



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: You Are Not Alone – Part 1

Guest(s): Tom and Dena Yohe

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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: The following program is intended for mature audiences. Listener discretion is advised.

Thank you for joining us for today's edition of Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and we have a very intimate, family centric interview to share with you today. Our guests are husband and wife, Tom and Dena Yohe. Conducting the interview will be Dr. Dobson and Dr. Tim Clinton. Both of these men have very busy schedules, so it's a rare occasion when they can sit down in the radio studio and lead a conversation together. In today's conversation, the doctors will tackle the difficult topics of depression, self-abuse and cutting among the youth population. Tom and Dena Yohe have firsthand experience with this type of distress, as their daughter began cutting herself at the tender age of 12. They'll share their story, one that is more common than you might think, of heartache, hope and recovery, both today and tomorrow here on Family Talk.

Tom and Dena Yohe are the co-founders of Hope for Hurting Parents, a ministry designed to support parents who are grappling with destructive behaviors or choices that their teens and adult children have made. Tom previously served as a senior pastor for 17 years and was a senior staff member with Campus Crusade for Christ for 14 years. Dena previously served as a social worker and is the author of the book, *You Are Not Alone: Hope for Hurting Parents of Troubled Kids*. This book will be one topic of discussion on today's program. The Yohe's have three grown children. They enjoy being grandparents and they make their home in Orlando, Florida.

Our host, Dr. James Dobson, is of course a best-selling author, the founder and president of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, and America's preeminent Christian expert on child psychology. Dr. Tim Clinton is the cohost of Family Talk. He's also the president of the American Association of Christian Counselors and the resident authority on mental health and relationships here at the JDFI.

Here now to introduce today's conversation is Dr. James Dobson on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: We have an extremely, extremely important program for our listeners today, which I believe is likely to hit very close to where many in our listening audience live. It is so significant in fact, that we've flown out my colleague, Dr. Tim Clinton from Lynchburg, Virginia. He's with us today and tomorrow. Tim is the president of the American Association of Christian Counselors, which has more than 50,000 members. As such, it is the premier Christian counseling organization, I think around the world. Tim, it's a pleasure to have you back and you agree with me that the importance of this program today is illustrated by your dropping all the other things you had going on and you're flying out here to be with us today.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, I'm delighted, honored to be again here with you and always excited to have conversation with you about what's happening in our world and the issues that we love to talk about. I agree with you, this subject is so serious and important. The untold stories that are out there of moms and dads who have a son or daughter, maybe a prodigal, maybe it's a son or daughter who isn't just an extra effort child, they've got some mental health issues and more. And the journey they've been on and the pain that goes with it and the fear and the confusion, the anger, the disappointments it's like, "Where do we go? God help us."

Dr. James Dobson: It never ceases to amaze me how the bond of marriage affects individuals. I've had men in particular, whose wives have left them, who have gotten in the car, and they're driving a hundred miles an hour on a freeway and stopped to call me and tell me they were going to kill themselves. I mean, there's no way to describe the agony and the pain of families that disintegrate. I don't think any aspect of that is more painful than having a mom and dad devote themselves to this little baby that they brought into the world and they would give their life for that child. Then to see it go wrong, to see drug abuse and alcohol, and you mentioned mental health problems that occur in many different forms. We're not here really to talk about all that, but we want to talk about the hurting families, mothers, and dads, and what they can do to help and interestingly, how they can help others.

This is of vast importance because the culture is warping and twisting young people today and they're not getting the spiritual foundation that they would have, that I did. I went to a Christian elementary school and high school where most of my teachers were also my Sunday school teachers. I had a wonderful foundation in my family and home, but also in the public schools. That's gone now and so kids grow up really questioning who they are and what they're supposed to be doing. That's all part of the pain that parents go through isn't it?

Dr. Tim Clinton: I was in a church service recently, Dr. Dobson, and the pastor spoke to everyone in the congregation, simply said this, "If you have a prodigal, you have a son or daughter who's wayward, for whatever reason, I want you to write their name down. I want us as a church to pray over them." He asked them after they wrote their name down to bring that up to the altar, place it on the altar. I don't think I've seen a move to the altar like that in years, which just-

Dr. James Dobson: Tears, emotion, crying.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The brokenness was profound. In a church, all these moms and dads going forward over their kids. That's why I'm excited, Dr. Dobson, that we have in studio with us, a mom and a dad to tell us a little story and the journey that they were on and the journey they're actually on right now.

Dr. James Dobson: Let me introduce them to our listeners. They're Tom and Dena Yohe, I got it right didn't I?.

Tom Yohe: You got it right.

Dr. James Dobson: I bet you everybody you've ever talked to has struggled with your last name.

