



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Motivating Your Child to Learn - Part 1

Guest(s): Cheri Fuller

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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: Hello everyone and welcome to Family Talk, the listener-supported broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. According to College Board Reports, SAT scores in the U.S. have shown a marked decline since 2006. For many of our kids, academic success just isn't their first priority and homework is the last thing they seem to want to spend their time doing.
- Roger Marsh: On today's program, Dr. Dobson's guest suggests that parents play an important role in motivating their children to learn in their child's early school years and beyond. Cheri Fuller is a speaker and author of nearly 50 books. She's written hundreds of articles for print and online publications. She's also a public speaker and the co-founder of Write Well Sell Well, a writer's conference in Oklahoma City.
- Roger Marsh: Cheri is also founder and executive director of Oklahoma Messages Project, an early intervention and literacy program. The Oklahoma Messages Project uses multimedia filming of parents in prison reading books to their kids to maintain and improve the parent-child relationship. Such a great program.
- Roger Marsh: Let's listen now to Dr. Dobson's classic conversation with Cheri Fuller as together, they unpack timeless truths about motivating children to learn.
- Dr. Dobson: I was thinking it today about a rather typical scenario. I'll bet you there are a lot of parents that can identify with this. Junior's in elementary school, and mom sends him off. Then about six hours, seven hours later, he comes home from school, and he's lugging his lunch pail and his baseball mitt. He has two or three textbooks with him and some crumpled papers peeking out from underneath the pages.
- Dr. Dobson: Mom's excited to see him and she says, "How was school today, honey?" He shrugs and he says, "All right." Then he makes a beeline for the cookie jar. She says, "What'd you learn in class today?" He says, "I don't know, nothing really."

She says, "You have any papers for me to put on the refrigerator?" He hands her this mess, his notebook is a disaster area. His handwriting is a disgrace to the whole family.

Dr. Dobson: She begins to unfold those papers and he missed seven on a very simple spelling test. She knows he has the ability to have gotten them all right. She opens a math paper and he missed 22 problems out of 48. It's kind of hard to put those on the refrigerator. Then she spots a note from the teacher.

Dr. Dobson: I'm sure, if not early in the school year, sometime during the next nine months, that scenario will occur for many parents. If you asked that mother and her husband what they most are in need of in their family, they would say it is information about how to motivate these kids, how to get them interested in school, how to make them want to learn, how to light the fires of curiosity, and make them want to learn.

Dr. Dobson: We have a guest here who has spent a lot of time thinking about that. Just wrote a book on that subject in fact. She is Cheri Fuller, former teacher, a parent of three, author of the book, *Motivating Your Kids From Crayons to Careers*. She's here today to help parents learn to enhance their child's natural curiosity and communicate the value of learning to their kids. Cheri, you've heard the introduction. You have also heard that explanation or that description of family life from many, many parents, haven't you?

Cheri Fuller: Yes, I have.

Dr. Dobson: Let's put myself in the role of the father representing the family I just talked about. I come to you and I talk to you about the motivation of our children. I say, "Cheri, what am I going to do to get those kids turned onto learning? They really don't care. They only care about playing. Is it something I've done? Is it my fault as a father? Is it my wife's fault as a mother? Give us some help."

Cheri Fuller: Well, first of all, I'd say to you, instead of saying, "What did we do wrong?" Say, "Well, what kind of learners are we?" Because the kind of learner that you are, if you're an avid reader, your children will not necessarily imitate you instantly, but it has a powerful impact. So I'd ask you, "What are you really interested in learning? And have you ever shared that with your child?"

Cheri Fuller: I know a dad, who's a geologist, and he shared with me how he has collected rocks all of his life. He has rock collections, and he's collected animal bones, and all kinds of interesting nature things. His natural tendency is to share that with his little girl, Melissa, and take her on nature hikes. So he finds that she's very motivated in science and she has the best show and tell collection that any first grader ever had.

Cheri Fuller: So I'd ask you, what are your interests, and most important, what are your son's interests? What is he really interested in? Because that can be something that

can spark his motivation and what's his talent or his skill? Maybe the child isn't even motivated enough to go to the library, but we collect up some books, maybe get him a subscription to a magazine in his interest.

