



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Dealing with the Difficult Child – Part 1

**Guest(s):** Dr. Tim Clinton

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

**Roger Marsh:** Welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, and on today's classic program, Dr. Tim Clinton joins Dr. James Dobson in studio to talk about the extra effort kid. You know that child that can be a challenge to get along with and needs lots of extra encouragement and love? Dr. Dobson will discuss the dynamics of how to connect with the hard to reach children with Dr. Clinton both today and tomorrow. But before we jump into our program today, I want to take a moment to remember the tragedy that occurred right here on this very day, 22 years ago, September 11th, 2001. You probably remember where you were on that fateful day.

I know where I was, in a production studio getting ready to get an early jump on my day when I heard about the first attack on the World Trade Center Tower. I watched with a colleague on a small black and white TV as we watched in shock to see another plane going into the second tower thinking it was a replay of the first. It was an amazing, surreal sight to be sure, and we must never forget the lives that were lost during those unthinkable terror attacks on that day. So if you haven't already, please take time in your day today to reflect and remember the men and women who are no longer with us, offer a prayer of comfort for the family members left behind on the day that forever changed our nation. September 11th, 2001. And now let's join Dr. Dobson as he begins his conversation with Dr. Tim Clinton right here on Family Talk.

**Dr. James Dobson:** Tim, I'm so glad that you have come to Colorado Springs to be with us today. I've been anticipating your visit for a long time because you and I have so much in common and many of the things that we believe together represent concerns for the family and generally speaking, we want to wade into some of them today. But thank you for being here.

**Dr. Tim Clinton:** Well, I love Colorado. I can tell you that this is a beautiful place.

**Dr. James Dobson:** You're a fisherman, aren't you?

Dr. Tim Clinton: I love getting up in those mountains. There's nothing like it. Pikes Peak, what a view.

Dr. James Dobson: You're the president of the American Association at Christian Counselors located right near Liberty University. In fact, in Lynchburg, Virginia, you have been in that role for a long time. I understand that you have 50,000 members. Could that be accurate?

Dr. Tim Clinton: Dr. Dobson, we have about 50,000 active members, people who have come together. It's an amazing phenomenon where God has just called together these men and women who love the Lord and who have given their life to helping other people and rallied them together, wanting to champion understanding and wisdom when it comes to people's problems and issues, to have dialogue, to bring that message to the church, but who are open, I mean, open about anchoring their life in Christ. They're unashamed about saying that spiritually we have got to root ourself in Him. There is no hope apart from Him.

Dr. James Dobson: And you bring a large number of those counselors together every year in Nashville.

Dr. Tim Clinton: We go to the Opryland Hotel and host a world conference there that's just-

Dr. James Dobson: And you take over that place. That's one of the largest hotels in the world, isn't it?

Dr. Tim Clinton: I think we've sold it out. Something like five six, we're going on our seventh time in a row. Nearly 7,000 counselors and pastors, all 50 states, 44 in countries come together to have that conversation about, "Hey, what's happening in the lives of people and how does God fit into the equation?" Dr. Dobson, it's fun.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you invited me there to speak and gave me an award not too long ago. There were 7,000 people there that day and it was such a pleasure to be with them.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That was a joyous moment for me, Dr. Dobson, having the privilege of bringing you out, that those 7,000 people who were seated in that audience, I think... I know they showed their deep love and appreciation for the influence you've had in their life. And so it's a joy to be here to talk about life and the issues that we face and celebrate God.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you've become a brother to me. Let me read some of your other credentials because they're relevant to what we're going to talk about today. You're the executive director of the Center for Counselor Education and Family Studies at Liberty University. You oversee the James C. Dobson Center for Child Development, Marriage and Family, and you're a full professor at Liberty. You're married to Julie. How long have you been married?

Dr. Tim Clinton: 36 years Dr. Dobson today.

Dr. James Dobson: That's long enough to know, isn't it? You live by what you preach.

Dr. Tim Clinton: She's the boss. I know that.

Dr. James Dobson: And you have two children, one son, one daughter. Your daughter named Megan. She's married to Ben, and you have a son who is a superstar pitcher for the Liberty baseball team. You've been in California, in fact watching him play, haven't you?

