



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Children and Stress - Part 2

Guest(s): Dr. Archibald Hart

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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: Well, welcome back to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. We live in a fast-paced world and it can be hard to find time in our busy day to even take a short, meaningful break. This message is trickling down to our kids as well and it's having a negative effect on them. Balance really is the key. I think about these words from the Apostle Paul to the church at Colossae say in Colossians 3:17 when he wrote, "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." In addition, the home environment we create for our children has the biggest impact on their lives. Some things that can be damaging are a conflict in the home, divorce, even drastic and sudden changes of any other type.

In today's classic conversation here on Family Talk, Dr. James Dobson joins his dear friend, Dr. Archibald Hart, to discuss these factors that are damaging the mental, physical and spiritual health of our children and teenagers. Now, Dr. Dobson and Dr. Arch Hart had been close friends for nearly 45 years. They worked together on many projects. Since the original recording of this program several years ago, Dr. Hart has been called home to be with the Lord Jesus and his wife Kathleen is with him in heaven as well. Dr. Hart was a renowned clinical psychologist and a certified psychopharmacologist. He served as dean of the School of Psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California for many, many years.

During his tenure there, Dr. Hart taught many classes, including for the doctorate of ministry program. He published over 30 books, including titles like The Anxiety Cure, The Digital Invasion, and Adrenaline and Stress. Today's discussion

centered around Dr. Hart's book entitled, Stress and Your Child. So, let's join Dr. Arch Hart right now with our own Dr. Dobson on this classic edition of Family Talk.

Dr. Archibald Hart: We don't teach children how to relax. We only teach them how to work. When they are relaxing, when they're taking things a little easy, when they're just lying on a bed listening to some music, we go at them and say, "Get off the bed, there are things to be done. You shouldn't sit around. Life's passing you by." Because the whole theme of the book has to do with the fact that serious stress disease in later life has its origin in childhood. Stress doesn't begin in your twenties, or thirties, or forties. It begins in your tens and maybe your teens.

Dr. James Dobson: It occurs to me, Arch, that our kids are a whole lot like us and it's really naive to think that our kids are immune to that and aren't caught up in it.

Dr. Archibald Hart: And there are many factors that create stressful environments for children. There's the child, him or herself. There is the environment, there is the family. And it's wonderful to be talking about stress in the context of the family, because I think that that is the arena in which most stress occurs. And if the family unit is not a functioning, efficient, warm, loving, caring unit, I think that stress there is going to be more serious on that child than anywhere else.

Dr. James Dobson: We're talking about stress in childhood. I have some information in front of me. Nearly 3,000 children in the United States alone see their parents get a divorce each day, isn't it?

Dr. Archibald Hart: Each day, 3,000 a day!

Dr. James Dobson: That is unbelievable. 1,629 children each day are put in adult jails. 3,288 young people run away from home. 1,512 students dropout of school. And 7,742 teens become sexually active every day. The stress level is incredible.

Dr. Archibald Hart: It's enormous. And parents are just not recognizing their children's stress. We have this blind spot, I think, Jim, about our children. They'll do fine. They're okay, until one day maybe something serious happens. But I think that the average parent is just not aware of the fact that they are laying the foundation in their child's youth for serious stress problems later in life.

Dr. James Dobson: Arch, this subject is so coordinated with the previous discussion we had on adrenaline and stress in adults, that I'd like to start the second program by going back to that discussion and giving parents just a little information that we discussed in a two or three day program before. You really see stress being

related to disease, and particularly heart disease, just in terms of the kind of lifestyle we live and that adrenaline plays a key role in this.

Dr. Archibald Hart: Heart disease is the most serious health problem we have. More people die from that than anything else.

Dr. James Dobson: I wish you hadn't have said that.

Dr. Archibald Hart: But in my understanding, the essence of the stress problem is really over arousal, is having too much of that good stuff we call adrenaline circulating in our bodies.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you see us getting addicted on that?

Dr. Archibald Hart: That's the arousal. And we can become addicted. We are an addicted society. And people who would drop from fright if they thought that they were drug addicts are in fact addicted to this powerful hormone we call adrenaline. And that lies behind the type A personality, lies behind the fast track phenomenon, and is the essential ingredient in all stress disease. Whether you look at headaches, or stomach problems, or high blood pressure, or the depositing of fatty substances in the arteries, it's part of this reaction that God created us with to deal with emergency. But life is not an emergency or at least should not be one long emergency.

Dr. James Dobson: He didn't intend for us to get up on that plane and stay there. Adrenaline is intended to ebb and flow and ebb and flow.

Dr. Archibald Hart: Mountains should be followed by valleys. And the concept of the Sabbath and so forth is the concept of a time for rest and recovery.

Dr. James Dobson: And yet people are less exhilarated in the valley and do something to pump the adrenaline back up.