Dr. Dobson: Did you imply a minute ago that what I'm interested in as a father is relevant to the motivation and the learning of my kids? I work 10, 11 hours a day, and I'm not even able to go up to the school. You're saying that who I am influences what they do off at the local school that I don't seem to have any relationship to?

Cheri Fuller: Instead of looking at our deficiencies at parents, if we look at, "Well, what are my assets? What can I share with my child? Maybe I'm not the greatest in science. Science is not my strong suit, but I love reading. I can transfer that love of reading." If you're excited about learning anything, whatever your field is, you can take your child to work with you, and let your child catch some of the excitement for some of the projects you're doing. This is a great boon to motivation. Often a child sits in a classroom all year, and year, after year, and they don't see the connection between the classroom and the world out there, where real people are doing interesting things.

Cheri Fuller: One thing that sparked the motivation of our kids is when we have people for dinner that they share with them what they're doing. We have a friend who's an orthopedic surgeon and he's been creating a new knee joint. He shared this with Chris and with Justin. He shared how the process he's going through to work on this. This really sparked an interest in them.

Cheri Fuller: I think for our children to see not only what I'm doing and what I'm interested in, but see other people, role models of adults who may be one is a missionary and very passionately interested in the work that they're doing in Haiti, and let our children be exposed to what's really going on out there.

Dr. Dobson: All right, then let's pull a first principle out of what you've just said. That motivation for learning is best sparked by identifying the areas of interest, the natural interests that are there and capitalizing on them.

Cheri Fuller: Right. Because that's a real key. I believe that God put those interests in a child for a reason. It may not be something that's going to blossom right now. It may be five years down the road. Your child is interested in writing and so maybe he tries out a little neighborhood newsletter that he writes of the news in the neighborhood. As he's encouraged and maybe given other opportunities, encouraged to try this at school, or to submit something to the literary magazine, he's going to discover, "Maybe that's what I can do. Maybe I can go into a career in journalism."

Dr. Dobson: One of the great, I started to use the word tragedies, that's too strong a word, but I think you understand what I mean. One of the great tragedies of human experience is that there is such a great natural curiosity in the early years of

development. You look at a three-year-old and he is fascinated by absolutely everything.

Dr. Dobson: I remember when our daughter was only 18 months of age, I was in the kitchen one night doing something. I don't remember, preparing myself a sandwich or something. I looked at over at my 18 month old daughter and she was examining the knob on the dishwasher. She stood there and she looked at it from all sides. She saw her reflection in it. I saw her pull her body back and forth to see how the reflection changed as she moved. She turned the knob, she looked at numbers, she felt of it. She leaned over and put her tongue on it. She was checking that out, just a natural curiosity about life.

Dr. Dobson: Then you jump 10 years and you see these kids absolutely bored with everything. The whole world is out there and they are bored to death with the learning process. Somehow we allow that excitement about learning to dissipate and we let them sink into this mire of boredom. It's a sin to bore kids, I think. Speaking personally, I bore very easily as well. I find it hard to sit and listen to speakers. In 20 years of education, I've heard some of the most boring teachers of all times, but it's a shame that we permit this to occur. Would you agree?

Cheri Fuller: I think so. I think one of those subtle ways that that happens is that as parents, we get so busy that when our child asks, "Why is the grass turning green? It's been brown in the winter and now it's turning green." "Why is that Caterpillar fuzzy?" We don't take their questions seriously. We're busy. We're rushing to the grocery store.

Cheri Fuller: That natural curiosity, as you said, is so strong in a little one and in a child. If we can instead try to take those questions seriously and answer them. If we don't know the answer, say those, I think what are powerful words, "Let's look it up." If your daughter's interested in why the grass is green, in a very simple way, get a book that explains that if you don't know how to explain it. Follow that up with something else, maybe the child can draw pictures about it.