Dr. Tim Clinton: I have been. We've been enjoying ourself and he's been playing summer ball in the Southern California Collegiate Baseball League. And that's been, what an amazing summer.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, there must be 500 topics that we could talk about here because we've walked the same path and our training is similar. Let's discuss something that we thought might be a good place to start having to do... And this was at your suggestion, having to do with the hard to get along with kid. Some children are just difficult to manage. Well, describe that child from your perspective.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Years ago, Dr. Gary Sibcy, a colleague of mine and I worked on a book called *Loving Your Child Too Much*. Of course you can't love your child too much, but there was this element of people feeling like they needed to overcompensate with their children and more. But a part of that book was a chapter we wrote on extra effort kids. Kids that you're right, there's this disconnect between parent and child possibly. Maybe it's a personality difference, maybe a temperament difference, something along those lines where just different than I am. And if you're a parent and you've got a son or daughter that you like the outdoors, they like the indoors, you enjoy math, they like the arts or whatever, and that emotional bond or connectedness isn't there. That can be difficult. And a lot of parents listening right now, they'll say, "Yeah, I've got two children that I am very much alike and I've got one or two children that I'm not alike."

Dr. James Dobson: And they're all of equal worth. And I want to say having lived a little longer than you have that the difficult child might turn out to be the superstar when they're grown. The very contentious strong-willed child often really comes into line. I want to encourage the parents who are looking at that youngster and saying, "My goodness, he's challenging me. He is difficult for me to manage and every day is a struggle." We want to encourage those people, don't we?

Dr. Tim Clinton: I remember Julie was away from home one night and Zach you had referenced earlier, was a little guy and she said, "Tim, are you watching Zach close?" And I said, "Oh, yes, I've got everything under control at home, honey. Just enjoy yourself." And about that moment, I looked into the living room and there's this boy in there and he had what was called a Juicy Juice back in that day, a blue

one, and he had carefully positioned it on his body and was squeezing it and it was squirting Juicy Juice all over the room.

Dr. James Dobson: How old was he?

Dr. Tim Clinton: And I said, "Honey, I've got to get out of here." But I remember Zach growing up. There were times when-

Dr. James Dobson: How old was he when he did that?

Dr. Tim Clinton: Zach, he was just a toddler. He was a young guy, but he had some energy to him that was very rare. He didn't like peas. It didn't matter what you're going to do. He was not eating those peas and there were certain things where he'd bow his neck and he had fire to him. And you're right, Dr. Dobson, it isn't just maybe that there are different temperaments or different personalities. Children may also not only just be strong-willed but maybe defiant, maybe irritable, maybe given to a lot of negativity or something. And it's how do I parent well, those children?

Dr. James Dobson: I had a parent, wrote me a letter. I hadn't thought about it until this minute. It was many years ago, this mom who couldn't get her little boy to eat peas and she was determined that he was going to do it and she threatened him. She did all kinds of things and then she eventually got in his face and said, "You will eat these peas." And she put them on a spoon and he put them in his mouth and he didn't say anything and he went to bed and the next morning she found a little pile of peas in the bed where he'd crawl down there and spit them out. I mean, the strength of the will in some children is unbelievable.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And if you get into a war with that child, and I think we'd agree that you've got to step back and remind yourself because if you get lost in that battle, you're going to wind up disciplining all the time.

Dr. James Dobson: Listen, I have recommended for years that you don't take a child on over food because he can beat you there. I mean, he really can take the measure of you. We just saw an example of it, but I was one of those kids, I hated eggs from the time I was four years old. I thought that through and I said something weird about this.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Not doing it.

Dr. James Dobson: And I'm not doing it. It was a plague of my life. Tim, I'm telling you, I remember at three years of age going to a birthday party for a little friend in the neighborhood and the mother came in and put eggs in front of all of us and I wouldn't eat mine. And I remember why did she have to do this? She said, "Boy, you don't like eggs? What's the matter with you boy?" And everybody there was looking at me. I felt absolutely awful, but I didn't eat those eggs. You just don't

have to win that battle. There are other ways to get nutrition down. I wouldn't take a kid on that level.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, the fruit of that is simply war. You're right. And there are a few hills worth dying on what my mother used to say, "Tim, choose your battles here for a moment." The scary thing, Dr. Dobson, out of this though are those children can drift into more of a rebellious kind of nature at times if it's not managed well or number two, they can begin to feel very alone and unloved, not understood. And I think one of the challenges that parents often have come to me with is how do you connect with a child that you're not connecting with? How do you go into that space so they can feel loved by you because they have different interests, they have different likes, they're just different moods than I am as a parent and a lot of parents out there have that.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's go back to the beginning and talk about where these differences come from. When I was in graduate school and my field was child development and I was taught something at a very, very good school, University of Southern California Graduate School, but they had it wrong. They taught children are born as a blank slate. They come into the world with no real inclinations and certainly no instincts, which I agree with, but they are not individualized. They learn to be different from their environment. That is simply untrue. And when my daughter was about three years of age and she was the inspiration for the strong-willed child, she's really tough.

