



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Navigating Your Teen's Emotional Storms – Part 1

Guest(s): Sharon Hersh

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Dr. 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: For many of us, the teen years were difficult. A time we would much rather forget, but for young adults, especially young girls, today's culture has placed an immense amount of pressure on them. Teenage girls are told that they have to look a certain way, be popular and fit in no matter what. If they don't meet the standards of society, society will shame and bully girls into developing issues of low self-esteem and hatred of themselves. Today on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, we're going to talk about those tough issues teens are facing and how parents can come alongside their teens as they struggle.

Your host is always the Psychologist and bestselling author, Dr. James Dobson. I'm Roger Marsh and today you're going to hear a rebroadcast of Dr. Dobson's interview with counselor Sharon Hersh, author of the book *Mom, I Hate My Life*. Let's get to part one now of this engaging and informative conversation that we've titled *Navigating Your Teen's Emotional Storms* here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Dr. Dobson: We're going to talk today about one of the most difficult circumstances that can come along. One that can create enormous anxiety. And it deals with the adolescent years, for some kids much more than others - they vary tremendously - when everything seems to go haywire. Parents, whose kids sailed through that time, may not fully understand the level of fear and depression that loving moms and dads can experience when the child that they brought into the world and love beyond measure suddenly begins to go off the deep end. These parents have no idea how this happened. They certainly didn't intend it.

And many of them have given it their very best shot. And many of them have done well. They've been good parents, and it still happens for hormonal reasons and other things, social reasons. And I don't know that there's a whole lot in life that creates greater angst than this one. Because you care about those kids more than anything on Earth, that's what matters to you. Your job and your

home and your car and all the other things that are accompanying your journey through life don't mean anything compared to those children. And when they're not only angry all the time, but are threatening to do things that you know could affect them for their life or even shorten their life. It is very, very difficult.

And that's why we're doing this program today. And fortunately, we have a guest here today who specializes in this kind of relationship difficulty. She's a licensed counselor and her name is Sharon Hersh. We have only met her today. She wrote the book, *Mom, I Hate My Life*. She's helped many moms and daughters bridge the chasm between them. She also speaks from experience because she's the mom of a daughter that's just gone off to college and Graham, a son Graham, right?

Sharon Hersh: Yes, that's right.

Dr. Dobson: And you have managed to get through the adolescent years pretty well yourself, but you've seen it. You know what I'm talking about, don't you?

Sharon Hersh: I do. And I think, as you spoke, I thought of a lot of moms listening out there who, maybe like me, really thought they were doing everything right. And sometimes it's shocking and feels like a huge betrayal when children who we've poured our hearts into and we've loved and we've tried to guide and lead in good ways and the ways of God.

Dr. Dobson: And you've prayed for them.

Sharon Hersh: Oh, yes. And all of a sudden they're stomping their feet, slamming their doors, telling us that they hate being in our family. And really considering choices that, as you said, are pretty scary. And one of the first things I do is encourage moms that it's inexplicable to me, why some girls grow up in families where there's not a lot of supervision and there's not a lot of guidance and they make good choices.

Dr. Dobson: They do fine.

Sharon Hersh: And then some girls grow up in homes with loving parents, where there is a lot of guidance and instruction, and yet, as you said, something goes haywire and moms get lost in the craziness as well as daughters during that time.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah. It's not possible to be entirely rational during that time, is it?

Sharon Hersh: Not for either mother or daughter.

Dr. Dobson: Both generations are caught up in the passion of what's going on. And it's very easy for a mother to begin to act like an adolescent, begin screaming and begin overreacting to minor things.

Sharon Hersh: Absolutely. I think of the first adolescent girl I saw in my counseling practice, her mother called, she was 15 and she was going to her room and slamming the door and not talking and not wanting to interact with the family. Didn't want to go to church anymore. Even hated the family dog. And mom said, "Can you help?" And I was a young counselor and I had gotten an A in Adolescent Psychology. And I thought, "Just bring this girl to me. And I will counsel her into happiness."

