



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Dealing with the Difficult Child – Part 2

Guest(s): Dr. Tim Clinton

Air Date: September 12, 2023

[Listen to the broadcast](#)

Roger Marsh: Today on Family Talk.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Every child deserves at least one person, hopefully it's two people, in his or her life who's crazy about him. A defiant kid, an extra effort child, a strong-willed child, whatever box you want to put them in for a moment, they still need to know that somebody's crazy about them, Dr. Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: Absolutely.

Roger Marsh: And if you are the parent of an extra effort, child or adolescent, well, be sure to stay tuned. That was just a small taste of the helpful advice that will be unlocked in today's edition of Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh, and yesterday on the program, Dr. James Dobson began an encouraging conversation with Dr. Tim Clinton about how to understand and parent a difficult or extra effort child. Now, that includes a son that you may not have very much in common with, or it may be a strong-willed daughter who challenges your authority at every opportunity. Or it might even be a kid who is constantly acting out when there doesn't seem to be a specific reason why.

Well, wherever you are in your relationship with your extra effort child, you might want to turn the volume up for today's program. Dr. Tim Clinton is joining Dr. Dobson once again for the conclusion of this two-part conversation. Of course, Dr. Tim Clinton is the president of the American Association of Christian Counselors. He's the executive director of the Global Center for Mental Health Addiction and Recovery at Liberty University. He's also a licensed counselor, therapist, speaker and author. Tim Clinton is married to his lovely wife, Julie, and together they have two grown children and two grandchildren. Let's join our own Dr. James Dobson and Dr. Tim Clinton as they continue their conversation on this classic edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Tim, I've been doing radio like this for 39 years, and the time always goes fast, but I think our program last time went quicker than anything I remember.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I was stunned.

Dr. James Dobson: You look at the clock and it's over. We were talking about the difficult child. I call that individual the strong-willed child, can be a boy or a girl. Or a child, I think you phrased it...

Dr. Tim Clinton: As an extra effort child.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Someone who just takes some extra out of your tank, to connect with, to pour into the parent. Like you say, parenting isn't for cowards. You got to show up every day. You know why? Because they need us.

Dr. James Dobson: They do.

Dr. Tim Clinton: God's given them to us for a reason. He's placed them strategically in our care.

Dr. James Dobson: There are two groups of parents listening to us right now. One of them is made up of those who have only easy, or what I call compliant kids. And it's duck soup. And you talk about overconfident. That parent often feels like, "I'm about the best parent in the world." Because I don't understand parents who say kids are stressful. They're not stressful. And then there's the other group of parents that's sitting there saying, "Finally somebody understands what I'm going through." And what's really interesting is when a parent has a couple of those easy kids and then comes up with a tough as nails kid. And all of a sudden, "What did I do wrong?" And parents are-

Dr. Tim Clinton: We're stopping on this one.

Dr. James Dobson: ... on their knees, and praying, and saying, "Lord, I feel like a failure," because you frequently do.

Dr. Tim Clinton: But like you say, Dr. Dobson, those children have unique qualities just like the other children do, that when drawn out, oftentimes they'll wind up being leaders, champions, those who are first into battle. And by the way, first one's to rush by your side, also, that in your moments of pain and brokenness. And so, how do you connect with them? I think that's the question that keeps coming up. How do I partner up, if you will, with my son or daughter who's different than me? Who may be shy, who may not be athletic, who may be moody, someone I just don't necessarily like to be around. One of the principles, Dr. Dobson, I've seen in research, and I'm waiting to hear some of your input on this, but people are now talking a lot about the quality of your relationship with your son or daughter.

Saw some work by a preeminent psychologist in the area of oppositional defiance disorder. His name's Russell Barkley. And in his work he claimed to have a 90 plus percent success rate in overcoming defiance, something you know a little bit about. But he claimed that if you could spend 20 minutes a day

in command, free, special time with a child, not that that was the complete recipe, but if you would spend 20 minutes a day in that child's world, not condoning things that you don't want, but literally participating in their world, "Zach, what do you want to do today?" If I said, "Hey, let's go outside and play catch," no, that's an indirect command. That's not what he wants. He wants you to crawl into the world that when you participated in that child's world for 20 minutes a day, radical things begin to happen in that relationship. A relationship begins to happen with your child.

And he found that that element was at the heart of change in helping overcome defiance. What do you think may be at the heart of some of that, Dr. Dobson? Because it's hard. If you don't like being with somebody and you're going to spend 20 minutes a day with them, a lot of parents can't even get started.