Cheri Fuller: Again, we're leading from what their natural curiosity. I believe children are born, motivated to learn. They want to learn. They're reaching out. They're taking things apart and putting them back together if they can. If we can just realize that curiosity is so important because it's part of what keeps a person motivated about life.

Dr. Dobson: You used a key word minute ago. You said, "let's look it up," instead of, "go look it up." There's a big difference between those two.

Cheri Fuller: There's a difference. For me to be able to admit, "Well, I don't know the answer to that, but let's go look that up together." How many bones are in the body?

Dr. Dobson: So the excitement of the two of you.

Cheri Fuller: Right. I think a lot of that is wrapped up with dialogue in the family. A conversation and dialogue is one of the most vital tools that we can use to help children remain motivated.

Dr. Dobson: In fact, one of the important points you make in the book is that the dinner hour should be preserved or restored to its original purpose, which is a conversation time within the family.

Cheri Fuller: Right, and it can be such a wonderful time to talk about what Sally's learning in science that day. Our son often would in his ethics class this year, he'd share about a debate they were having on abortion, and he'd tell us the different sides. Chris would tell us what was happening in the NBA.

Cheri Fuller: So we have this dialogue going on, this conversation, and it's not just a time filler, but it also gives children a chance to reflect on what they've learned during the day, and to have parents be a sounding board, and give their ideas, and to weave together what they're learning with other things that are happening in life, maybe with current events. Help children see a bigger picture than just this worksheet that they're having to do on whales, for instance, but to tie this in with, well, what's happening with whales around the world?

Cheri Fuller: And so that's what I try to do with, for instance, the chapter on literacy skills in conversation is to say, "Let's use the resources we have. We're all busy, but we do have a dinner hour. Let's sit down together. Let's say grace together. Let's use it as a time, not to scold, not to just hand out orders, but to really dialogue together." It encourages children to have thinking skills. In the classroom, a child may only have 40 seconds to say anything because of all the things the teacher has to do, taking role, giving instructions, the work that they have to do.

Dr. Dobson: It's that interaction between generations that matters, isn't it?

Cheri Fuller: Right. The live interaction between adult and child is what improves language skills.

Dr. Dobson: In fact, studies have shown for years... I remember studying this when I was in graduate school, that... that twins develop language more slowly typically than single children because they depend on one another. They get so familiar with the grunts, and the groans, and the almost nonverbal interaction of one another, that they depend less on adults, and it inhibits their language to some degree.

Dr. Dobson: So if it's true in that context, then you can take the larger picture, that the amount of time you spend as a child, talking to adults and interacting with adults, is directly related to the development of that skill. So if parents are extremely busy, they send their kids in throughout the day, in the formative years, to some kind of setting where this kind of language interchange with adults does not occur, then it's a handicap.

Cheri Fuller: I think too, parents are busy. We all are, but we can take advantage of the opportunities in the car to talk to our children, when we're washing dishes. We have opportunities right before they go to bed to talk with them, or when we throw the football after dinner. To use those opportunities to ask them what they're thinking, what they're feeling, and to share ideas. It's a powerful tool to motivate children. The education, if it's just happening at school is just a thin veneer if it's not really happening at home too.

Dr. Dobson: We're talking to Cheri Fuller, who has written a book called *Motivating Your Kids From Crayons to Careers*. So that's what we're discussing and who we're discussing it with. In this book, you talk a lot about motivational busters and motivational boosters, things that assist in motivating children and the things that get in the way. In terms of the busters, one of the most important ones you named was when you move a child from one district to another. How does that break up or bust motivation?

Cheri Fuller: Well, a school transfer can just remove the child, first of all, from the setting that he's secure in or that she's secure in. Then they have a whole new set of friends to get used to, or to find friends. Often, they've got totally different books that are being used. Maybe this school is ahead of them in certain areas, and so they come in with some gaps. Their family is in transition, and so there are certain difficulties and challenges that go with a school transfer.

Cheri Fuller: But my point in having a chapter on smoothing a school transfer was how can we keep kids motivated in the midst of that so that their learning can go on? I think really there can be some great benefits.

Dr. Dobson: How do you do it?