Dr. Dobson: Lots of luck.

Sharon Hersh: Well, after about 15 minutes of silence from her, which is a long time in the counseling office, I felt like this little yippee dog who was nipping at her heels, trying to get her to answer any question or interact with me in some way. I thought, "How do you get through to a moody, sullen teenager?" My children at the time were about eight and nine, and she started shaking her foot furiously. She was wearing, at the time, those trendy, clunky Doc Martens shoes, which I did not know could become weapons in the counseling office.

And before I could even anticipate what would happen, she pulled off her shoe. She threw it through my window-

Dr. Dobson: You're kidding.

Sharon Hersh: ... which cracked into pieces. And she said, "I am not the problem here." And stormed out of the office, as I followed her to the lobby and said to her mother, "You're right, your daughter needs counseling."

Dr. Dobson: Take her to a good counselor.

Sharon Hersh: Yes. I knew I had a lot to learn about adolescents at that time and anticipated my own daughter's, I knew soon arriving adolescence, and remembered what it was like to be female and thought surely that love that you talked about, Dr. Dobson, that we have for our children ought to count for something here. And what I have discovered is that it does. But first of all, we have to-

Dr. Dobson: You have to work through it, don't you?

Sharon Hersh: ... face some pretty mighty storms, sometimes.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah. Sharon, as a mom, you would have given your life for your kids, wouldn't you?

Sharon Hersh: I still would.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah. There's nothing you care about more than that.

Sharon Hersh: And yet, when they're grouchy and irritable and ungrateful, I don't sometimes even want to give them five minutes. And I think that's what we, as parents, have to begin to tell the truth to ourselves and one another that sometimes our teenagers, especially teenage girls, can be mean and hard to get along with, irrational, as you said. And we throw up our arms and think, "Who? Who can bear this?"

Dr. Dobson: Yeah. Sharon, now you have dedicated this book, essentially, to the mother-daughter relationship. Why not mothers and sons? Why did you focus specifically on daughters?

Sharon Hersh: Probably for two primary reasons. It's been who I've been privileged and humbled to know in the counseling office. Mothers and daughters who show up week after week, day after day. And I get phone calls in the middle of the night. "My daughter won't speak to me. She's run away. We don't know where she is. I found a razor blade in my daughter's bedroom. I don't know what she's doing. Is she cutting herself? What does that mean?" Desperate mothers have forced me to learn far more than often you learn in those adolescent psychology classes. And my own daughter as well has taught me so much. And I do believe, Dr. Dobson, that there is something uniquely special about the mother-daughter bond.

Dr. Dobson: Oh, man. I've been writing that for years. There is a mother-daughter thing,

Sharon Hersh: There is.

Dr. Dobson: And sometimes it bonds and sometimes it's two women in the kitchen.

Sharon Hersh: Yeah. And what I want to encourage moms is to perhaps let go of some of the anxiety and fear that inevitably comes when our daughters are making scary choices. It's often mothers who wake up in the middle of the night and who know, "Something is off-center with my daughter. Something's gone awry. There's a friend that I don't have peace about." I think that intuition, where God's Spirit speaks to our inner voice, intending us to connect with our children. That connection gets broken when we are filled with panic or disgust or embarrassment at our moody teenager daughter's behavior.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah. I want to go back to something we implied a minute ago, but we really need to start at this point. There is not a one-to-one correlation between being a good parent and having a teenager who sails through adolescence. Those things don't always connect at the same time. You can be a great parent and go through very difficult things in the teen years. Can't you?

Sharon Hersh: I'm so glad you said that. And I think that will be relieving to so many mothers, in particular, because we moms are experts at feeling guilty. I think that will be relieving for them to hear for a moment. And then we think, "Okay, but what do I do?" First of all, I think it's important that we understand what the forces are

at work that really are out of our control that are going on inside of the hearts, souls, minds of our teenage girls.