Dr. James Dobson: I've written a lot about what I call the strength of the will. It was Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden who were told that they could eat of any tree in the entire garden except one. And what did they want to do? Satan tempted Eve, Eve then passed it on to Adam and they said, "I know that the creator has said don't do this, but we want to do it." There is that determination, that self-will, I think that is original sin, that willful defiance in the face of even God Himself. I'm not a theologian, but that's the way I interpret it. And we all have it to a degree. Even the easy child, the compliant child, will eventually express that will. It may be at 19, or 20, 22, and matter of fact, the rebellion is often late. Yeah, it comes anyway, but we've all got it. It's in the nature of mankind.

So you take a little child that's born, he's seven pounds, he can't hold his own bottle, he can't turn over, he can't do anything for himself, and two years later he's got the temerity to stamp his little foot and look a 200 pound man in the eye and say, "Where do you get off telling me what to do?" It's in the nature of mankind, and I think it's inherited.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And in that connecting with that child, moving into that child's world, learning about their nature, there's an old song that was entitled "What I Like about You." I think an important thing you've got to do as a parent is somehow you've got to move into that space, and you've got to look those children in the eye, and you've got to make a decision about what you're going to like or not like about that child. There's a statement out there that says every child deserves at least one person, hopefully it's two people, in his or her life who's crazy about him. A defiant kid, an extra effort child, a strong-willed child, whatever box you want to put them in for a moment, they still need to know that somebody's crazy about them, Dr. Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: Absolutely. That's why I have recommended that after discipline has occurred, especially if it was a real confrontation, and you have been forced to make the child uncomfortable, whether it's sitting in a chair, or spanking, or whatever it is, and the child, especially if he's cried, especially if there's been an emotional exchange, you open your arms and let him come. I mean, that's a point at which a child will want to be reassured. And pull him into your lap and say how much

you love him, and why you have to see that he minds, because God has given you as a parent that responsibility. If you don't stop when I say stop and you run out in the street, a car could hit you. There are dangers out there. You have to obey me. Whether you like it or not, you have to. But it's out of love and it's because I care about you. There's a conversation there, I'm trying to put it into words, every parent will have his or her own way of dealing with that, but you reconnect with this child with whom you have become distant. You agree with that?

Dr. Tim Clinton: I do agree with it, Dr. Dobson. I think some of the most meaningful moments in our family have been after a correction, after discipline, where the embrace is so strong it's like, "You know what? At the end of the day, we'd love each other. We're here for each other. Yes, I'm the parent. Yes, you're the child, but most importantly, you are loved. You are not abandoned. I will not forego my relationship with you because we have discipline. You know that?" My son, Zach, this was kind of a unique situation, Dr. Dobson. Zach is a physical presence boy. He likes proximity, he likes closeness, he likes to feel-

Dr. James Dobson: An arm around him.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yes, he does. Enjoys, no, he needs that. He doesn't enjoy it, he wants that. Even as a young man, he enjoys that kind of relationship. When he was little, we would do time out as one of our discipline strategies. You know what I learned about Zach? That time out almost wounded him. If I gave him time out and I left the room, it was just devastating to him. It was almost like he felt completely abandoned. So recognizing that in him, here's an attunement issue, understanding your child's temperament, understanding what is turning, say, the knob, maybe a little bit too far or not, I started deciding to take time out with him.

Dr. James Dobson: Really?

Dr. Tim Clinton: So I took time out-

Dr. James Dobson: Sit beside him.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I sat beside him. We took-

Dr. James Dobson: What a great idea.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Time out together is what we did. And he hated that too. He did, but it mattered to him, you see? And it taught him the importance here.

Dr. James Dobson: What you said is so valid. You have to know your child. Every one of them is unique, every one of them is different. And what will crush one child, a look will crush some children, and they will think about it all day. And others, you can scream till you're red in the face, and-

Dr. Tim Clinton: Don't care.

Dr. James Dobson: Don't mean a thing. No.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: In fact, they rather like it, I think at times, to get this big adult all worked up. But you got to know your child. Last weekend we had our grandkids over. And we took them to the grocery store. We were getting food for them and for us. And after we had done what we were there to do, we said, "Well, there's some toys here. See if there's one that you would like." And each one of them chose something. And Little Luci, who is four years old, shows a doctor kit. I think it costs 4.99, I don't even remember, it's not much. And we brought it home.