She would react to things in ways that I said to myself, "That didn't come from me. Hey, she's got mind of her own." At three years of age, she already had a mind of her own. And then I began to investigate it and learn more about children and I realized that every child is unique and different. Every mother of two or more children will tell you when they held that baby for the first time, he or she was different from the others that she has. They are made by God and why wouldn't we know that if every grain of sand at the seashore is unique and every snowflake is unique, why would we think God rubber stamps these complex little human beings? I've heard it said that the human brain is probably the most complex thing in the entire universe. We've certainly not found anything to compete with it, and these kids come in with all kinds of feelings and inclinations and especially they want to take you on.

Some of them do and they're willing to go to the mat to do it. That's what I talked about in *The Strong-Willed Child*. Now I'm not going to do too much talking here, but I'll turn it over to you. In my book, *Solid Answers*, I wrote about this and I've got a copy of that page here in front of me and it deals with what the research shows about the personalities of newborns. I think this is magnificent research. It's not new. It's been around for a long time, but it is absolutely on target. The question that I ask is what does the research show about the personalities of newborns? My answer, one of the most ambitious studies yet conducted took a period of three decades to complete. That investigation is known in the professional literature, is the New York Longitudinal Study. The findings from this investigation led by psychiatrist, Stella

Chess and Alexander Thomas were reported in their excellent book for parents, I don't think it's in print now, called *Know Your Child*.

Chess and Thomas found, here's the findings of three decades of research, babies not only differ significantly from one another at the moment of birth, but those differences tend to be rather persistent throughout childhood. Even more interestingly, they observed three broad categories or patterns of temperaments into which the majority of children can be classified. First, they referred to the difficult child, that's the one you suggested we talk about, who is characterized by negative reactions to people, intense mood swings, irregular sleep patterns and feeding schedules, frequent periods of crying and violent tantrums when frustrated. Does this sound familiar? I described these individuals many years ago as the strong-willed children. The second pattern is called the Easy Child who manifests a positive approach to people, quiet adaptability to new situations, regular sleep patterns in feeding schedules, and a willingness to accept the rules of the game. The authors concluded, "Such a youngster is usually a joy to his parents, pediatrician and teachers." Amen. My word for the easy child is compliant. Finally, the third category was given the title Slow to Warm Up or Shy Child, you run into these kids?

Dr. Tim Clinton: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: They're just different. They're different In many ways, these youngsters respond negatively to new situations and they adapt slowly. However, they are less intense than difficult children and they tend to have regular sleeping and feeding schedules. When they're upset or frustrated, they typically withdraw from the situation. They don't fight over it and react mildly rather than explode with anger and rebellion. No, every child does not fit into one of these categories, of course. We're too complex for that, but approximately 65% do. Doctors Chess and Thomas also emphasized that babies are fully human at birth being able immediately to relate to their parents and learn from their environments. I doubt if that news is going to come a surprise to most mothers who never believed the blank slate theory anyway. That was my reply.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Dr. Dobson, that research is still strong, it's still taught because it's true. The nature nurture debate is profound. Every parent listening right now knows you don't love your kids, for example, the same way. Why? Because they're different. They love and receive and give love differently. At the same time, a tenderness back toward these children is what it's going to take if you want to connect and make sure they feel loved. See, part of the challenge here is how do I connect with a child that's different than me? What if I'm struggling and I just don't enjoy his or her presence or I don't like their behavior and we can't get it under control?

That's where some new research, doctor, has come into play and it talks about relationship development, so you've got this kind of temperament perspective where these kids are hardwired, they're unique, and also the nurture side of being in relationship with say, a mom who's exhausted, who doesn't have a lot

to give and the child begins to perceive that mom isn't necessarily accessible or dad isn't accessible or available or willing to love me in these moments when I'm under high stress, everybody looks pretty normal until we hit times of stress, even adults. Everyone tends to look very normal, but then you see their true relationship style when stress or duress comes into their life, so these children, let's dial it back.

