



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Healthy Habits for Your Children – Part 1

Guest(s): Dr. Walt Larimore

Air Date: March 23, 2026

- Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.
- Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. As parents, we want our children to be healthy, of course, but what does healthy really mean? Is it just about keeping them physically fit or is there something more involved? On today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, Dr. Dobson sits down with his longtime friend, Dr. Walt Larimore, a family physician with 40 years of experience, who's also the author of the book, *The Highly Healthy Child*. Together, they will explore a whole child approach to health that covers body, mind, relationships, and spirit. That's coming up right now on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.
- Dr. James Dobson: To help us explore that topic, we've invited our physician-in-residence, my very good friend, Dr. Walt Larimore, to be with us. He is in a fine position to advise us on medical issues and other things. He was in private practice for 20 years. He's received his medical degree from the Louisiana State University. As a graduate of USC, I sort of resent that, but that's the way it is. And he went on to complete a residency in family medicine at Duke University Medical Center. He's got all the medical credentials in the world and has used his talent for his patients and for the Lord for these many years. And now it's just been wonderful working together. And he's here to talk about this new book that he's written, published by Zondervan called *The Highly Healthy Child*, right down the barrel of what we were talking about. Well, the things we talk about are just the common sense stuff of everyday family life. And boy, we're certainly right there today. What is a highly healthy child? This is very similar to another book that you wrote with a similar answer, I think, but define it.
- Dr. Walt Larimore: Yeah. Yeah. It's very similar to *The 10 Essentials of Highly Healthy People*. I surveyed as a research project about 3,000 families, not just in this country, but around the world, asking them what does it mean to be highly healthy? And Dr. Dobson, it won't surprise you, but most people thought of health as being physical health or maybe emotional health. And yet the Bible tells us and research tells us and thousands of years of wisdom tell us that health is much more than that. In fact, a physician by the name of Luke writing about the child, Jesus. In Luke 2:52, Luke wrote that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature. He grew

in relationship with God and relationship with men. He sort of outlined it for us. Jesus grew physically. He grew in stature.

Dr. James Dobson:

Yes.

Dr. Walt Larimore:

He grew emotionally in wisdom. In relationship with men, well, that's relational health and in relationship with God and that's spiritual health. And those four principles that Luke outlined so clearly as being the total picture of health, we now see in the medical and social science literature as being crucial, not only to us as adults, but to our children, even at the very youngest stages.

Dr. James Dobson:

And you refer to that as a wheel that can be flattened on one side and the other three can be doing fine, but if one of them doesn't inflate properly, then you're bumping along.

Dr. Walt Larimore:

There's no question.

Dr. James Dobson:

You got a lot of work to do.

Dr. Walt Larimore:

And if you think in terms of your health as being a vehicle, who in the world, especially the women that are listening today, Jim, I mean, can you imagine going down a dark road in the middle of the night and there's no lights and you're alone and all of a sudden one of those tires blows? What could be more frightening? And our health is designed by our Creator that those four wheels, physical, emotional, relational, spiritual, are to operate together. They're intricately and complexly designed to work together. And one of those wheels starts to get a little out of balance or a little flattened. Well, it can. It can wreck the whole car. And yet, I remember a little guy I write about him, his name's Daryl. I met him early in my practice. A little guy, bald as a cucumber because he was suffering from leukemia, a real severe form.

And he came down to the Disney area for a Make-A-Wish foundation trip. And I got to meet him and his mom and dad, and I got to talk to him. And here's a kid, Jim, who is as almost as sick physically as you can get. In fact, he died just a few months after I met him, and yet he was one of the healthiest kids I've ever met. This kid was bubbling with enthusiasm, with energy. He was centered. He was emotionally healthy. He had a great family that loved him and laughed with him, and affirmed him, and cheered for him, and guided him, and disciplined him. And this little guy knew the Lord, I'm embarrassed to admit, in a way I don't think I ever will. And even though highly unhealthy physically, he was one of the healthiest kids I ever met, because those other three wheels compensated.