Now, it's no fun to play with something like that if you don't have somebody to play with. And so I told Luci that I'd been in a car wreck and I was all beat up, and I went over and laid down on the couch, and she came over and she listened to my heart. She got it where the stomach is, she didn't know where the heart was. And then there were all kinds of band-aids in there and she put them all over me, and she absolutely loved that, because I was into her world. I was doing something with a child. Instead of bringing her into my world, I entered into hers. And you can build a lot of goodwill with a child by doing that.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That whole special time concept that we had talked about earlier, I believe with you that there's emotional connection that begins to take place when you step into their world. You learn what they like, what they don't like. You learn where their heart is. You learn what's significant to them, really important to them. And by the way, your presence, think about this, mom or dad, 20 minutes a day can revolutionize your relationship with your son or daughter. They actually begin to believe that you think they're important. It's important to spend time with them. There's a calming effect.

Dr. James Dobson: You know what works against that is this pace of living that we've allowed ourselves to get into. If I spend 20 minutes with this child, I'll never catch up the whole evening. I get dinner to make, I've got to get the dishes and the dishwasher... I can't get my work done, I've got calls to make. Come on, is that what life's all about? Children do not function well on a to-do list. They need time with us, and they frequently don't get it.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I think it's no coincidence, Dr. Dobson, I know you've been a champion of the family dinner table basically your whole life. New research coming out on teens and dinner. This is fascinating to me. You know what they found? The more you eat dinner with your teen, the better the effect is on that child, the more healthy they are. And as I read the research, here's what I found. It was staggering to me. Is there a drop-off effect? In other words, if I eat dinner with my teen three times a week, is that enough? You know what they found? There was no drop-off effect. The more you ate dinner each week with your teen, the

more healthy the outcome was for that son or daughter. Now, it's not about the food. Think about it.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, it can even be fast food. As long as you're sitting down together, turn the TV off.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Get rid of the phone.

Dr. James Dobson: Get rid of the cellphone.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Turn the iPhone and the iPad off.

Dr. James Dobson: And look each other in the eye.

Dr. Tim Clinton: The conversations that take place, I think about hunting experiences. My dad pastored for nearly 60 years, but one of the things he loved to do was he spent time with us, his sons, in hunting. And we still go every year and get together. Recently, we went up to our place in Pennsylvania. There's 17 of us. Dr. Dobson, in those four days we spend together, it's not really about hunting, we enjoy getting outside. It's what takes place at that place with 17 men, family members, related family members, and friends.

Dr. James Dobson: How'd you get from killing each other? 17.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It is pretty dangerous up there, I agree with you. But the time around the campfire, the time around the dinner table, the time out in the woods, working with our hands, fishing, whatever. Legacy gets transferred. Important truths about how to live your life, history, there's so much.

Dr. James Dobson: The happiest days of my entire life. I've had a lot of happy days because I'm happily married, I've enjoyed raising kids, I've been rewarded professionally. I've had a lot of good things in my life. I sometimes feel like one of God's spoiled kids. But the happiest days of my life, were going hunting with my dad when I was about 12 years old, and being out there with him. He talked to me in ways he didn't talk to me at home, because there was nobody else there but me, and we just got involved in conversations, and there was a lot of intrigue in hunting. We were hunting squirrels early on, and we would try to outfox them. I would stomp around in the grass on the other side of a tree and the squirrel would run for me, and then my dad would be there waiting for him.

There's no way to put that in words, or what it meant to me. And it bonded me to my dad is why I talk about him like I do so often, because he took time for me. He cared for me. Your dad cared for you too.

Dr. Tim Clinton: I share in that with you. I was blessed to have a wonderful dad. I don't call him a father, he was a dad. It takes somebody special to be a dad. That lesson is what we're trying to communicate back to those of you listening, and that is simply

this: you got to learn what it is about your son or daughter that you love. What do you love about him or her? There's a lot to love about them. Take enough time to crawl in their world. I want to challenge parents too, Dr. Dobson, to spend, try that exercise. Give 20 minutes a day. Don't let anything come in the way, and see what God begins to do. Even think about your relationship with God. Think what would happen if you spent 20 minutes a day alone with God, and you were able to hear His voice, spend time in His word. Wonder what it would do to our soul inside. Here it comes back to our kids so much the more.

Dr. James Dobson: Ryan tells stories even today about being a teenager. And after he was able to drive being out there someplace, and coming in at 10:00 or 10:30 at night, and walking in quietly and walking past our bedroom door, and finding us on our knees praying for him. What a priceless moment to see your son see you calling his name before the Lord. I don't care how busy you are, there's nothing more important than that. And God will bless it. He hears and answers those prayers.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And that's the power of influence. You never know what moment or what moments God will use most in the life of your kids. Our responsibility is just to love them with everything we got, ask God for all the grace we can, and be there. Just be there. You know what? I agree with you. If that is true, that moment will come where they'll come back around. Someday they will show up. I believe that.

