navigate. I mean, a part of being a teen, we get 80, 90% of it. Where's the disconnect?

Chap Clark: Well, it depends on how far back you go. If you just talk about the last four or five years in our culture, the incredible anger and frustration of the polarization, our kids have grown up in a world... Let's say they're 15 years old. Well, they have only known a world where you can't have a Thanksgiving meal with your grandparents. You got to see the world as those guys versus us, so the polarization and the anger from people of all different stripes.

Our kids haven't known anything really else. You add to that then what happened in the last 15, 17 months of the racial stuff, the different voices around that, how their families interpret that, what kind of stuff is on TV and our computers. Kids are trying to figure out, I don't have a baseline for me to interpret the craziness of the world.

When they say, "You have no idea what I'm going through..." Now our kids are having to figure out, how do I navigate this? I got one teacher that says this stuff about life. I got this other teacher that's making fun of stuff. When they say

nobody understands, it's not like your parents don't understand. It's like nobody understands what I am feeling. I don't even understand what I'm feeling.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Chap, you bring an interesting perspective in as a result of your study, 15 years at Young Life, substitute teacher in the L. A. area, all kinds of work, now as a pastor. Chap, you wrote a book called *Hurt 2.0*.

Chap Clark: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: In it, you have some pretty strong thoughts and feelings about where these kids are. It's the piece that you think we miss the most. Let's start down that road.

Chap Clark: I didn't come into the study that had started all that. 20 years ago now, it's where it began with it, trying to really listen to young people, tell their story. One kid told me, "The reason we're going to tell you stuff is because you don't have a hammer." I said, "What do you mean?" The school district and the school let me be in every single class. I had every kid, and 3,200 kids, during that year. Then from there, a lot of research after that.

I don't have a hammer. What do you mean? "It means everybody else can hurt me if I screw up. Everybody else has as an agenda for me, but all you're doing is listening." I felt like Moses taking off the shoes, man, as like, I'm in this sacred space of them trying to figure out, how do I navigate this with my peers and in my world?

The bottom-line conclusion that I came to and hearing all these stories is I have to live a life of performance on the outside, but on the inside, I wonder who cares. Do they care for me the person, or do they care for me the student, the child, the kid in youth group, the kid that plays the various roles that I'm forced into? It's isolation and a sense of being alone that has so devastated young people. That's affected everybody who's roughly 35 or so and younger at some level that they still carry them.

Dr. Tim Clinton: A lot of people though, Chap, push back there for a moment say "No, Chap. I think these kids today are more narcissistic".

Chap Clark: I've heard that once or twice.

Dr. Tim Clinton: More narcissistic than ever. They don't have any respect for others, too many choices. They're spoiled, lazy. They only care about themselves. They're rebellious.

Chap Clark: Dang kids.

Dr. Tim Clinton: They don't want a relationship with their parents. Chap, it's interesting how those kind of themes flood into our culture. They flood in and influence our parenting and we often look for the negative. Chap, in your research, I think this

is really important. You found that when you got under the skin, the hurt piece was really profound and quite devastating.

Chap Clark: It's driving everything. In fact, yes, there is a greater sense of, "You don't trust me. Well, I don't trust you. You want me to be kind and listen to you? You're not kind to me, and you don't listen to me."

In other words, what's happened is our way of parenting and leading young people for several decades, maybe close to a hundred years, has been, "you just do what you're told. You be good at it. You fit in. You kind of assimilate, and everything will be fine." When you're in trouble, you will fight back. Hurt people, hurt people. You've heard that before, and you said it.

It's all true. Here's what I always say to parents though, is the first step is making sure that you are authentic, that you are kind, that you're respectful, and you treat your child and everyone else with the kind of respect that you hope your kids will give to you. If you'll start there, young people will, for the most part, be far more open to receiving leadership and correction.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Chap, the parent-child relationship is everything here. I've often read, heard, and understood this, that the quality of my relationship even influences the effectiveness of my discipline strategies. By the way, let's say this. I think a lot of Christian parents are getting it right.

I think they're loving on their kids. I think they set limits. They do boundaries well. They also want to give them the freedom to learn to have some elbow space, and learn how to fail, and have success, and give them wings to fly. That's the journey of parenting. Dr. Dobson's taught us that for years.