Dr. Dobson: And one of them is a hormonal firestorm.

Sharon Hersh: It really is. During adolescence, during puberty, girls' bodies are constantly flooded with hormones. And so she's got this internal craziness going on. But then you take another component, which I think has changed since I was a teenage girl and unfortunately appears to be intensifying, and that is some external chaos. Teenage girls ages nine to 19 are the most victimized segment of our culture.

Dr. Dobson: I have no doubt about that.

Sharon Hersh: Even in The Denver Post, they did a study on harassment that said that bullying among girls has eclipsed bullying among boys.

Dr. Dobson: Isn't that incredible?

Sharon Hersh: So, we have sexual harassment and bullying, and then we have just meanness among teenage girls, and then all the things available via the internet and the culture that suggest to girls, models and images that are unrealistic for them to attain to. You have this external chaos collide with the biological, inevitable internal chaos, and no wonder we have a culture of girls who are suffering with depression, eating disorders, and alcohol and drug abuse greater than any other time in our history.

Dr. Dobson: The body image thing at this time is a national crisis and a disgrace-

Sharon Hersh: It is.

Dr. Dobson: ... where Hollywood and the entertainment industry and television hammers away at the fact that you've got to be bone thin and you've got to have all these characteristics. And teenagers don't have them. I mean, not one in a hundred-

Sharon Hersh: Really, that's true.

Dr. Dobson: ... even comes close and they look at themselves in the mirror with total disgust. It's only one little step from there to hating everybody around.

Sharon Hersh: It's very connected to the subject that we're talking about today. When girls' emotions go out of control, they often look for something that they can control. And for a growing girl, who's bombarded with images from her culture about how she's supposed to look. That is one thing a girl pretty quickly discovers, "I can control how much I eat." Anyway, she thinks she can control, "How much I eat and what I do with my body and how I appear."

So, what we need to ask ourselves is - eating disorders are no longer a big secret like they were when I was a teenage girl - why is knowledge alone not helpful? I think it should alarm us all and should take us back to the subject at hand of what is going on in our daughters' internal world that is making them make such scary choices with regard to their external experience?

Dr. Dobson: Well, I want to come back to the specifics of eating disorders and cutting, self-mutilation and other things that teenagers do. But let's go back to some of the general principles that you started with in this book and a phrase that you have coined called hand-in-hand mothering. What do you mean by that?

Sharon Hersh: Hand-in-hand mothering really refers to the posture that we assume with our children, as you know posture, how I sit or stand or lay, make certain activities possible. And we have postures in parenting as well. In the book, I talk about four different postures in parenting, where you place yourself in relationship to your child. And none of these are wrong. They're all appropriate at times.

But then I move us into the hand-in-hand posture, which I think, especially during the adolescent years, can be most powerful and effective. Some of those other postures could be standing above our children, lecturing, nagging, disciplining, setting boundaries, posture that is certainly most appropriate when they are younger. And they need those boundaries and that safety.

Or there is a posture of being beneath your child, which is feeling like she's most important and that your needs are not important as a mom. And you're just going to sacrifice everything for your child. And some of that is good at times. Although, certainly not always. There is the hover mother posture, which is my favorite, because it's one that I tend to. Where we think we can fix everything for our children.

And believe me, when it comes to emotional wellbeing, if you're set out in a course to always make your daughter happy, you're either going to be mad at her for not going along, or you're going to feel incredibly ineffectual and powerless as a mother, because we-

Dr. Dobson: She's going to be mad at you too.

Sharon Hersh: Yes. You're absolutely right. That's a huge responsibility for her to bear to always have to be happy. But hand-in-hand mothering really adopts a posture that says, "Our relationship can be a haven from that cruel cold world that you have to go into as a teenage girl." And that, "I am willing to always lend a hand and learn whatever means possible to guide you into emotional maturity."

