



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Understanding Autism: Supporting Struggling Parents - Part 1

Guest: Mark and Jenny Shaffer with Dr. Jerry Kartzinel

Air Date: April 19, 2021

[Listen to the broadcast](#)

- 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: Hello friends and welcome to Family Talk. The listener-supported broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. Dr. Dobson is still in California working on his new book, but we here at the ministry continue the daily work of bringing you valuable and inspirational content each and every day. And today is no exception. Now, what you're about to hear is a program that tackles a very prevalent but often unspoken topic. And that is autism.
- Roger Marsh: According to the Autism Society, autism is a complex lifelong developmental disability that typically appears during early childhood and can impact a person's social skills, communication, relationships and self-regulation. The CDC estimates that one in every 54 children in the United States has been identified with some form of the autism spectrum disorder. Historically, April has been known as National Autism Awareness Month. This year, though, the autism community is calling for the phrase to be shifted from autism awareness to autism acceptance. This is simply to match the need for this disability to be better understood and accepted.
- Roger Marsh: Now, finding out that your child has been diagnosed with autism can be life shaking. Our guests today know that firsthand. Mark and Jennifer Shaffer had been married for 27 years. Their eldest son was diagnosed with severe autism when he was only three. But through much hard work with diet and biomedical interventions, he is now diagnosed with a high functioning autism and is doing quite well in fact, he is thriving. It's a pleasure to have the Shaffers in studio with us.
- Roger Marsh: Also joining us via phone on today's broadcast is Dr. Jerry Kartzinel. He's a Board Certified pediatrician and a Fellow in the American Academy of Pediatrics. His specialty is the recovery of neuro development, chronic neuro inflammatory diseases and hormonal dysfunctions. After receiving his medical degree at Saint Louis University School of Medicine, he completed his residency in pediatric medicine while serving in the Air Force. Following desert storm, Dr. Kartzinel

practice general pediatrics in private practice for 10 years until his fourth son was born and was subsequently diagnosed with autism. We're excited to share this important interview with you. Let's listen now to the first half of Dr. Tim Clinton's conversation with Mark and Jenny Shaffer, along with Dr. Jerry Kartzinel here on Family Talk.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Welcome into Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton sitting in for Dr. Dobson today. Let me open today with a very sobering statistic. The CDC, the Center for Disease Control just released its latest data. One in 36 children... One in 36 of our kids will at some point in their lives be diagnosed with this disorder, it's autism.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Today we're blessed to have three in studio guests and we're going to talk about autism. We're going to talk about what it's like to have a family with an autistic child and how God can bring great glory to himself through all of this. Our special guests include Mark and Jenny Shaffer. Mark is the Community Relations Manager at a Christian radio station K-WAVE. Actually that's where we're at right now recording this particular program. It's great to have you Mark. Thanks for inviting us in.

Mark Shaffer: No, it's great to have you guys here.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And Dr. Dobson's show airs on this particular station...

Mark Shaffer: Absolutely.

Dr. Tim Clinton: ...2:00 to 2:30. Everyday?

Mark Shaffer: Everyday.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Everyday.

Mark Shaffer: Monday through Friday.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And his wife, Jenny. Jenny, welcome into Family Talk. Great to have you.

Jenny Shaffer: Hello, thank you.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And also joining us today is Dr. Kartzinel.

Mark Shaffer: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Jerry, great to have you join us and I'm told too that you also have a child with autism and you guys have collectively collaborated together. I think this should really be a robust program. Jerry, welcome in.

Dr. Jerry Kartzinel: Thank you very much.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Hey, as we get started, Mark and Jenny, tell us a little bit about your family.

Mark Shaffer: Well, Jenny and I have been married now for 24 years. Come August it'll be 25. And we started out with high expectations for family. We waited a number of years before having children. When we finally pulled the trigger on that, and God blessed us with our, our oldest son Justice. And he is now 17 years old. He is a love of our lives and Justice was diagnosed with autism just right at his third birthday, basically.

Jenny Shaffer: Just before at age three.

Mark Shaffer: Yeah. And so we have since had another son, our younger son, Jordan is 11 now. And it's just the two boys. We have a great family dynamic. We have been blessed, God has blessed our home. And we've been through a lot of struggles. We've been through a lot of family issues. And then we had this come out when Justice was three. So this was back in 2001 when he was diagnosed and it was a bombshell in our family.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Can you take us back to... Maybe that day, that moment? What led up to that, Jenny?