Tom Yohe: We get all kinds of things.

Dr. James Dobson: Because you spell it Y-O-H-E.

Tom Yohe: Correct.

Dr. James Dobson: But it's Yohe.

Tom Yohe: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Where's that from?

Tom Yohe: My uncle says it's French. They were French Huguenots that fled France and went into Germany and other parts. Our family said it's Pennsylvania Dutch, but that's where it came from.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Dena, you have written this book that we're going to talk about today. The title of it is a wonderful title. *You Are Not Alone: Hope for Hurting Parents of Troubled Kids*. Tom, did you help to write this book or was it all Dena?

Tom Yohe: She did it, it was her.

Dena Yohe: He was my moral and prayer support.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, it's essentially about your daughter, Renee, who has had many, many problems. Many of our listeners today may know her because she has a ministry of her own doesn't she?

Dena Yohe: Well, it's not her ministry, but it is something that came from her story.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It was a story about "To Write Love on Her Arms." There was actually a movie produced about that. It was all built around her journey.

Dena Yohe: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: The title of it has to do with cutting?

Dena Yohe: Indirectly. The person who wrote the story, I think his thinking behind it was that when people who have faith and hope go to someone who looks hopeless, we can write love on their arms. She had cut herself up very badly the night before he wrote this and he really wanted to make a difference in her life. That's a little bit of what was behind the title that he gave the story.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, let's go back to the beginning and tell us about Renee.

Dena Yohe: Yes. Well, Renee was our second child. We were excited to have a little girl because our first was a boy. Renee was a very challenging child. Stubborn, strong willed, but yet also very delightful and creative and fun.

Dr. James Dobson: Be a good title for a book, wouldn't it?

Dena Yohe: Yeah. Full of surprises.

Dr. James Dobson: Was she strong willed from the early days at, we'll say two years of age?

Dena Yohe: Yes. We'll say the day she was born. We had come up with this wonderful idea that we had read about putting your newborn into this nice warm, soothing bath right after birth. It was supposed to be so relaxing and peaceful and we thought, "Oh, that sounds wonderful. Let's do that." So we had a natural childbirth and Tom was right there and he lowered her in the water. Instead of her being just soothed and peaceful, she immediately started screaming and we thought, "Oh, what is this? What's going on?" There was a little bit of a window of what was to come. She had her fair share of temper tantrums and things like that. What we eventually found out when she was older was that there was this dark presence that was continuously harassing her, spiritual attack, even though she had tremendous spiritual awareness and depth. All of our children accepted Christ when they were really little and she had a great ability to understand deep things. But when she was-

Dr. James Dobson: That's a hypersensitivity, I think I've read.

Dena Yohe: Yes, that became known a little later on, that she had a sensory processing disorder, which we didn't know was the reason behind a lot of her stubbornness and what appeared to be a difficulty to just do what your brother and sister do. This toothpaste smell doesn't bother them and this doesn't bother them, but it did her. She cut herself the first time when she was 12.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That's young.

Dena Yohe: That was a big, big... It knocked the wind out of me. We'd had a head to head as a mother daughter. She was in trouble for something and I left her in her room to just calm down and then we would talk about the issue. When I returned, I saw on both of her arms, they weren't deep, but all these scratch marks and I just couldn't believe it. I didn't want to believe that anything was really wrong. I chalked it up to another temper tantrum of sorts and threatened her with counseling if it ever happened again, like that would be some sort of punishment and I'm very ashamed of that today.

When I asked her years later, if there was something she wished I would've done differently, one of the things that she has said is, "I wish that you would've given me the opportunity for help with the counselor sooner." She doesn't really know if she would've taken it and been honest or not, but the opportunity. That first happened when she was 12. Problems seemed to abate a little while until her early teen years, when she began to struggle with depression, the cutting returned when we were overseas, living in Russia.

Dr. James Dobson: That scare you to death?

Dena Yohe: To death. I didn't understand it at all. It just made no sense to me. All I could think was why do you want to die? No one we knew did it. She said she didn't know anyone who did. The idea of hurting herself, she said, came to her from nowhere.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Tom, as a dad, well, you certainly have your own perspective on your daughter and her journey. I know that part of her story was that she was bullied as a young girl. She began to struggle with self-hatred, didn't like herself. There were incidences where she wrote in this book, captions about her life to help compliment your story, Dena, that you were sharing there. But she would say things like, "I blew it. Why did I say such stupid stuff," and was really hard on herself. Then the depression and other things that really began to envelope her life.

Tom Yohe: Yeah, it just caught us off guard and unaware. I was totally ignorant. I had never heard of this before. I had no framework to process it.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You feel like it really just came out of the blue?