Dr. James Dobson:

Yeah. I remember reading an article written by Dr. Benjamin Spock. This goes a long ways back because he's been gone for many years, but he was talking about the panic that mothers feel when they take that child home for the first time, especially if it's a new mother. And they say, "What am I going to do? I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know how to take care of this child. I'm not

even acquainted with him, and yet I'm responsible for all those areas that you talked about." That's a common reaction today, isn't it? Especially when we are separated from family members. It used to be that mothers and grandmothers and aunts and neighbors would come in and they would teach those things. Now these women are isolated and they look at that complex little creature and say, "How in the world can I pull this off?"

Dr. Walt Larimore: And if you add to that, Jim, the single mom whose husband has been lost to her, abandoned her or perhaps has passed away. And I think if there was a subtitle for this book for parents, it would be "Fear Not." That you are designed by your Creator to be crucial, integral to your child's health and all four of these fears. And by practicing a few simple principles, first of all, becoming aware of them and then practicing them, you can influence not just this child's health, but the next four generations. And Jim, I've got to tell you, as a young doc, just out of residency, Barb and I are in a little town in North Carolina. We're practicing.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, name it. It's Bryson City.

Dr. Walt Larimore: It's Bryson City. Bryson City, North Carolina.

Dr. James Dobson: And you've written a book called *Bryson City Tales*, which tells the stories of that early practice.

Dr. Walt Larimore: Well, and one of the sequels to that original book will have this story of how as a dad, I felt lost. No one ever taught me how to be a dad. No one ever taught me how to be a husband. No one ever taught me to be a father. And I remember coming home one night at the end of a very rough day. It had been rough in our family dynamics. It had been rough in the practice. And it was a little yellow Toyota Corolla. I still remember pulling up under a fur tree and just dropping my head to the wheel and saying a phrase that you'll remember, "someone help the boy." You remember the story about Ryan?

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, how could I forget? In fact, how can he forget? He hears about it a lot.

Dr. Walt Larimore: Well, and that's how somebody helped the boy. And Jim, that next week was when the film series that allowed you to go home and be there for your family started playing. And Jim, the guy who taught me to be a dad and a parent and a father was you.

Dr. James Dobson: You're very kind, Walt.

Dr. Walt Larimore: Well Jim, that's a fact. And the principles you espoused then, all of them supported by Scripture, but some of them not having any science one way or the other. Jim, they worked. They equipped me, they empowered me, they enabled me as a dad, a father, a husband, a spouse, to not fear. And so I've stolen from the best of your wisdom, the wisdom of Dr. Gary Chapman, of John Trent and Gary Smalley and Kevin Leman, and tried to put all of those tips into a

handbook that would help that parent who's saying, "Someone help the boy, someone help the girl."

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we all have drawn from the same source, really. There is only one source, and that's the Creator of children, the Creator of families. He will give us an owner's manual that tells us what to believe and how to respond in situations. It's amazing how much truth about child rearing is in that book. And for me, I get the credit for the things you're talking about sometimes, but I stole it also. I not only got it from the Lord, but I got it from my mother who got it from her mother, who got it from her mother. And it used to be handed down generation to generation. There was just a common wisdom about kids and that's gone in the culture. It is totally gone. I'm telling you, I'm very worried about this generation of parents and their kids because I see them in public places and they don't have a clue about what to do when this three year old is throwing a temper tantrum.

They have no idea what to do when this child demands the purchase of candy or whatever it is. And the child's in control and you can see that. And it is just unfortunate that we have lost that common wisdom, that understanding of the ages, really.

Dr. Walt Larimore: It's like the story of the young mother that was pushing her child in the car, and the child was just terrible. Screaming, yelling, and the mother was trying to stay calm. And she'd say, "Connie, it's going to be all right. Connie, we're going to make it. Hang in there, Connie, we're almost done." And it was just masterful watching her at work. And the couple that was observing her kind of followed her from aisle to aisle. And finally, as she was checking out, the man walked up and he said, "It's just amazing to me." He said, "I've been a dad a long time. I'm a grandfather now. I can tell you're a young mom and this is a strong-willed child, but it's really masterful the way that you have dealt with and communicated with your daughter, Connie." And she said, "Oh, her name's not Connie. My name's Connie."

