



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Screens and Teens – Part 2

Guest(s): Dr. Kathy Koch and Ryan Dobson

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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: Welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks for listening to our program today. Family Talk is a ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. And before we begin today's program, I want to share with you about some important news regarding our JDFI family. As many of you know, Dr. Tim Clinton has served as co-host for our Family Talk broadcast for nearly six years. Tim is also the president of the American Association of Christian Counselors, known as AACC. Over the past few years, it's no secret that our nation is suffering through a mental health disaster and to respond to this critical need, AACC has more than doubled in size over the past three years alone. Given the weight of leading this effort, Tim is stepping away from his role at JDFI to focus his energy and attention to AACC. We are grateful for his contributions to our ministry and he leaves with our deep appreciation and profound prayers.

Now alongside Dr. Dobson, the JDFI is blessed to have our Senior Vice President of Public Policy, Gary Bauer and the Honorable Michelle Bachman, available to speak into the many cultural issues that families are facing today. You will be hearing more from them in the coming months for sure on these important topics. And now here is Dr. James Dobson to introduce his special guest for today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, yesterday we were talking with Dr. Kathy Koch. It was a wonderful interview and I've invited her to be with us again today. Let me go back and reintroduce her because she has so much to say and she's written six books that many of our listeners will have read. So Dr. Kathy Koch holds an earned PhD in Reading and Educational Psychology from Purdue University. She was a tenured associate professor of education at the University of Wisconsin, Green Bay. She also taught second graders. She was a middle school coach and a school board member before becoming a full-time conference speaker in 1991. Dr. Koch is deeply committed to Jesus Christ, whom she says is the foundation of her ministry and her life, and we're so glad to have Dr. Kathy with us. Welcome back to JDFI.

Dr. Kathy Koch: I am so honored to be here, so happy to be here. Thanks for the invitation.

Dr. James Dobson: I've also invited our son, Ryan Dobson to participate, not only in the discussion yesterday, but also to be with us again today. He has his own podcast ministry called Rebel Parenting. He's the author of a number of books, so it's good to have Ryan back. Now, the book that we're going to talk about again today, we'll hit home with parents and grandparents who are looking for answers. It's titled *Screens and Teens: Connecting with Our Kids in a Wireless World*. It's such an important topic. And Dr. Kathy, let's get right into it.

Dr. Kathy Koch: For sure.

Dr. James Dobson: This is something that I think is really insightful. It may not be original with you, but I sure loved it. You suggest that parents ought to take what they call no screened vacations. Elaborate on that.

Dr. Kathy Koch: Yeah, ideally, even if it's a half a day realistically, again, where there's one phone, the emergency number, the GPS phone if you will, the phone that you might have to use, maybe you're going to search for which restaurant is open. I get that. But no other devices on the walk in the park, in the car ride because conversations will happen. Going to a mountain cabin with no cell signal, oh my goodness. And initially it could be like panic city, but it's ultimately really good for the heart and the mind and the connection of the family to engage.

Now, don't be foolish, don't go on a no phone, no tech vacation and leave all the toys at home. Make sure you take board games and really enjoyable books and soccer balls and footballs and frisbees and find out what's available in the community that you guys could participate in. But having the alternatives is really, really important.

Dr. James Dobson: You told an absolutely wonderful and delightful story about a boy's reaction to screen time, came up to you after you had spoken.

Dr. Kathy Koch: I had shared at a parent meeting about digital free days and I suggested two days a week possibly, except for educational use. I used to say, unless you only turn it on if you need to read by it or cook with it, otherwise keep it off. And I recommended two days a week and I recommended that the parents invite the children to participate in the decision-making. So their eight or nine year old little boy said, "Well, dad, let's choose Wednesday and Sunday." Well, he was a smart kid because they're at church on Wednesday night and they're at church on Sunday. Well, he came up to me in the hallway at the church a while after that and he said, "Are you the lady?" And I'm like, what lady? "Are you the lady who taught my mom and dad to turn off all the toys, all the technology?"