Cheri Fuller: Well, one of the ways is to really prepare the child for the move, and to have a family meeting, and to sit down and say, "This is what's about to happen in a few months." Talk about it. Of course, the parent investigates what are the best school situations, whether it's going to be a Christian school, whether it's public school, what's the best place that's accessible?

Cheri Fuller: Another way that I know of a family that did that was just wonderful to prepare their children for the move was when the parents visited the school, they asked for a boy and a girl their children's age to be pen pals for their children until they got there. It was going to be like four months until the family got there in the new setting. So a boy and a girl volunteered and they exchanged addresses and they began writing letters back and forth. So when the family actually got to the new school, they already had a little developing friendship here that really did help in their transition.

Cheri Fuller: So I think one thing is helping the child to say goodbye, to also maintain some friendships and some continuity, and maybe having an address book and your child can collect addresses, and then encouraging them to write.

Dr. Dobson: Began to create curiosity about what the new place is going to be.

Cheri Fuller: Right. When we were about to move to Maine with our children, I wrote off to the state and the tourist bureau and asked for information about some of the different points in the state. Of course, the ski areas, because we'd never been close to a ski area, and they were going to be 45 minutes away. Some of the historical things that might interest the children and things about the beach and the ocean. We'd never lived there.

Cheri Fuller: It did give them a sense of anticipation and an expectation about, "Boy, we're going to be in New England and it's a totally different part of the country." Although they were sad about leaving their friends, we were trying to say, "This can be an adventure too," so that they can begin to have a positive attitude. I think that really helped.

Dr. Dobson: It's been my experience in dealing with the adolescent period that almost every student will quit studying sometime between the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. There's so much going on emotionally in there.

Cheri Fuller: Hormones.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah, the hormones. There's so much pressure, so many assaults on self-esteem. So many other interests, the opposite sex suddenly become so interesting and so on, that nearly every youngster will quit working at some time in there. So when that happens, it's very important for parents to know it, to monitor it and to help them get past that, tutorials assistance at a time like that,

Cheri Fuller: Often too, when that happens, when you're saying that they stop studying or the grades start to fall, what happens is the parents get very anxious and very upset about this failure. Boy, they don't want this to continue, and so they put on more pressure. They say, "You've got to bring this grade up or we're going to ground you." Or they begin to really focus on, "You've missed 10 points this week on this test."

Cheri Fuller: When that burnout or this decline in grades begins to happen, instead of focusing on those grades and putting more pressure on, what we need to do as parents is begin to focus on the learning, and take the pressure off the grades, and try to find something positive to say. If it's not that you brought your grade up this week, appreciate the fact you put effort into it, and that it's building perseverance.

Cheri Fuller: Say again, "What is your interest? Maybe you're struggling like crazy in algebra two, and that's not your deal, but you're going to get through it. Maybe we need to get you a tutor to get through it, but you can get through it. But what is an area that you could be good at?"

Cheri Fuller: Our son, Justin, he was so glad the day he finished algebra, and trigonometry, and all of that, but what he was really interested in was government. So we challenged him to try an honors government class. It was going to push him a little bit, an honors English class, but to be with some kids who are achievers, who are interested in the subject. It happened to be something also that he was interested in. So he saw, "Well, I can do a little bit more than just the average courses that I'd been in."

Cheri Fuller: Another girl I know, Kim, A student through elementary school through junior high, and just began to get burned out with all the deadlines, and the tests, and the pressures. One of the things her family did was to find a graphic artist for Kim to work with on Saturday. They knew she was interested in art. None of the subjects in school were particularly challenging to her. They found an artist who would be kind of like a mentor to her.

Cheri Fuller: I think for high school students, that's very important. If we can find someone who'd be a mentor. With Kim, she worked on Saturdays with this graphic artist. It helped her to see beyond high school a little bit. Because in high school, you have almost tunnel vision. This gave her the spark to get through and then to go on and major in art in college.