Tom Yohe: Yeah. I mean, she went in her room one day and she's got these cuts on her arm. I go, "What is that?" I had never heard of it. I thought, "Who put that into your head?" I'm figuring somebody at school or somebody must have done that. But she said, "No."

Dr. James Dobson: Tim, let's interrupt the story just for a little bit to talk about what that really means. Why would a person pick up a knife and cut themselves? Why would they disfigure themselves like that? Quite a bit's now known about that, take a run at it.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Children, walking through life on the receiving end of bullying. When you have some mental health issues already, maybe it's neuro-chemically you're not just right and more, and the sensory issues that you talked about. I know Dena, you had talked about her being diagnosed later on and Tom, you shared it with me. With this sensory perception disorder or sensory integration processing disorder, the elements create this cocktail or recipe that almost fuel this teenage journey now that she moves into. Everybody goes through those awkward stages. If you have those elements all coming together, you can see how a teen can really get lost and the depression goes deeper and deeper on this journey. There are some kids out there who just have these issues. It's not a result of bad parenting or anything. It's just their DNA, their makeup, that's what we're dealing with.

Dr. James Dobson: Tim, you mentioned a minute ago, the phrase self-hatred. That usually is at the core of it, isn't it? Because it is a loathing, a self-loathing and Tom, you've already mentioned that she would say these things, "Why am I like this? I hate myself." That is almost always linked to this kind of self-destructive behavior.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It is and in the midst of it, you begin to think, "Well then how do you move into cutting? And what does that do?" It almost becomes an addictive behavior, believe it or not. You guys know this probably as well or better than I do, that there's a sense of relief that almost comes over a child when they're doing that. The moment they begin cut. It almost creates almost a calmness, believe it or not, in their body. So they're driven to that because they feel like there's a sense where they need to punish themselves, or they're not valuable or worthy, you hear what I'm saying? And at the same time, when this happens, there's this release. It's mortifying. It horrifying.

Dr. James Dobson: That brings them back to it.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It brings them back to it.

Dr. James Dobson: To doing it again.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Again and again, becomes addictive.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Tom, continue with the story from your perspective.

Tom Yohe: Well, we were again, so caught off guard and didn't have any framework to process this, so we didn't know what to do with it. I think we were happy to just say, "Don't do this again," and we just let it go away. But as she became a teenager, her whole identity was confusing to her. Just trying to figure out because she would have a different group of friends maybe every other month and they were totally different from the previous friends. One group, it was a lot of Latino friends, another group was a lot of Black friends. Another group was a lot of other kind of friends, maybe athletic friends. And so-

Dr. James Dobson: No long term relationships.

Tom Yohe: Yeah, she would change a lot.

Dr. James Dobson: From your perspective, Tom, was there the mother daughter thing going on here? Often mothers and daughters will do battle. Was that happening at home?

Tom Yohe: We tried to work together. We tried to support one another in whatever we did, tried to do as a united front. I don't know that it was, necessarily. She would get angry just as much at me as she would with Dena. In fact, probably sometimes we would have the harder clashes because I'm strong-willed too. We got two strong-willed people going at each other and one of the last things I want to do is let her win. We would clash pretty heavy, as well.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The darkness only continued though, as she aged. She got into a place where she was starting to have suicidal thoughts and behavior.

Dena Yohe: Yes, she had begun experimenting with drugs and alcohol, pot. When we were living in Russia, she confessed to us that she had started cutting again because she was so depressed. It was very hard for her to admit that, it was at the end of staying up literally all night. Just us finally ready to ask her hard questions and willing to wait as long as it took until she could answer honestly. She finally revealed that and that she had also become suicidal and had really struggled to not throw herself on the train tracks in the metro station or off of our balcony from our 16th floor. At that point, we just told her, "You are more important than our ministry or what anyone thinks. We will go back to America as fast as we can to get you the help that you need." But that was the beginning of our eyes being opened a lot more to just how troubled she was.

Dr. Tim Clinton: There's a scene in the book that I wanted to share, Dr. Dobson, that really stopped me because I couldn't help but think about being a mom or a dad in this moment. It's the scene at the hotel, that you tell in the book. I think Tom, you were on the phone, she actually called home. She's in the bathroom on the floor. You guys want to tell that piece? I wanted Dr. Dobson to really hear this.

Tom Yohe: "To Write Love on Her Arms" had become very, very popular and famous and she was actually traveling and speaking for them on college campuses. She had three years of sobriety and she was all by herself. They flew her up and she rented a car and she was driving back after an evening of pouring out all this stuff that she'd been going through, that these students wanted to hear about. She just thought like, "Well, I've had three years and I just think I want a drink." So she went to a restaurant and had something to drink and there was another man there who fortunately didn't have ill intentions toward her, but helped her get back to her hotel. Well, then the guilt started to settle in, "What have I just done? I've come off this speaking engagement, I've been in recovery, I've just

relapsed." She couldn't take it and so she cut up her arms real, real bad. She thought maybe she hit a nerve or something and she called.