And I said, yes. And Dr. Dobson, he said, thank you. And I was really kind of hesitant thinking he would yell at me so to speak, but he said, "I now know how to catch a ball. My dad took me to the park and taught me how to catch a ball

and I got to make cookies with my mom and it was amazing." And the parents were standing over to the side with tears in their eyes as he said, thank you for what I had done. And you know what was interesting? I did that really for the children. But the mom and dad came up to me after and said that they were also transformed by that, that they found themselves having more intimate conversations as a couple, that they had worked harder to walk toward their children to see what would my son and daughter want to do with me now that I have time to do something with them.

Dr. James Dobson: Dr. Kathy, I just read that story yesterday. You left a line, a critical line out as you retold it because that little boy looked at you and said, "Thank you, I got my daddy back."

Dr. Kathy Koch: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: I mean that's the punchline for the story and it brought tears to my eyes.

Dr. Kathy Koch: Yeah, thank you, sir.

Ryan Dobson: Yeah, Dr. Kathy, I think on that, really that's the message to parents. Those parents were missing out on so much in their lives because I think parents have bought into this. When it's *Screens and Teens*, I think secretly, this is a parents and screens book. I think there are so many parents that have absolutely 100% bought into that social media live. They get their likes from it, their self-worth from it. They're feeling their identity from it. But when their kids start asking for time, they start spending time with their children and it's more rewarding. They start spending time with their spouse and it's more rewarding. Parents need this book.

Dr. James Dobson: That's a really interesting comment there, Ryan, because it's not only teens that are the problem here, but it is adults as well. I have wondered, to what extent is this invasion of technology interfering with marriage?

Dr. Kathy Koch: It's alarming, isn't it? And technology has allowed all of us to be less vulnerable and less transparent, less accountable to others. And that bleeds over then between husbands and wives and adult children and their parents, who are still our parents. They'll never not be a parent. And then of course, between parents and their children and between siblings, we're less connected all the way around and we know it. We know it. Are we going to be brave enough, courageous enough, wise enough, and mature enough to decide to change? Those are decisions we can make. And we have a conversation. We have decided we miss each other. We're not designed to live in the same home or designed to love and live and know each other intimately. I miss you even though I live with you, and we are going to grow up and make some changes here.

Dr. James Dobson: So the bottom line for us and for the people listening is technology can not only be a problem for our kids, but for us, we're in the same world. We see the same things, we have the same temptations, and we all need to take a step back and correct the amount of time that we give to this subject. How do we have time for the Lord? How do we have time to read the Bible, to study, to contemplate? We just get so wrapped up in all that's going on that I don't think there's ever been a time in human history where the distractions have been so pressing and so obvious and should make us pause.

Dr. Kathy Koch: I appreciate all those comments so much because you know what gentlemen? We have to want more for ourselves. We have to want more. We have to realize. I like to talk to young people about abundant life. We have that option now. Abundant life doesn't start when you die an earthly death. We can have abundant life now. Do we know what we don't have and do we want more? And when you realize how much more love provides for you and how much more joy provides for you and how the firm foundation shifts, it changes you. We have to want that, desire that and work to make it happen. Change requires a taking off and a putting on.

If you read Ephesians 4:22-24, "Change requires a taking off of the old self and a putting on of the new self and a changing of the mind." So when we say we want to do tech less, we want to get off our phone, know what you're going to do instead. Because if you have nothing to do instead of gaming, instead of social media scrolling, instead of researching Pinterest, instead of a football game, if you don't know what to do instead, you'll have an empty vacuum that will be very painful and you'll immediately pick up your device.

Dr. James Dobson: That's right.

Dr. Kathy Koch: So know what you can do instead. And I think we can be very successful.