Dr. Dobson: All right. How in the world do you go through the day-by-day experience of parenting when your kid is saying, "I hate you."? And screaming and crying, bursts through the door at night, coming home from school, is weeping, goes straight past you, goes into the bedroom, slams the door and leaves the

impression that this is all your fault and you didn't know what in the world you did. She didn't want to talk to you. She doesn't want to come out. She's depressed. And when she does, she is a tiger to live with. How do you get hand-in-hand with somebody like that?

Sharon Hersh:

It's tough. And when we are in pain, we look for someone to blame. And that's where moms often become the emotional containers for all that our girls are going through and experiencing out there. And so, they come home from a day where they have been called all sorts of names in the hallways at school. It might be relieving to moms to know that only 10%, some experts say, of teenagers' emotional unhappiness has to do with what's going on at home. Some experts say that 90%, and that by the time a girl is 16, one third of her emotional experiences have to do with what's going on with the opposite sex, with boys in her peer world.

But if we add to those statistics, the knowing that if a child feels unloved and rejected at home, rejection or hurt by a peer is experienced a hundred fold. Then, I know it seems counterintuitive when your daughter is yelling and slamming the door and saying mean things to you, we must create a haven of safety and love and acceptance at home.

Now, if my emotional climate is regulated by my daughter's thermostat, I'm not going to be able to do that. So moms, first of all, we have to grow ourselves up. And then when your daughter comes home and says, "I hate my life. I had a horrible day. I don't have any friends. I wish that I could just die." My daughter has told me that the most helpful thing that I have ever said to her during the adolescent years is this, "I know you are feeling that way right now." In other words, I didn't try to coax her out of her bad mood, or, and I have done this, believe me, to debate her and explain to her why she should be happy and all the friends that she has and remind her of what she did just the night before and how happy she was last week.

But to say, "I understand you are feeling what you are feeling." And then saying, "I understand you're feeling that way right now." It suggests to her-

Dr. Dobson:

It's not always going to be that way.

Sharon Hersh:

... that I know it hasn't always been this way. And I know it's not going to always be this way in the future. And depending where she's at, she may just file that away and go to her room and still slam her door or turn her music up loud. Probably the second most important thing I can tell mothers to say during these chaotic, tumultuous times is to let your daughter have that space to say, "Wow, you must have had a really bad day today. Maybe we can go get a cup of coffee later on." And so mom says, "I see what's happening." In other words, I'm not going to look the other way. I'm not going to walk on eggshells and pretend that you're not in a miserable space that is impacting me. But I will always offer reconnection. And that's where we, as moms, fall down. Our daughter slams the door in our face and we think, "Okay."

Dr. Dobson: All right, forget you. Who needs this?

Sharon Hersh: Exactly. And we get to imitate God when we say, "How about breakfast tomorrow morning?" We get to be like the one who said, "Here I am knocking at the door. If anyone will answer, I'll come in and eat with them. And they with me." We get to do that with our daughters. That's where these tumultuous times become the perfect context to not only develop a relationship with our daughters that outlast the "mom, I hate my life" stage, but to offer them a taste of God.

Dr. Dobson: And it won't last forever.

Sharon Hersh: It won't.

Dr. Dobson: I mean, that's not propaganda. It won't last forever. Sharon, you mentioned prayer. Have you ever fasted for your children? That's a personal question.

Sharon Hersh: I have not. I have not.

Dr. Dobson: I strongly recommend that. Not that you're bribing God, not that your purpose is to hurt or to have an ascetic approach to your faith. But it's just a way of saying once a week, "Lord, here I am, again, you know that I can't fix this kid, but everything's in the balance now. This is the most important time of her life or his life. And I want to do the right thing. I want to say the right thing. You know the answers and I don't. You can also work within that child. And so for this day, I'm putting aside food simply to talk to you about this. And whenever I think of eating, I will think of you and hold this precious child up to you. She was born in love. You gave her to me. And I brought her through these toddler years and the childhood years. And now we've come to a juncture where things could go really wrong. You know that, and I don't want to make it worse. Give me wisdom and work in the life of my child."