Jenny Shaffer: Well, I've noticed something was wrong, well before two, two and a half years old.

Dr. Tim Clinton: What'd you notice?

Jenny Shaffer: Well, he wasn't talking, he didn't make eye contact, he would be flapping his hands and spinning in circles and walking on his tip toes and he wasn't like the other kids. And if I took him out to the park for the day, he wouldn't be playing appropriately, like on the jungle gym, he'd be over in the planter, playing with the bark in the planter, it wasn't normal. He wasn't playing with his cars normal. He would just sit there and spin the wheel and watch the wheels spin and watch fans spin in the seat on the ceiling. And I kept saying, something's wrong, something's wrong. And it actually went on for a while and I would take him into the pediatrician and they would just blow me off and say, "Oh, well boys talk later," but I just had this mom instinct in me that was just like nails on a chalkboard. And Mark wasn't really cluing into it.

Mark Shaffer: I was in total denial. I just believed what the doctor said that, "Oh, well, he's just talking late... And he'll come around... And it's okay, boys talk late," and I was in complete denial, but Jenny just had this unrest in her that wouldn't let her give it up.

Jenny Shaffer: And so it's interesting because I finally found this pediatrician in the area where we were living. And so I went in, I didn't get her as my doctor, but I got the older man pediatrician and I walked my son in and he was flapping, not making eye contact, doing all the shenanigans. At that point I had researched so much. I

realized he might have autism. And the doctor, I said to him, "Doesn't it look like he has autism?" and he goes, "Hello,"

Dr. Tim Clinton: Really?

Jenny Shaffer: And he... Yeah. He said, "He definitely has this," he says, "I work with the regional center at Children's Hospital of Oakland," and he wrote a script right away, "Go see the doctor there at Children's Hospital, Oakland," he wasn't even able to complete the whole system of...

Dr. Tim Clinton: Tests.

Jenny Shaffer: ... test. He wasn't even able to walk up the stairs because he had such horrible vestibular issues and it's where you are in relation to, if he was a PI, he couldn't handle it. And so she did half the testing and he was diagnosed with severe autism.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So when people often talk about autism, they talked autism spectrum disorder. I know there's some debate out there.

Jenny Shaffer: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: But in terms of severity, how is Justice?

Jenny Shaffer: Well, now he's, he's doing great. When he was first diagnosed, that doctor was, "Well, good luck with this," and they sent us on our way.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Really?

Jenny Shaffer: Yeah. They just were, "Good luck with the best,"

Mark Shaffer: You don't get a lot of empathy from the medical community, unfortunately.

Jenny Shaffer: And at that time, let's just say at that time, cause this was in 2003 actually. But once I did finally figure out some things about him that were going on with him. We started working with him. We changed his diet and we did all that biomedical kind of stuff and he really, really responded to that.

Mark Shaffer: Right.

Jenny Shaffer: And so now some would say, he's very high functioning because he can talk, you can have a conversation with him, he has interests, he's doing things that are more appropriate. However, I have friends that have non-verbal kids. First of all, I want to preface this all with. Mark and I are one couple with a child with autism. And there is a saying that goes, "Once you've met one kid with autism, you've met one kid with autism," so I'm sharing our story.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Your story.

Jenny Shaffer: I don't want to put this out there like this is everybody. I have some friends whose children can't talk. And they're like, "You're so lucky your son can talk," but sometimes what he says is inappropriate and or it's off subject, it's very strange. And so people kind of look at him and think, "Oh, he's typical," but then he'll say something really, really bizarre or not pertaining to the discussion. And they'll kind of be like, "Oh, that was weird," so it's difficult because it's... Yes, he's high functioning, you can talk with him and he can do a lot of these things, but it can become a danger too.

Dr. Tim Clinton: We'll talk more about that in just a moment. Julie and I actually have a very close friends. The Tomlin's who live back in Virginia where we are from and their oldest son, Koi is autistic. We call him awesometistic.