Dr. James Dobson: Dr. Kathy, you made one point in here that really ought to be emphasized. I'd like you to do it. You talk about the screen time has a way of making kids feel that they're the center of the universe. How does it do that? How does a child become convinced that he's the only thing that matters and his concerns are the only thing important. Elaborate on that.

Dr. Kathy Koch: One of the ways that happens is when parents ignore them. So again, we're back to the choice to isolate. If I'm alone a lot, then I turn to the device, I can hear a song and buy it immediately and listen to it forever. Back in the day, I had to save 20 bucks, drive to the store, hope the record was there, and buy a whole album for the one song I wanted. We can have whatever we want the way we want it. We don't watch shows we don't want to watch because most of us have our own devices, so we're not at dad's control, if you will.

We decide who to connect with on social media. I don't have to connect with you and you don't have to connect with me. I don't have to play a game I don't

want. I don't have to watch a movie I don't want to watch. And we answer the phone if we want to. We control it. And it's so dangerous because this lie that I'm the center of my own universe causes the pride, self-centered, entitled, angry, lonely reality that says, I don't even need God because ultimately it's all about me.

Dr. James Dobson: You said in the book that the lie number one is I am the center of the universe. Truth number one is no, God is the center of the universe. So it goes right to the heart of what we believe.

Dr. Kathy Koch: Absolutely. And something that's happened a lot over the last couple of months, as I've spoken to a lot of young people, they'll say to me, "Dr. Kathy, I'm not sure that I've ever thought I was the center of my own universe, but I think I'm the center of my mom's." One of the things I'll say to parents, and I don't say this lightly, but if parents post 65 pictures of a birthday party because they think even grandma needs to see 65 pictures, you're saying to your kids, it really is all about you making me happy. It's all about you making me look good. I tell the story in the book of a child who did something really fun on the playground and went up to his mom and said, "Was that good enough for Facebook or should I do it again?" Rather than, "Did you like that mom? Wasn't that cool what I did?"

And so we who are adults and supposedly the mature ones, we need to make sure that we're not creating a false life on social media again. And I'm not saying if you posted a bunch of Christmas pictures that you've done something wrong, of course not. I will post my own pictures. There's nothing inherently horrible about that. But it's the idea of how many and what kind of attention did you draw to yourself in those moments? So do your kids feel like they have to perform for you because they are the center of your world? Or are you parenting and modeling marriage if you're married so that they understand God is at the center of it all?

Ryan Dobson: Yeah. We started seeing this a little while ago. It was that child-centric thing where you started getting the helicopter parents and the snowplow parents. I will say this, people say, "Oh, do you shelter your kids?" And I go, absolutely, I shelter them as much as humanly possible. I try to keep them younger longer. I am not trying to take away regular life consequences and hardships from them. But I will say what we try to do as a family is create the safest possible environment within our home for our children because the world is rough out there. It's rough for our kids.

The difference in social media, I was talking to my son about this last week. If a kid at school didn't like me when I was 15 and I went home, I didn't hear about it until I got back to school and ran into that dummy the next day. Now, children on social media get to hear every negative comment about them to their face, 24 hours a day. And it's not the gamers in Romania keeping my son up at night. It's the bad parents that don't monitor their children's cell phone usage that keep texting my son at 2:00 in the morning and then force me to reach out to

the parent and say, could you please control your child in just the slightest at 15? Getting 18 texts at 3:00 in the morning seems inappropriate.

Dr. James Dobson: Ryan, you are the keeper and the trainer and the lover of my grandchildren. And you're doing an absolutely fantastic job of taking care of those kids. And I just want you to know I say publicly how much I appreciate it.

Ryan Dobson: Oh, I appreciate that. I really do. Let me throw one more thing in as a parent, because as parents we're always looking at our budgets, things like that. This is a really interesting one when it comes to health consciousness and parents. They did a study of children showing them Saturday morning cartoons, and they gave them goldfish crackers to eat while watching cartoons. They did the study again and they added regular Saturday morning commercials in between the cartoons that children were watching. And what they noticed was that children ate 60% more goldfish crackers if they were watching commercials. That's how dangerous those commercials are for your children.