Dr. Archibald Hart: That's right, because when the valley comes, it's too down, you feel depressed, it doesn't feel good. The mountaintop feels so much more exciting. We were designed to, Jim, in my opinion, for camel travel. And most of us are trying to be supersonic jets, and we cannot. I mean that's the essence of the stress problem. And as it applies to children is that we don't give them those valleys sufficiently. We take away the valleys. We put them on a mountaintop and it becomes one long plateau for these kids. And that does fine until your mid-thirties or late thirties or early forties and then you pay the piper. That's when you begin to reap the consequences of that stress.

- Dr. James Dobson: What do you say when people say you can't make it on a camel anymore? I mean, you've got to move, you got to go. That's life in a big city. You can't slow down.
- Dr. Archibald Hart: Well, I live in a big city and I know how to slow down. I have been able to take care of myself sufficiently to reverse stress disease that I was developing. It's all a matter of self-management, of self-control, of self-discipline, that people believe that that high exciting lifestyle, adrenaline driven lifestyle is normal. I mean the sound level that has increased dramatically in the last 10 years and the television stimulation and bombardment. Movies have got to be much more dramatic and stimulating to get a reaction anymore, because we've already up there to get any sort of reaction on top of a peak, you've got to do something pretty dramatic.
- Dr. James Dobson: I watched Alfred Hitchcock's Rear Window a while back and remember that as one of the best movies of the time, and yet it moves so slowly. I mean compared to today's movies, it was pedestrian and I was saying, hurry up, I get the point, keep moving.
- Dr. Archibald Hart: You see, we are conditioned then to higher levels of stimulation. And there's an adaptation process going up. And so, when you up at this level of stimulation, that becomes blah and you need something even more dramatic on top of that.
- Dr. James Dobson: You're telling parents to slow their children's world down?
- Dr. Archibald Hart: Two things, how to lower the adrenaline arousal of their children by reducing the amount of stimulation that they give their children. And secondly, teach your child how to build in valleys of recovery for recuperation.
- Dr. James Dobson: In your book, Stress and Your Child, you indicate that parents are the problem a lot of the time.
- Dr. Archibald Hart: Parents set the tone for the environment. See, there are two ingredients in childhood stress, the child and how he or she is made up and functions, and then the environment. And the first environment the child encountered is the home environment. And when homes are conflicted, when the home has a lot of anger and hostility and conflict going on, that child's adrenaline is up. That child's emergency system is alerted for the danger. And that child will go to bed and the stress disease process will be at work in its body.
- Dr. James Dobson: Let's talk specifically about the dysfunctional family and what parents can do.

Let's talk about divorce. We said that that's a very, very common source of stress for, what do we say, 3,000 children a day?

Dr. Archibald Hart: 3,000 are divorced.

Dr. James Dobson: And that process is not occurring in one day. It occurs over a childhood. What does the parent who sees that evidence of stress in the child after conflict that has resulted in a separation or divorce, how do they reach out to them? I mean, you can't make it go away.

Dr. Archibald Hart: No, you can't make it go away. You can't control every life circumstance. But there are lots of things you can do to help a child go through that period and not suffer as much damage. I'm convinced that divorce is extremely damaging to children.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay, how do they help?

Dr. Archibald Hart: First of all, make sure that you change things slowly. Sudden change, change is stressful. It's true for us as adults.

Dr. James Dobson: Boy, it really is.

Dr. Archibald Hart: Certainly change is stressful, because it evokes a whole new set of reactions and defenses and so forth. So, parents who- for whatever reason are divorcing change things slowly, first of all. Secondly, don't ignore your child's feelings. Children hurt. I was divorced when I was 12 years of age. That pain, that hurt.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you still remember it?

Dr. Archibald Hart: Vividly. Vividly. It's part of what I call my unfinished business. And every adult child of divorce has this tremendous amount of unfinished business to take care of it. The anxiety, the fear, the panic you feel when the family begins to disintegrate. It doesn't matter how conflicted the family is, when finally the step is taken to separate, you have a very, very serious amount of stress in that child.

Dr. James Dobson: So, important to keep them talking.

Dr. Archibald Hart: Keep them talking, have them share their feelings. Because what I discovered, the frustrating thing for me as a young child, I couldn't talk to anybody. If I wanted to talk to my mom, she was having so much pain, she didn't want to hear what I had to say. And then boys turn inward, which is why boys suffer more stress than girls in the divorcing process. I think that parents can help

tremendously by minimizing their conflict in front of the children. Why is it when divorce occurs that parents have got to have so much visible conflict impacting their children? Why can't they be civil in front of the children and go and do their fighting and scrapping around the corner?

Dr. James Dobson: It's not rational though, is it?

Dr. Archibald Hart: No, it's not rational.