Dr. Tim Clinton: There was blood everywhere and you're trying to get her to wrap her arm with a towel, you're frantic. I know, Dena, you were just terrified in those moments. You're trying to get her to call the hotel, to get them to come up and rescue her. But those scenes, Dr. Dobson, I think about all the moms and dads, maybe listening right now, who might be in the middle of this. How horrifying it is at times and how overwhelming and how powerless you feel as a parent.

Dr. James Dobson: And how guilty.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And how guilty.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you struggle with guilt?

Tom Yohe: Oh, yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Obviously, you did.

Tom Yohe: Yes.

Dena Yohe: Quite a bit.

Tom Yohe: What did we do wrong? What good that we didn't do enough of?

Dr. James Dobson: What have we done to cause this?

Dena Yohe: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Nightmares?

Dena Yohe: Oh, yes, yes. Dreaming that she died.

Dr. James Dobson: I can't believe what you... I mean, I can, but I can hardly imagine the depth of the despair. Did I understand that you were in Russia when this serious account occurred?

Dena Yohe: No.

Tom Yohe: No, we had come home. She was in Philadelphia and we were in Orlando.

Dena Yohe: This was several years later. By that time she was already 22. We'd been up and on this roller coaster. She'd been in rehabs numerous times by then. Yeah, a long journey and the trauma of her being hospitalized and Baker Acted numerous times. At this point, never knowing is she dead or alive? Will she just disappear one day and we'll never ever know what happened to her?

Dr. James Dobson: What about the spiritual dimension?

Tom Yohe: Well, as Dena related, she was very strong spiritually when she was young. In fact, in Russia, she was a flaming evangelist. We had Bibles that we had with us, just stacks and stacks of them to hand out. She would take a backpack full of Bibles to school and her goal was to give every one of those Bibles away in the subway, in the metro or something, on her way to school. She would weep over her friends that she knew hadn't received Christ. She would cry over them and just pray for them that they would come to Christ. She had a very, very deep spiritual passion.

Dena Yohe: And from an outsider, looking at her life, people would assume that she's rejected Christ, she's not a Christian. When we talked to her about this later on, she said, "People don't understand, but I never rejected God. I never stopped believing." She said, "But I guess I just wanted to be in control. I didn't want to surrender everything and so I just wanted to be my own boss."

Dr. James Dobson: That's the strong will coming out again.

Dena Yohe: But the enemy has seemed to really been right on her heels a lot.

Dr. James Dobson: Tim, this is one of those programs that just can't be broken and yet it has to be, because we're out of time. We're not going to be on the air but just another minute or two. So if you will sit tight, we will continue the conversation and let people hear what we're about to say tomorrow. Is that okay?

Dena Yohe: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: And we will tell people the rest of the story. We can't leave people in this despair, however. Your book is really a book of hope and there is good news coming, right?

Dena Yohe: Yes, there is. I like people to know what my friend told me; there are no promises or guarantees, but as long as your child is still breathing, there is still hope.

Dr. James Dobson: And you're still on your knees praying, aren't you?

Dena Yohe: Always.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay, we'll pick it up next time.

Roger Marsh: I'm Roger Marsh and it is true, there is always hope because we serve the God of hope and redemption. You've been listening to the first half of an incredibly difficult and vulnerable conversation featuring Dr. Dobson, his cohost Dr. Tim Clinton, and their guests, Tom and Dena Yohe. Tom and Dena's daughter struggled with depression and self-harm for years. She abused drugs and alcohol

and was suicidal. Thanks to the prayer and support of her family and friends though, and because of God's grace, she is now doing quite well. Tom and Dena will share more about that on tomorrow's broadcast. In the meantime, if you'd like to learn more about Tom and Dena or their ministry called Hope for Hurting Parents, please visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org, that's drjamesdobson.org, and then select the broadcast tab. You'll find a couple of links there. One to their ministry and the other one to Dena Yohe's book called *You Are Not Alone*.

Now, before we go, I'd like to offer a resource for parents. If you think that you or your child would benefit from the godly perspective of a Christian counselor, visit connect.aacc.net. You'll find a comprehensive directory of mental health professionals who are members of the American Association of Christian Counselors and you can search by zip code to find a counselor near you. That's connect.aacc.net. Be sure to join us again tomorrow to hear the conclusion of Dr. Dobson and Dr. Clinton's compassionate conversation with Tom and Dena Yohe, right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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