Dr. Dobson: You make a distinction in the book between pressure and motivation that you are not real big on parents pushing their kids. Yet there is an assignment, Cheri, that's due next Friday. It's got to be 40 pages long, and it's a whole notebook, and it has all this stuff, and the kid hasn't started. That's pressure. It's pressure for the parent and the parent translates it onto the youngster. How do you avoid it in a world of homework?

Cheri Fuller: Well, I think one way is when children are younger and they begin to have projects like this, is help them divide up this big task, which can seem very overwhelming, into small bites. Help them see, "Well, what are you going to do on it this week?" instead of waiting till the last minute. Doing some planning together, some brainstorming together, maybe encouraging the child to go in and talk to the teacher about his idea for the science project, and bringing in some books that maybe might spark his interest. I think this can help.

Dr. Dobson: Well, Cheri, your book is entitled *Motivating Your Kids From Crayons to Careers*. This is a 260 page book, and we're obviously not going to cover even the basic meat of it in one program. I want to talk to you some more next time. Just tell me why you wrote this book. Why this particular subject? There are many things as a teacher you could have written on.

Cheri Fuller: Well, I think one is from being with children in the classroom and seeing that they really have hopes and dreams. Sometimes as parents, we have great expectations for our children, but we don't realize that they also have hopes and dreams. For those dreams to be realized of the boy who wants to become a doctor and the little girl who wants to be a nurse or a teacher, then they're

going to have to have the motivation to go the distance, and to overcome obstacles. Because it isn't easy.

Cheri Fuller: I think about a boy I know, who decided when he was seven, he wanted to be like his dentist. He wanted to become a dentist. He ended up going through a small town school and not really being quite equipped for college and for the hard pre-med and pre-dental courses he had to take. He made not high enough grades. He ended up changing to a different college and really learning better study habits, having to repeat a whole year.

Cheri Fuller: Then he got into dental school and worked very hard, but his freshman year he missed passing the final that would mean he could go onto the next year by about a 100th of a point. He had to repeat that whole freshman year of dental school. He continued to persevere because when he was a seven year old, he thought, "Someday I want to be a dentist." So that helped carry him the distance. This past year, he did finish and he graduated with a 3.0, and he hung that sign out that says DDS.

Cheri Fuller: Children have hopes and dreams and how can we, as parents, help them stay motivated for all the challenges, and all the difficulties, and sometimes school situations that aren't going to be ideal, and their own limitations, so that they can realize those hopes and dreams? That's really why I wrote the book. I wrote it also to say to parents there's a lot of ways, just in the course of family life, that we can spark that desire to learn that we can help motivate children, and it doesn't have to be a drudgery.

Dr. Dobson: And not just realize hopes and dreams that are already there, but to create hopes and dreams.

Cheri Fuller: Right, and help them develop goals and aspirations. Our daughter's been, she's thought maybe she wanted to be a nurse, and now she's volunteering at the hospital, and she's getting to be a real part of that scene of helping people, and being in ICU. It's really sparked something within her. Because as a seventh grader, her self-esteem has kind of been shaky this year, and she's wondered, "Am I really worth much? Is there anything that I can do?" Just having that extra responsibility.

Dr. Dobson: Every seventh grader I've ever met in my life is asking that same question.

Cheri Fuller: She's feeling better about herself. She's developing some goals. She's saying, "Maybe I want to be a pediatric nurse." It gives her a little more motivation because science is very hard for her.

Dr. Dobson: Cheri, let's talk some more next time about motivation of children.

Cheri Fuller: I'd love to do that.

Roger Marsh: It's true, all kids have hopes and dreams. We, as parents, can be their cheerleaders and their guides as they take steps toward those goals. You've been listening to part one of Dr. Dobson's classic conversation with author and speaker Cheri Fuller here on Family Talk. They've been discussing motivating your child to learn.

Roger Marsh: To learn more about Cheri Fuller and her ministry, visit our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. If you missed any part of today's broadcast, you can also rehear it there as well. That's drjamesdobson.org. Be sure to join us again tomorrow for part two of Dr. Dobson's conversation with Cheri Fuller. They'll share what you can do and what you shouldn't do to motivate your child to learn. For everyone here at Family Talk, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks for listening and be sure to join us again next time.

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