Dr. James Dobson: Two people out of control with each other.

Dr. Archibald Hart: But that father will go to work and he'll perform perfectly normally in the work situation. He won't be out of control there. I really think we mustn't just leave parents to think that, because it's so intensely emotional, therefore they don't have to worry about exercising control. I think you have to exercise control.

Dr. James Dobson: Let me press you a little bit. Do you ever recommend that people who consider themselves incompatible stay together for the welfare of the children?

Dr. Archibald Hart: Absolutely. All the time.

Dr. James Dobson: I do too.

Dr. Archibald Hart: People can change. Incompatibility, Jim, is the given. There is no such thing as compatibility. Everything is relative. Incompatibility is the given. You have to overcome that incompatibility and that's the miracle that God works. No, I don't believe that incompatibility is grounds for breaking up a marriage. The child then going through all of this will experience a lot of stress symptoms. I think anything you can do to help that child get extra sleep. In fact, all the techniques I talk about in the book for stress proofing your child would apply in that situation and would help to relieve the child from the stress consequences of that divorce.

Dr. James Dobson: I know you're aware of Dr. Wallerstein's work that shows that children are actually more disturbed and more stressed five years after the divorce, than at the time of the divorce. It does not go away.

Dr. Archibald Hart: It doesn't go away and it goes into adulthood. And the phenomenon of adult children of divorce I think is a very, very valid one. And now you see that after the divorce, now we get into the remarriage, the new blended family. Stress doesn't go away. Now you have a whole new set of stressors. You have a stepparent who's a stranger, who often doesn't like you. It's rare that I meet a stepparent who will say to me, I really like my stepchild.

Dr. James Dobson: This is a strong statement. I have never seen a blended family that did not go through major, a major, extremely difficult adjustment period. And some of them never made it. Most of them just have to live with it.

Dr. Archibald Hart: But adjustment is stress for the child. You see, I mean this is not just purely in the head. That child's body will be responding with lots of adrenaline as if it were life-threatening. And then the whole stress situation increases and headaches will intensify, and stomach problems, and just general aches, and get sick a lot. And again, it's not as if nothing can be done. I think that we need to do a lot better job in pre-marriage counseling for remarried couples. I think that we put a lot of emphasis on pre-marriage counseling for first time marriages, but I think if... No one should get married a second time without a very, very thorough premarital counseling course.

Dr. James Dobson: And yet most single parents, women at least think of the ultimate solution to their stressful situations.

Dr. Archibald Hart: Getting married again.

Dr. James Dobson: Getting married again.

Dr. Archibald Hart: And often they regret it. There are exceptions, of course, one can't generalize. But boy, it does put a lot of stress on the child.

Dr. James Dobson: Speak specifically to the parent of a hard driving type A personality in a child, the straight A student who would get depressed if they got a B+, who puts such enormous pressure on themselves to perform.

Dr. Archibald Hart: Yes. But you see that pressure, although it becomes internalized, originates outside in the parent. And if you have a child like that, then you really have to ask yourself, what message am I sending that child? And perhaps sit down and start a process of educating your child in a more balanced set of expectations and values. I think we have to teach our children that they cannot be good at everything, perfect at everything. Maybe even choose a parent who takes a chance and says, "Look, we are going to choose to do something today that neither you nor I are good at. And we're going to do it just so we can learn that it's okay not to be perfect at something."

Dr. James Dobson: Academic institutions reinforce that kind of performance in an type A child too though. It's not just parents, is it?

- Dr. Archibald Hart: It's not just parents, the whole system does it.
- Dr. James Dobson: Teachers write letters to the parents saying how great the kid is and he gets a lot of reward and feedback. Relatives say, straight As, my goodness.
- Dr. Archibald Hart: And if a child has it, that's not a problem. But even for the brilliant child, I think that child whose father say has been able to communicate to their child, that the performance is not the ultimate value. I know you've given it your best. And if you come in with a B-, C+, D or F, I know you've given it your best and I will value the same for that, is teaching that child, is stress proofing that child. This is what I talk about in the book, as stress proofing. It's like taking a piece of cloth and making it waterproof, dipping it in certain chemicals. We need to take our children and dip them in certain experiences, certain attitudes, certain behaviors that will one day shed the stressors.
- So, the child who knows how to receive criticism, positively, constructively, the child who knows how to fail graciously and learns from that failure. The child who understands the role of forgiveness in all of life. I mean that child has a fantastic set of resources with which to live. And that all directly relates to the stress phenomenon. And it is parents who shape that, who develop that, and then often have to counteract the other influences of the school system and so forth. And we have to be intentional about how we do that educating my children.
- Dr. James Dobson: I have never found a real good way to put this thought into words and I'll probably fumble with it today. But for the child who has the other problem, the other end of the continuum, from that hard driving type A straight A mentality. The child who does not have the self-discipline to carry that daily responsibility and he's a classic underachiever, that child's under a lot of stress too. He looks lazy. He looks like he's floating, he looks like he doesn't care. He's often torn up inside, because he's not performing and he knows it. When I see one of those youngsters who, by his temperament does not fit the academic mold and just not that way, just doesn't function well in school. I strongly recommend that parents put an arm around that kid and tell him it's okay and put the emphasis someplace else. I know educators might not understand that and it isn't what they want parents to say, but if a kid can't make it in that world, I'll take him out of that world and let him make it someplace else.
- Dr. Archibald Hart: That's what I call faceting and I talk about it in the book, where the task of the parent is to help a child identify its strengths. Now, in my opinion, there is no child on God's earth that doesn't have some strengths, some talents that could