Chap, when we step back for a moment, there are some things that may happen that are real or maybe just... I don't know. They just happen. They're in our mind, that we've got a disconnect that's put a wedge between us. Somewhere we've lost touch with each other, parent, child. That relationship, again, drives everything here. When you have a parent-child relationship rupture, and then you try to, quote, "keep steering the bow of the ship," it's a hard thing to do because people...

I remember when Zach was little, he didn't want to eat peas. He refused to eat peas. Chap, oft times, what we do is we try to shove those peas down. He is not eating them. He's not going there. You hear what I'm saying? I see a lot of that happening in our parenting today. We continue to bring a hammer in when we need a chisel, when we need a saw, when we need something else.

Chap Clark: Yes, or we need to sit on the curb for about 15 minutes, and just smile, and laugh with each other. Yes, it is. It's a toughest thing because even words, especially in the Christian community, is... All of us are trying to do it right.

Everybody's trying to figure it out. You and I are grandfathers now. Welcome to that club. I've been there for five years. Oh man.

The idea of raising kids, we love that we're disciplining. Unfortunately, in the Bible, the English word, discipline, in both the Hebrew and Greek, when you look at the Old and New Testament, is 90% of the time, the word that's used is a word that means training. Only about 10% is a word that means punish. We get this idea that discipline is much more about corrective punishment as opposed to a training.

I think we think of our kids like they are high school or college football players. When they really mess up, we got to grab their face mask and tell them, "Here's what you did wrong. Sit in the bench. Think about it," instead of being coaches of the six-year-old peewee team where we stand in the back with them, we whisper, and saying, "Hey, keep your eyes... See that thing. That's called a ball. Now they're going to do this thing. Just watch the ball."

Then they do the play. The kid does it and tries to kind of tackle them. Then you go home, and you look him in the eye, and you go, "That was so great. What'd you do?" The kid goes, "I just did what you said. I looked at the ball." I go, "Yes, that's fantastic."

In other words, to train from where they are instead of to try to push down on them just the box of the rules, especially now, that is simply going to backfire on us. To come alongside, to listen carefully, but still be the parent because our kids desperately need us to help shape their journey through this period, but doing it with great care and tenderness. If you need a model, just look at Jesus.

Not one time was Jesus forceful, or angry, or mean, or tough with a person who is vulnerable. Not one time. The only time he spoke out harshly, strongly, correctively, it was always with people that should know better. Our kids are vulnerable.

We sit at the well with them like John 4. We tell stories about what does it mean to care for the guy that's been beat up on the road. See, if we would just kind of allow ourselves to love as Christ loves us, we're going to be way better off, Tim.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Chap, it also influences, in multiple ways, their relationship with God.

Chap Clark: Oh, absolutely, yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Dr. Dobson reminded us all that we often view God through the eyes of our father, how we see our dad, that authority in our lives. How we do life out of that is everything. Chap, I know we have talked today about this world that our kids are living in. Yes, it is challenging. It's insane in a lot of ways, but it's also a beautiful opportunity. It's an opportunity to shape little hearts and lives and fashion them to deal with a pretty brutal world out there.

When they're anchored in love and when we are able to get our hands to the plow, if you will, because parenting isn't for cowards... Dr. Dobson reminded us of that, that we're on a journey together. We can go to a place of help, and hope, and freedom, and great love in our families.

Chap, tomorrow, I had asked you if you'd stay around. I want to talk at length about, what do we do? If I've got brokenness going on, a disconnect in my relationship with my kids, if they're struggling with issues or challenges in their life, how do we move to a place of freedom? How do they press into their relationship with God? You spent a lot of time prepping in that area. You got a lot to say about it. I can't wait for tomorrow's conversation. Thank you joining us.

Chap Clark: Thanks for having me, Tim. It's sure fun to be with you.

Roger Marsh: A vital conversation between Dr. Chap Clark and Dr. Tim Clinton on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I hope you'll join us again tomorrow as we bring you the conclusion of their conversation. To learn more about Dr. Chap Clark, his ministry, or his many books, including *Hurt 2.0*, visit our broadcast page at Drjamesdobson.org. That's DrJamesdobson.org/broadcast. Remember, you can always give us a call at 877-732-6825 as well. That's 877-732-6825.

I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks for listening to Family Talk today. Be sure to join us again tomorrow for part two of this important conversation featuring Dr. Tim Clinton and Dr. Chap Clark as they tackle the role of the church in ministering to hurting kids and young adults. Thanks so much for listening to Family Talk. Join us again next time.

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