But what I'll say to adults is that poll is there for adults. And what we see at Rebel Parenting is that Amazon expenditures have been skyrocketing the more the parents are watching TV because commercials are designed to create a need that needs to be satisfied within you. And what they hope is you'll buy the product they're selling you. But if you don't, that need has still been created. And if you've got a phone in your hand and low self-discipline, Amazon can satiate that need really quickly.

Dr. Kathy Koch: Commercials on social media, right?

Ryan Dobson: Right.

Dr. Kathy Koch: I've been posting during the Thanksgiving, Christmas season, of course, meaningful Scripture and meaningful quotes and stories, and then you're sucked into the ad thinking, "Ooh, that would be really cool for my nephew or my great niece would love that. Or maybe I would like that." And before you know it, you're on social media for a long time and you're spending money that you don't have. And again, we're not stupid, horrible people. It's designed to do that and it is addictive. And again, we all have needs, and yet we would say, let's make sure that our needs are being met in healthy ways and not unhealthy ways.

Ryan Dobson: Totally.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we're running out of time. There's a question that I've wanted to ask Dr. Koch, what does neurological research tell us about the obsession with technological devices morning, noon and night, the same activity repetitively? Do we know the impact that has on the human brain?

Dr. Kathy Koch: We are beginning to understand it more and more. This is why there are hospitals for the tech addicted. The neurons are connecting, and this would be much more your expertise than mine, but the neurons and the synapsis are connecting, and it's why the habit is so hard to break. It's why when we're bored, we go to the device. I know of people who pick up a phone at a red light. A red light is a minute long, but we can't handle a minute of boredom and silence because we don't feel important. Like the world revolves around us. We pick up our phone. "Oh, heaven forbid that I might miss out on something. Oh my goodness." And so it is wiring that expectation of entitlement all about me, a quick pace.

Children are bored when somebody reads them a paper book and I try to turn the page quicker than the mom or dad can allow it to be changed because they're still reading the text that's there, but the kids are used to such a quick pace, that's brain development, and this is why we're having a disconnect between grandparents and grandchildren often because their brains are radically different.

We're not addicted to the phone, we're addicted to the adrenaline drop that the device causes, the ping and the ding and you won the game kind of celebration on the device, and all of that addiction is changing the brain. And this is why so many of us are concerned about intellectual growth, kids who are learning on devices, kids who have done device-based school colleges that are doing more and more device centered, it's damaging.

Dr. James Dobson: What does it do to mental health? Do we have a handle on that?

Ryan Dobson: Dr. Kathy, here's what I'm wondering. The effects of mental health on young girls and social media is so extreme and all the studies are coming out and the tech companies know it. They know the mental health issues of young girls are being exacerbated by their algorithms, so extensively will someday we have a sort of a big tobacco reckoning? For decades, big tobacco said, "Oh no, smoking's not bad for you, one in seven doctors prefers Pall Mall," whatever that was. I think tech companies are playing a very dangerous game with the future when they know how dangerous and how insidious it is for mental health of young girls in social media.

Dr. Kathy Koch: I agree. Both of you, great question and great comment. It is a reason to get off our devices. It is a reason to have tech-free zones in our homes, tech-free days in our week, rules and policies that we follow that we expect our children and grandchildren to follow. Not because we're mean and they're bad, but because we'd love you too much to allow this to continue. We have young girls in therapy way sooner than they would've been 10 years ago. Depression is real. They don't know how to handle difficulty emotion. They do not know how to handle boredom. We've got to teach kids how to handle boredom or they're going to go from one kind of coke to another. And we've seen that start. And so this is again where we as the mature parents draw the line and say, because of

our love and our passion for you and the fact that we're an ordained family unit that we don't want to lose, we're going to make some changes here.