You've got this temperament mix and now you have this relationship style mix that's going on, and if I don't know how to do relationships well as an adult, say I had some brokenness in my own life and I'm not connecting or bonding well, that's going to be felt into the life of my child.

Dr. James Dobson: Of course.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And you can see those patterns flow systemically. Families tend to reproduce themselves. We say it this way, "You're just like your father or you're just like your mother." Well, the truth is we often take on those principles too, and so it's quite a, if you will, cocktail of things coming together that now I've got to make sure here's my goal. I just want my children to know I love them.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, here's one aspect of this that isn't often mentioned. This is tailor-made for conflict between siblings. You've got one of them who's a goody two shoes and he never gets in trouble. He always does everything right. He wants to please, that's what's different about him. This youngster, the easy child really needs your love and attention and he plays by the rules and he looks over here and here is this tough as nails kid who is always getting yelled at. If the parent believes in spanking, he gets lots of them and the strong-willed child resents goody two shoes like crazy because they think the parents love him more and why is he always getting in trouble? He doesn't realize that it's his own approach to life that's getting him in trouble and they grow up sometimes almost hating each other. Have you seen that?

Dr. Tim Clinton: Have you seen that? And Dr. Dobson, what it does is it creates quite a challenge for families. I was thinking just about fathering for a moment. Virtually every dad I've ever talked to, if you ask him, "How are you doing as a father," You know what he'll say to you? If you're alone with him privately, he'll say, "I think about it every day," and he worries about connecting with each child.

Dr. James Dobson: Tim, that will be our topic for next time.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Okay.

Dr. James Dobson: We're out of time and I would love to discuss this with you. There's so much more here because we really need to offer some advice to parents about how you reach that tough kid, that hard to raise kid. What'd you call him?

Dr. Tim Clinton: Extra effort kid.

Dr. James Dobson: Everything he does seems to irritate you for a period of time. I just want to offer this word of advice. I said it a minute ago. Let me say it again. That kid that's causing you so much grief may be and probably will be your best friend when he gets older. It certainly happened in my family. Danae who was so difficult, especially as a toddler and sometimes during the adolescent years is the sweetest lady you're ever going to meet and it just gives encouragement and hope to the mother who sits in a chair and says, "I don't know if I can do this." Yes, you can. You will. You must. You will be rewarded for it many times over.

Dr. Tim Clinton: They'll rise up and call you blessed.

Dr. James Dobson: Our time is gone. Thanks Tim for being with us today. Man, we're going to have some fun together, aren't we?

Dr. Tim Clinton: We're going to have some fun together.

Roger Marsh: Please keep the parents and caregivers as well as the strong-willed children in your prayers. They truly need your support and encouragement. Actually, from all of us. I'm Roger Marsh, and that was just part one of a conversation with longtime friends Dr. James Dobson and Dr. Tim Clinton here on Family Talk. Perhaps you or someone you know is dealing with a situation that is similar to what you've heard here on the broadcast today. Our hope is that you find renewed strength to continue being a loving God led parent or caregiver who can provide love, encouragement, and guidance to a child who needs that extra effort, and be sure to join us again tomorrow for the conclusion of this dynamic and uplifting discussion. As Dr. Dobson has been fond of saying, parenting isn't for cowards, and as I know from personal experience, it certainly is not. I'm reminded of the words of the Apostle Paul in 2 Timothy 1:7 when he wrote, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind."

Parenting sure can be challenging, that's for sure, especially if your son or daughter is strong-willed and defiant, and if you have one or more of these independent youngsters or adolescents in your home, please be assured that there is hope for you and your whole family. Here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we want to walk alongside parents of kids like these, especially during these important developmental years and as an additional resource to the program you just heard, we encourage you to consider signing up for the new and free 10 day email series based on Dr. Dobson's best-selling book called *The New Strong-Willed Child*. This email series is just for you to encourage and equip you to wisely lead your kids even through the toughest of trials. Now, to sign up, just visit [drjamesdobson.org/strongwilledchild](http://drjamesdobson.org/strongwilledchild). Again, that's [drjamesdobson.org/strongwilledchild](http://drjamesdobson.org/strongwilledchild). I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for listening to Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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