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, she's talking to herself.

Dr. Walt Larimore: My prayer is that moms, dads, young marriages around the country and churches all over the country will take this handbook and dissect it, that we don't have those extended family members around us. Many of us don't. And so to gather together and say, "We don't know at all, but there is wisdom available and there are principles available. How can I very simply assess where my child is at?" Find the areas that are the most flat, if you would, the wheels that are most flat, and then begin to apply principles, Jim, that literally can change parenting in a few short weeks.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, the title of your book is *The Highly Healthy Child*, and one would get the impression from that title that this is all about medicine. So what are the things parents need to know about diseases and about immunizations and other

things? But you have tried to deal with this totality of child rearing that, again, represents four areas. Name them one more time.

Dr. Walt Larimore: It's physical health.

Dr. James Dobson: Right.

Dr. Walt Larimore: Emotional health, relational health, and spiritual health. I remember one day in the office, Jim, I had a eight year old girl, her mom brought her in the office with severe chronic headaches. Now, as a physician, I might start thinking about tumors or infection or something like that. As a psychologist, you might think about anxiety or depression or-

Dr. James Dobson: Or a two year old at home underneath her.

Dr. Walt Larimore: Oh, sure. Sure, sure. And so I did a physical exam, did a history, couldn't identify a cause. So I had the mom use the assessment tool that's in the book. It's a very simple tool that allows a parent to measure these four wheels. There's four spokes on each wheel. And when you finish that assessment, Jim, you can literally look at that little one page chart and in three seconds, identify where the problem is. So I had the mom fill that out, walked back in the room, and I was stunned because the physical wheel was pretty round. The emotional wheel was round. It was balanced. But the relational wheel was flat. And the reason it was flat is that one of those spokes measures how much time a mom and dad spend with a child. And this child had parental involvement that was almost zero.

The dad had two jobs. The mom had one job. There was very, very little time spent with that child. And I asked that mom, I said, "Are you willing to try and experiment? Yes, I want to give your child something for pain, but over the next two weeks, will you and your husband commit to give this girl at least three hours a week of your time?" She said, "Well, that's going to be very difficult." I said, "I know, but are you willing to commit?" And she said, "Well, we have quality time with her." And I said, "You never have quality time outside of quantity. It doesn't occur with the child."

Dr. James Dobson: That's absolutely true.

Dr. Walt Larimore: You can't plan it. It happens within quantity. And so she reluctantly agreed, and I saw them back in the office 12, 14 days later, and she was stunned. Why? The headaches were gone. Now, that wasn't a lucky guess. That was just taking ageless, timeless principles, putting them into a simple assessment tool, allowing parents to do it. And parents around the country that have used this tool now are sending us reports saying, "I found a broke spoke" someone wrote recently.

Dr. James Dobson: And it's in this book.

Dr. Walt Larimore: Well, it is. And there's lots of folks listening to us that can't afford to go out and plop down money for a book. We recommend books all the time here, but what we've done is take that assessment tool and put it on the internet where parents can get it absolutely no charge.

Dr. James Dobson: Now, you're an advocate of parents seeing themselves as quarterbacks of their child's health. That means that there are a lot of players and the parent's responsibility is to get all those people in place and see that they're each playing their proper role. Is that an accurate...

Dr. Walt Larimore: Jim, isn't that a great analogy? We both love football, although we root for different teams, don't we?

Dr. James Dobson: Mine's better than yours.

Dr. Walt Larimore: Wouldn't you have loved to see USC and LSU play? You and I would have been there.

Dr. James Dobson: A shame that they didn't get a chance to play.

Dr. Walt Larimore: We might never be friends again after that game, but I think it would have settled some arguments. But I teach parents that not only do I want them to be the child's healthcare quarterback, God has given them that responsibility and that obligation. I remember one of the first moms to teach me this. Her husband was a golf pro just starting out on the tour and he was out and away. And their little child, three year old girl, got sick and she brought her to the office for me to check her out. And I always ask moms, I said, "What do you think's going on?" She said, "I think she has meningitis." I said, "Why?" She said, "Her neck's a little bit stiff. She's got a fever. I just think she has meningitis." So I examined this little girl, neck wasn't stiff, ears were fine, throat was fine, there was no fever.