Mark Shaffer: Awesometistic.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Koi is amazing. He loves baseball. We're a baseball family. He loves baseball. So there's a lot of story here, but we certainly understand that. Let me bring Dr. Jerry into the conversation. Dr. Jerry, let me ask you real quick, a little bit about your story and connecting some of the dots here with this family.

Dr. Jerry Kartzinel: Well, I'm a Board Certified pediatrician and I got brought into this when my fourth boy was diagnosed with autism, developed autistic characteristics and traits, losing language, losing eye contact, up most of the night, screaming, tantruming, hyperactive, diarrhea. And my wife basically said, "Now you've got to figure out how to fix this," and I think God had a purpose of bringing Joshua in our life so that I could be helpful to other families around the country, around the world, bringing in medical treatments. And why we think about medical treatments with these children is even though they may have a diagnosis of autism, if an autistic child breaks his arm, well, we'll set it and we'll fix it. If an autistic child can't have normal bowel movements because they're constipated or having diarrhea, we should be able to fix that. Or if they're not sleeping through the night, well, we should be able to address that.

Dr. Jerry Kartzinel: And you know, when you do, when you make the child feel much better, where they're able to eat more, normally they're able to sleep the whole night, when they're able to digest their food and, and all they're going to do better in their therapies. So that's when we hear about this biomedical intervention, but my wife and I learned firsthand how spiritually devastating this is. The churches, especially back in the, in the late 1990s, 2000 were not set up for our kids. Nobody wanted to see Joshua coming in. When people hear the word... The diagnosis of autism, they no longer want to come over to your house or they don't want you to bring your kid over to their house. So it's, it's socially isolating.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Sure.

Dr. Jerry Kartzinel: And of course all the supplements and everything financially, it's really inexpensive.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yes.

Dr. Jerry Kartzinel: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And a lot of people think maybe it's just bad parenting or whatever, don't they?

Dr. Jerry Kartzinel: Yeah. They think, these kids are just spoiled, a good spanking, back in the old days, it was raising children God's way. And they had this very tough way to raise kids. And it's, gosh, if a good spanking would fix these kids, we wouldn't have a problem.

Dr. Tim Clinton: How about it?

Dr. Jerry Kartzinel: These children react differently to the stimuli. You can get that form...

Dr. Tim Clinton: But there's a real intense sensitivity. Right? Right, Dr. Jerry?

Jenny Shaffer: Yes.

Dr. Jerry Kartzinel: Yeah. It's just, they don't respond to things, for example, kids who won't eat certain foods because they have the wrong smell, the wrong color, the wrong look or whatever, they don't respond to food in normal way. They may not respond to their bladder or the stool that they're holding inside of them in a normal way and they just won't go in the toilet. They just don't respond to stimuli in the more stimulated they don't respond to in a normal way. Like you were mentioning earlier, the spectrum, the lower functioning on the spectrum, they are the more stimulated they respond to in a normal way, the higher they are on that spectrum. And I guess our job is to help them respond to stimuli. And normally it could be something as simple as like, go get your shoes or Dad coming home and the child saying, "I love you, daddy, how was your day?" That's not a trick, that's an actual response to stimuli of a parent coming home from being at work all day. So that's what we're trying to do with these kids,

Mark Shaffer: Dr. Jerry, I don't even think you know this right now, but Justice comes up to me every day when I come home from work and tells me how much he loves me and that he's glad I'm home. And a lot of Jenny and I's story goes through Dr. Jerry. We met him at a very crucial time in Justice's development. And Dr. Jerry, I don't even know if I've told you this, but I consider you a mentor in my life, not just through the world of autism, but in my marriage, in my walk with the Lord, you have spoken words of wisdom into me that I hope, you know, have not fallen on deaf ears.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So we're blessed to have all of you here on Family talk. By the way, you're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, President of the

American association of Christian counselors filling in for Dr. Dobson today, we're talking about autism. It's Autism Awareness Month this month. And we're celebrating that and celebrating the families and the lives of those who are out there, who are dealing with this every day and trying to raise kids and love on them and help them to find their way and their place in this big old world that we live in. Dr. Jerry and may I ask both the two of you too Mark and Jenny, everybody always asks the question, why? Some people would relate it back from what I've seen to vaccinations and so many different things. You guys, no doubt have just searched high and low. Why, why, why? Dr. Jerry, let me start with you. Maybe you can throw in some from wisdom our way and I'll come back to Mark and Jenny on it.