Dr. James Dobson: And for kids to see parents loving each other. I tell another story about Ryan. He went over to see his grandmother and grandfather many years ago. I suppose. Ryan was 25, 28 years of age by that time. And went over to their house in Long Beach. They always went in and out the back door. And so Ryan parked his car and he came in the back door. He opened that door and he saw his grandmother and grandfather sitting at a table holding hands and not talking, just looking at each other. And he said, "What are you doing?" And they said, "We're just sitting here looking at each other." They just wanted to be together. Oh, that sends chills down my back, I'll tell you.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It does. And God made it to be that way. It's about loving and being loved. I've made this statement, Dr. Dobson, there's no more beautiful thing in all the world than to be in a relationship with someone who's supposed to love you, and they actually love you. And there's nothing more painful in all the world than to be in a relationship with someone who's supposed to love you and they don't love you. And so God help us. Help us to be defined by love.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, that takes us into marriage, Tim, so we just kind of rip from one family issue to another one. That's another one that we really ought to talk about and how to make the very, very most of marriage. You've been married for how long?

Dr. Tim Clinton: 36 years.

Dr. James Dobson: Think it's going to work?

Dr. Tim Clinton: As long I let her run the house, we're in great shape. She's a wonderful girl, and I'll tell you what, I agree with you, some of those moments you were talking about, the older I get, the more you realize that life's precious and God gives you moments. I don't want to miss a moment of life with her.

Dr. James Dobson: Or with your kids.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Or with my kids.

Dr. James Dobson: Tim, it's always good to have you here, thank you for this additional time together. I think that we can do this again and again and again. Will you come back?

Dr. Tim Clinton: Absolutely, Dr. Dobson, pleasure being with you.

Roger Marsh: Well, parenting is truly a tough job. It's probably the toughest job that most of us will ever face, and I hope that today's conversation featuring Dr. James Dobson and Dr. Tim Clinton has helped restore your hope for connecting with that child who just needs a little extra effort, love and encouragement. By the way, if you want to share either part of this discussion, or if you'd like to listen to it again, just visit drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. As we've been talking about parenting over these past couple of days, we know that even children who are sweet and mild-mannered come with their own set of challenges. But if your son or daughter is strong-willed and defiant, they can literally wear you out emotionally. If you have one or more of these independent youngsters or adolescents in your home, you know how difficult life can be.

But be assured, there is hope. The Dr. James Dobson Family Institute wants to walk alongside parents during the child-rearing years, and we have developed a new 10-day email series based on Dr. Dobson's best-selling book, *The Strong-Willed Child*, to help you in this quest. It's designed to equip you to wisely lead your kids through even the toughest trials. Now, to sign up, by the way, it's absolutely free, just visit drjamesdobson.org/strongwilledchild. Again, that's drjamesdobson.org/strongwilledchild.

Thanks for listening to Family Talk today. I'm Roger Marsh, and I pray that the Lord will continue to richly bless you and your family as you grow each day as you walk with him. 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.

Roger Marsh: Here's Dr. James Dobson with Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Have you noticed that laughter is the key to surviving the special stresses of the child-rearing years? It's true. Almost every day I hear from mothers who share the most wonderful stories with me about their kids. One of my favorites came from the mother of two small children, and this is what she wrote.

“Dear Dr. Dobson, A few months ago, I was making several phone calls in my family room where my three-year-old daughter, Adrienne, and my five-month-old son, Nathan, were playing quietly. Now, Nathan loves Adrienne, who's been learning how to mother him gently since the time of his birth. I suddenly realized that the children were no longer in view. Down the hall and around the corner, I found the children playing cheerfully in Adrienne's bedroom. Relieved and upset I shouted to Adrienne, 'You're not allowed to carry Nathan. He's too little, and you could hurt him if he fell.' Startled, she answered, 'I didn't, mommy.' Well, knowing that he couldn't crawl, I suspiciously demanded, 'Well, then how'd he get all the way into your room?' Confident of my approval for her obedience, she said with a smile, 'I rolled him.'” The kid's a little dizzy, but he's okay. Parents like this mother of Adrienne and Nathan, who can see the delightful side of children, also tend to cope better with the difficulties. I hope you'll never, never get too busy to smile.

Roger Marsh: Hear more at drjamesdobson.org.