Boy, I tell you what, you start praying that kind of prayer. And especially in a context of fasting, I don't know why that matters to God, but Jesus didn't say, "If you fast." He said, "When you fast." He assumed that we were going to do this.

Sharon Hersh: That sounds powerful. And it makes me think of the story of the prodigal son, which is a story about hunger. And since many of the girls that I work with are prodigals and their parents are waiting for them, as the father did in the story, wincing with hope for them to return. I often think how it is our hunger, as babies, that makes us need our mothers. And as our daughters grow, their hunger for acceptance, for belonging, for connection, sometimes leads them to look for that love in all the wrong places.

But it's that hunger that offers the potential for us to connect with them. And it is in turn our hunger for God, as you said, that takes us to Him on our knees, absolutely desperate. "I cannot do one thing for this child who I love more than

life, help me." That we then can in turn offer a taste of God to our children. And that's that circle of give and take that it's such a privilege in parenting to be involved in.

Dr. Dobson: Sharon Hersh is our guest and she's written this book called *Mom, I Hate My Life: Becoming Your Daughter's Ally Through the Emotional Ups and Downs of Adolescence*. I think you've got a real good fix on this subject. I want to do another program with you. And I would like to talk next time about the specifics. How do you recognize an eating disorder? And what do you do about it? How do you recognize potential suicide? What do you do when your teenage girl begins to dress in very, very provocative ways that you know are not right and that lead to difficulties? What do you do? We're going to get to the how-tos next time. Thank you, Sharon, for being with us-

Sharon Hersh: Thank you, it's been great to be here today.

Dr. Dobson: ... and for the work that you do with teenagers. *Mom, I Hate My Life*. That's a great title, because most parents have heard that one way or the other. It's good to have you here today. We'll pick it up next time if you're willing to be with us.

Sharon Hersh: That'd be great.

Dr. Dobson: Good.

Roger Marsh: You've been listening to part one of our re-broadcast of an interview Dr. Dobson did with author and counselor Sharon Hersh about directing your kids through their turbulent teen years. If you're interested in learning more about Sharon's book called *Mom, I Hate My Life*, be sure to visit our website at Drjamesdobson.org for more information. If you have questions regarding this message, or if you're having a difficult time right now raising your own teens, we are here for you. You can call us toll free at 877-732-6825. We have people here who would love to pray with you, or just to talk with you. Once again, the toll free number to call is 877-732-6825.

As a father of three myself. I know the teen years can be challenging. That's why we here at Family Talk are excited about all the resources we have available to help you through the teen years. As we seek to continue to do the work of the Lord, we need your continued prayers and your continued financial support. Won't you prayerfully consider partnering with us as we fight for righteousness in our culture today? And we know that budgets can be extremely tight this time of year.

So if you are able to help in any way, please know how much we would deeply appreciate your tax deductible donation. You can donate securely online at Drjamesdobson.org. You can donate over the phone by calling toll free: 877-732-6825. And please know how much we appreciate your prayers and your

generous financial support. Again, the toll free number to call: 877-732-6825. Be sure to listen to our program again tomorrow to hear part two on our theme of "Navigating Your Teen's Emotional Storms." I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks for listening. Be sure to tune in again next time for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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

Roger Marsh: The battle lines for decision 2020 have been clearly drawn. Dr. Dobson believes that there are several essentials every Christian needs to understand, and then take that wisdom to the polls as we take a stand for biblical values in our culture in this year's election. He's writing about the most urgent issues in his publication called Faith Votes, and you can get a free copy when you go to Drjamesdobson.org/faithvotes. That's Drjamesdobson.org/faithvotes.