Dr. Jerry Kartzinel: Okay. Well, first of all, we have to keep in mind that this is a worldwide phenomenon, this increase in autistic children. In my medical training, back in the '80s, the autism rate was between one and four per 10,000. Okay. And I've watched it go to one in 500, one in a hundred and 88.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It's soaring. It's soaring.

Dr. Jerry Kartzinel: It's soaring. So something is affecting these children. And there's, there's nothing that we can call like a genetic epidemic that affects all people all around the country, all around the world. So something's definitely impacting our children in a, in a negative way. And there, there has to be a hard look at anything that we're doing to our children, cause and effect, whether it be the pesticides or ultrasounds or low vitamin D levels in pregnant moms. And there's lots of different theories and of course, one of them is vaccines.

Dr. Jerry Kartzinel: As a, as a doctor who listens to histories, I do hear over and over parents concerned about vaccines, potentially being a trigger for this. But I also have kids who have not been vaccinated in my clinic who have also developed autism. So I don't think it's a very clear picture. I think the biggest things that we have to focus on would be that there's actually really good treatments out there for our children to, to bring them back into our world, to be able to, to respond to stimuli, to be able to communicate with us, to be actually accomplished, developmental milestones that unto now most people would have just written off.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Mark, Jenny.

Jenny Shaffer: Yes, Tim.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You guys add anything into this?

Jenny Shaffer: I'm wondering if your question is a spiritual why or are you saying, why did our son have autism? Do you know what I mean?

Dr. Tim Clinton: Sure. And you know what? It's, it's kind of a both end.

Jenny Shaffer: Okay.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Sure. We're going to come back to the Lord and ask the God, why? Why us? Why our family? Why our son? Why our child?

Jenny Shaffer: Because it is catastrophic.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mark Shaffer: It's devastating to a family. I know that when, when our son was diagnosed, I immediately went into depression. And my whole question was, "What does it mean? What's he going to look like in 10 years? And in 15 years? What does this diagnosis? Is my son going to graduate from high school? Will he ever drive a car? Will he play ball? What does this mean?" And I would go to the experts and they would look at me and they go, "I don't know," What do you mean you don't know?

Jenny Shaffer: That's the thing.

Mark Shaffer: What is it that you don't know?

Dr. Tim Clinton: Let's help our listeners to understand this for a moment.

Mark Shaffer: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: What's it like behind the closed doors in autistic home?

Mark Shaffer: My wife just gave you-

Dr. Tim Clinton: I heard many, many stories, Jenny.

Jenny Shaffer: It's like a roller coaster and you're... It's like a tight rope walk. Which arena? Like the school, the school is tight rope walking that, do I go in and talk to the teachers? Do I lay back? It's like constantly, you're constantly trying to figure out how to manage them.

Mark Shaffer: But if it's not the schools, it's medical practices...

Jenny Shaffer: Right.

Mark Shaffer: ... It's therapies. It is biomedical.

Dr. Tim Clinton: It's up all night treatments.

Jenny Shaffer: It can be the people you hire too. We've hired people. I remember this behaviors that we hired. We paid her out of pocket and we paid her assistant out of pocket. And to help our son, we had walked...

Mark Shaffer: To the tune of tens of thousands of dollars.

Jenny Shaffer: ... It was, yeah, 30 grand in a month we spent. And it ended up being in the wrong fit. And you're just out that money too bad. So I don't know. I'm pretty tough. I'm tough as nails, but man...

Mark Shaffer: It's rough. It's rough.

Jenny Shaffer: ... I have my moments. Yeah, it's hard. I didn't grow up in a home where you cry and you let it out. So I, I have my once a year cry, I guess. I don't know.

Mark Shaffer: She is tough as nails and I got to tell you this, I want to give my wife so much credit in this because she has dug and dug and dug. She gets this unsettled feeling and she will not stop.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You're going to stay that way.

Mark Shaffer: And that's the way her...

Jenny Shaffer: That's my OCD kicking in, no.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That's okay, we like that.

Mark Shaffer: It's her love also for her son.

Dr. Tim Clinton: What do you want, what do you want the church to know? I hear the spiritual dynamic here for a moment. What do you want people of faith to know about autism and autistic families?