I said, "She doesn't have meningitis. I think she's got a little viral infection, treat it this way." And this mom looked me in the eyes and she said, "I think she has meningitis." Well, I had been in practice long enough to realize that God's given a mother, a special heart, a special intuition. And I said, "Well, if you want to check for it, we can. We've got to go to the hospital and do a spinal tap, but I don't think we need to." And she condescended or acquiesced to that, but I said, "If there's any problems, you call me back." Well, about an hour later, she didn't call me back. She called Barb at home.

Dr. James Dobson: Your wife.

Dr. Walt Larimore: She called my wife and she said, "I am concerned and here's why." And Barb said, "Then you take her to the emergency room. I'll call Walt and he'll meet you there." Jim, the exam wasn't changed, but I did a spinal tap on that little girl. And do you know what? Of course you know what. She had early meningitis.

God's designed moms that way and we in the healing serving professions need to understand that and empower that and equip that.

Dr. James Dobson: Many physicians haven't understood that.

Dr. Walt Larimore: Oh, to their own detriment.

Dr. James Dobson: You know the mom says there's something wrong.

Dr. Walt Larimore: To their own detriment.

Dr. James Dobson: They don't make a diagnosis, but they say something not right about this kid. And the physician sometimes says, "Well, it's an anxious mom." But the truth matter is she often knows.

Dr. Walt Larimore: She does know. I remember the story of a little four month old girl whose mother said there's something wrong with her. And the doctors that looked said, "Nothing wrong, nothing wrong, nothing wrong. This is the first child you're a hysterical mom." When that child was six months old, finally the doctors gave in and did a brain scan and that little girl had no right brain and only half of a left brain. She had cerebral palsy. She had had a stroke when she was in the womb, but that mom knew two months before the doctors knew. And that mom's name was Barb Larimore.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, that was your child.

Dr. Walt Larimore: And the first doctor that missed that diagnosis was Dr. Walt Larimore. And the sooner that pastors and physicians and psychologists understand that the parent has the responsibility and the obligation to be that child's healthcare quarterback. And then as that child grows to teach that child to be their own healthcare quarterback. Hire a good coach, get a good primary care physician, hire assistant coaches.

Jim, you've done that. You have wonderful assistant coaches that you can call upon to get opinions, to get guidance. But the game plan is yours. Now Shirley helps with that, doesn't she? Good friends help with that.

Dr. James Dobson: That's right.

Dr. Walt Larimore: Your church community are all part of your healthcare team.

Dr. James Dobson: The problem with that is money. I mean, it's difficult enough for a person to pay for medical care. Many people don't have insurance today. So finding somebody that can deal with all four wheels is difficult, isn't it?

Dr. Walt Larimore: A parent may have to recruit several people onto that team. And so in the book, I talk about who are the possible team members? How do you choose them?

When it comes to a child's physician, for example, how do you hire them? How do you fire them? How do you interview them? And this shocks moms. They say, "Fire a doctor?" You bet. That doctor is your servant. Now you're paid servant, maybe even your overpaid servant, but nevertheless, they're there to serve you. And so I wanted to guide parents in making wise decisions and choosing that, what I call healthcare coach.

Dr. James Dobson: When we're talking about the health of the child, that wheel, one of the first things that a parent runs into is the decision regarding immunizations. I mentioned that earlier, and there's a lot of controversy about that. And probably what you're going to say, and I'm in agreement with today is going to irritate some people, but stake out your claim.

Dr. Walt Larimore: Well, Jim, the myths that are circulating, particularly among churches about immunizations and vaccinations are stunning. And so what we've done here is look at all of the letters that come in and all of the communications that come in, what, 250,000 communications a month?

Dr. James Dobson: Yes.