be developed. Now, book learning may not be where it's at, but how do you know that that child doesn't have tremendous craftsman skills, who couldn't carve or make beautiful furniture or paint?

Dr. James Dobson: Or sing.

Dr. Archibald Hart: Or sing, or dance, or could have a beautiful personality that can minister to others? I think that we bring to parenting and this causes stress in children, preconceived ideas, plans that we've drawn up for how we want our child to turn out.

Dr. James Dobson: Some of that's related to our own peer pressure.

Dr. Archibald Hart: Got our own peer pressure and our own unfulfilled dreams and ideal self. The parent who can be honest and say, I will start at the point of discovering my child's strengths. We did this with one of our daughters. She was the one who didn't have a beautiful singing voice and oh, it would've been wonderful if we could all have formed this wonderful quintet. She didn't have a good singing voice and she was beginning to act out. And then we turned it around and we began to value the few things she could do and do them well. And suddenly, she began to blossom.

Dr. James Dobson: See that little flower open up.

Dr. Archibald Hart: It begins to blossoms. It's faceting. It's a process by which you take the dull diamond and you begin to put the bright faces on it, and then begin to bring out the brilliance. And every diamond has its own pattern that has to be shaped.

Dr. James Dobson: This entire discussion and the entire process of attempting to stress proof or de-stress your children starts with being able to get behind the eyes of the child and see what he or she is feeling and seeing, and feel that emotion and then reacting accordingly, isn't it?

Dr. Archibald Hart: It is that.

Dr. James Dobson: You've got to get into the world of the child.

Dr. Archibald Hart: You have to get into the world of the child so you understand it, so you see the world through the child's eyes. And that means slowing down yourself, you see? I mean, take the fast track parents where they're into money and into possessions and both got-

Dr. James Dobson: The job's survival, Arch, let's be fair.

Dr. Archibald Hart: But you see, but survival is relative, Jim. For many of them, survival is whether they can keep up payments on the BMW or some other fantastic possession they've got. Sometimes it's not survival, survival that drives fast track parents. But I think it is a fact that at a certain point in the child's life, many parents just hand them over and are no longer taking a vital personal interest in what that child is doing or how it's managing its life or how it's experiencing stress.

Dr. James Dobson: The name of the book is Stress and Your Child. Its causes, dangers and prevention by Dr. Archibald Hart. Good stuff, Arch, good practical stuff. We call it nuts and bolts. This is a big book, nearly 250 pages of advice related to this subject and most of it highly pragmatic. You're dealing with very specific situations.

Dr. Archibald Hart: Lots of work, charts in it, lots of tests in it to really give a parent a handle on the stress life of their child. It's directed to the parents who can shape or destroy a child. It's directed also to how you help your child. What do you do for your child? And so, it has that double barrelled focus.

Dr. James Dobson: When are you going to write one for teachers so they can recognize stress in their children? This subject goes on and on, doesn't it?

Dr. Archibald Hart: Yes, it does.

Dr. James Dobson: I mean, it touches all of us one way or another.

Dr. Archibald Hart: All of us.

Dr. James Dobson: Arch, it's always good to have you here. You always have good things to say, good insights to share with us. I appreciate the man you are. You love the Lord, don't you?

Dr. Archibald Hart: I love the Lord.

Dr. James Dobson: There's never been any doubt about that.

Dr. Archibald Hart: Thank you, Jim. It's very good to be with you.

Roger Marsh: Well, what an insightful broadcast we have heard these past couple of days here on Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh and I hope you learned something from this classic interview, especially if you are a parent. A child's mother and father play critical roles in how they approach and deal with stress. You can visit our

broadcast page for more information on how to get a copy of Dr. Hart's popular book called Stress and Your Child. Go to drjamesdobson.org for more information. Once you're there, you'll also find a link for Dr. Hart's organization that continues to support families. You'll find all of this when you go to drjamesdobson.org and then click onto the broadcast icon at the top of the page.

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