Jenny Shaffer: Right off the bat when you asked me that I was struggling to get help. And I don't mean just dumping him off at a program or whatever, but we, us parents, we need a body. We need somebody to come into the home and help us. And I didn't have that. The area we were living in, nobody really wanted to do it. So you will...

Dr. Tim Clinton: You isolate.

Jenny Shaffer: Yeah. Let's not even get into that when your friends or you're at the store and they turn the shopping cart and go the other way. Oh yes. I know about that. But I'm talking about, I just kind of started hitting a bottom, and I just finally wrote a letter to the youth pastor at our church. And I asked, I said, I need help. I need somebody that will come and, and just be with him for a while so I can get dishes done or do laundry. I'm not asking for much. And you know what? This girl from the youth group showed up at the door and just came two to three times a week. We set up a schedule. She come for a few hours and she didn't ask for a penny. After a while I did start giving her something.

Jenny Shaffer: But my encouragement to parents out there is get involved at the church. If that church isn't accommodating your kid, move on, keep looking. There are churches out there that will accommodate your kids. Keep looking and don't give up and ask for help. People don't know what you need. They don't know what we need. They don't even know what you're going through, but you have to tell them what you're going through and ask for help. And don't stop...

Dr. Tim Clinton: Part of it is the lack of understanding.

Jenny Shaffer: ... Until you get it. True.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And fear. They are afraid.

Jenny Shaffer: Yeah. They're afraid.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And they're afraid of being overwhelmed. They didn't even know how to embrace this child. Say severe, you hear what I'm saying? What do I do?

Jenny Shaffer: It is scary.

Mark Shaffer: But one of the best piece of advice that I ever got on the spiritual side to what Jenny was just talking to, came from Dr. Jerry. And that was, he told me, he goes, "If your children don't like going to that church, find a different church. You and Jenny are spiritually mature. You can get fed anywhere, go to a church where your kids want to go," and he was speaking specifically of Justice and of course my younger son as well. And that's what we've done. Like Jenny said, move onto a different church, find someplace where your kids want to go where they are welcoming.

Roger Marsh: You've been listening to Family Talk and Dr. Tim Clinton's conversation with two families who have children with autism, we hope that you've been encouraged by what you've heard in this program.

Roger Marsh: Now, as Mark and Jenny Shaffer had been sharing, there are churches and communities out there that are equipped and ready to support you, whatever your autism journey looks like. So if you have been impacted by autism spectrum disorder, please don't give up. Keep looking until you find just the right fit.

Roger Marsh: To learn more about Mark and Jenny Shaffer or Dr. Jerry Kartzinel, or to order a CD copy of today's broadcast, visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. And remember it's D-R James Dobson dot O-R-G forward slash broadcast. Remember, you can also give us a call anytime day or night. We'll be happy to answer any questions you might have about Family Talk or pray with you even recommend a resource to help you out. Our number is 877-732-6825 that's 877-732-6825. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for listening today and be sure to join us again tomorrow, to hear more ideas about finding the right treatment

for your unique child with autism. That's coming up on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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

Dr. James Dobson: Just how tough is it to be a good parent today? Dr. James Dobson for Family Talk. A couple of years ago, I asked 1000 mothers and fathers to describe their greatest frustrations in raising kids. I heard all kinds of goofy stories in response about sticky telephones and wet toilet seats and shoestrings in a knot. One mother actually wanted to know why it is that a toddler never throws up in the bathroom that would violate some kind of great unwritten law of the universe to be sure. But in my poll parents didn't merely laugh about their frustrations. They tended to blame themselves. They said they were overwhelmed and were losing confidence, and didn't really know how to cope anymore. How sad it is that this age all responsibility of raising children has become so burdensome and guilt laden.

Dr. James Dobson: Actually, the facts won't support that self-condemnation in the majority of cases. Millions of parents have handled their child-rearing responsibility with great skill and it's time that someone patted them on the back for their commitment and their sacrifice. And someday when the frustrations of toddler hood and the turmoil of adolescence have passed, they'll enjoy the sweet benefits of a job well done. Hang in their moms and dads. Your kids will be young for the mere blink of an eye.

Roger Marsh: To hear more, visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org.