Dr. Walt Larimore: Many about vaccinations. And so we've tried to take those myths, those stories that are circulating and give people what does the evidence say about immunizations? What is the truth so the parents can make wise decisions? I was in England in the late 70s training and Jim, in the late 60s and early 70s, there was an anti-immunization movement in Great Britain. So by the time I got there, most children were not immunized. So I saw diseases in Great Britain that most doctors have never seen in the modern era in the obstetrical ward. I saw a mom come in who delivered a baby.

This mom had not been immunized when she was a child. She hadn't had her measles, mumps and rubella shot. But as a young pregnant mom, she came down with German measles with rubella because she wasn't immunized. It was devastating to her baby. That baby that was born was deformed, brain damaged, blind, deaf. And to watch that mom and to watch those grandparents weep over this horribly deformed little girl who could have and should have been saved from that horrible disease, but wasn't because of a decision that was based upon falsehoods, myths and misleading. And my hope is that parents in America won't fall victim to false information, untruthful information, often given, Jim, by very sincere people.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. It's a subject that people get very exercised over, but when you see what immunizations have done to eradicate these diseases, man, I don't know how you can argue with it.

Dr. Walt Larimore: If you learn the truth, it sets you free. And we want to, in this book, to present truth. And Jim, most of our listeners won't know this, but you've been mercilessly attacked by people who say, "Hey, Dr. Dobson, you're in the pockets

of the pharmaceutical company. You're recommending these immunizations which are causing autism and shame on you." Well, Jim, there are a few things that irritate me as much as that because if you or I were convinced for one instant, one millisecond that any shot could harm any child, there's no one in this country that would stand on a mountain and yell it louder than you would. You would just do it. You love kids.

Dr. James Dobson: I would and I've never had even so much as a meal provided by a pharmaceutical house. It's absolutely ridiculous to say that I'm a shill for them or even for physicians out there. People are just very suspicious today of the medical community and of that whole area, including pharmacy matters. But I got to tell you, I'm a product of it. I'm sitting here today because the Lord used physicians to give me the right medication when I had a stroke, and it lasted 24 hours instead of 24 years. So I have a lot to be grateful for.

Dr. Walt Larimore: Well, I've seen your scans from that day. And I believe as you do, that had the clot buster not been available, Jim, your ministry, as we know it and as we love it, all of us who are listening today would have ended.

Dr. James Dobson: It would have. Yeah. I couldn't say a word for 24 hours and that is a combination of things. First of all, it's a lot of prayer that went into that and the Lord heard that prayer and I believe He answered it through some very competent neurologists and people who knew what they were doing.

Dr. Walt Larimore: Well, in the last 30 years in this country, I don't know another man who has demonstrated his love for children more than you, for how they're cared for in these four areas. And so when it comes to the vaccination area, we just want people to have the evidence, to have the truth, to make wise decisions.

Dr. James Dobson: You know, Walt, when you're talking about health and the social development of a child and spiritual development and all the other things that you touch in this book, there's no place to stop.

Dr. Walt Larimore: It's like trying to eat an elephant, isn't it?

Dr. James Dobson: It really is and we've been going awful fast, but there's a lot more here. So as I often do, let's just devote another program to this subject. And I just want to thank you again for the contributions and I appreciate you personally. And as a friend, you and Barb have just been great friends to us, so it's a pleasure to have you as our guest, and we'll do it again next time.

Dr. Walt Larimore: I look forward to it, Jim.

Roger Marsh: Well, what a fascinating conversation featuring Dr. Walt Larimore and our own Dr. James Dobson discussing raising truly healthy children. That idea of four wheels, physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual is such a practical way to think about our child's overall wellbeing. And even if one of those wheels does

go flat, we have to pay attention to it because then the whole ride will go bumpy. You've been listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk and part one of Dr. Dobson's conversation with Dr. Walt Larimore. Now, if you missed any portion of today's broadcast or if you'd like to share it with a fellow parent, visit jdfi.net. And be sure to join us again next time when Dr. Dobson and Dr. Larimore will continue their discussion. You'll definitely want to hear what Dr. Walt Larimore has to say about you, the parent, and the crucial role that you play in your child's health. It's coming up right here on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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