Devices could be used for as tools and not toys. Devices could be used only for an hour a day. Devices could be used only after one hour of face-to-face socialization. Then you're allowed 30 minutes of screen time. There are policies that we can implement. You know what? When children are young, you never let them color 24 hours a day. You would never let a kid play kickball 10 hours in a row. You would never let a kid eat as many chocolate chip cookies as he wanted to. Parents have always said no to the things that they knew were unhealthy. Why is it harder with technology? Because we're just as addicted as our kids, and we would have to sacrifice our own self for the betterment of our children. And that's a whole nother show, guys, but I need to say that.

Dr. James Dobson: We've been talking to Dr. Kathy Koch about her book *Screens and Teens*. We covered about a third of it. There's so much in this book. Dr. Kathy, you have written a very practical book. Here's just so much information here for parents and I hope that our listeners, both parents and grandparents, will avail themselves of this book because they will benefit from it. More importantly, their children will benefit from it. Thank you for writing this book and for being our guest today.

Dr. Kathy Koch: I appreciate your affirmation. That means a lot and it's been an absolute joy and a real privilege to be a part of your action here. Thank you so much.

Dr. James Dobson: And the question is how do people get in touch with you?

Dr. Kathy Koch: Our website is celebratekids.com, and they can find us of course on the Instagram and Facebook like so many other ministries, but our website is celebratekids.com. We have an email newsletter. We have our own podcast. We would love for people to hang out with us there.

Dr. James Dobson: It sounds like you're pretty heavily into technology yourself.

Dr. Kathy Koch: We really have to be, but again, to use it as a tool, to use it as an educational, spiritual maturity device and not always a toy makes a difference.

Dr. James Dobson: Kathy, thank you for being our guest. Ryan, thank you for being with us today. You made a contribution to the program and I love you.

Ryan Dobson: It's always a pleasure, dad. I appreciate it. Thank you, Dr. Kathy. It was great.

Roger Marsh: Well, what an encouraging conclusion to this two-part conversation,, featuring our own Dr. James Dobson, his son Ryan Dobson and Dr. Kathy Koch here on Family Talk. Dr. Kathy is the author of the book called *Screens and Teens: Connecting with Our Kids in a Wireless World*.

A lot of the issues that teens are dealing with today are the result of technology and the common denominator that we have for leading them astray is us, their parents, the adults in their lives. You know the old adage that children pay more attention to what you do than what you say. It's really very true in this context. For example, if we are constantly checking social media, why are we so surprised when our kids spend hours scrolling through it as well? If mom or dad is checking text messages at a stoplight, how can we get mad at our own kids when they do the same?

And if the last thing we do each night before we fall asleep is to watch an episode of our favorite TV program, we really shouldn't be too surprised when our kids watch hours and hours of TikTok and YouTube, late into the nights as well. As families, we can take a look at our technology habits and usage and then we can work together to make smarter choices that will benefit each member of the family. By the way, if you'd like to learn more about Dr. Kathy Koch, her ministry called Celebrate Kids, or the book we've been discussing the past couple of days here on Family Talk, that book is called *Screens and Teens*. Just go to drjamesdobson.org for more information. That's drjamesdobson.org.

If you prefer, you can give us a call. Our toll free number is 877-732-6825, and a member of our staff will be happy to take your call to recommend a resource even to pray with and for you. Again, the number to call is 877-732-6825, and we look forward to hearing from you today. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for listening to Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love. Have a great weekend and be sure to join us again on Monday for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

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

Dr. James Dobson: Hello everyone, this is James Dobson inviting you to join us for our next edition of Family Talk. Every day we come to these microphones with someone in mind. Whether it's a busy mom looking for tips on discipline or a husband who wants to learn more about connecting with his wife. We want to put an arm around your family in any way that we can. So join us next time for Family Talk, won't you?