



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Screens and Teens – Part 1

**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 Bower, and the honorable Michele Bachmann, 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:** We're going to talk today with a celebrated author of six books, some of which you may have read. She's Dr. Kathy Koch, who holds an earned Ph.D. in reading and educational psychology from Purdue University. She was a tenured associate professor of education at the University of Wisconsin in Green Bay. She also taught second graders, and was a middle school ... I mean, it's been a busy lady, I can tell you. 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, Dr. Kathy, to have you join us. Welcome to James Dobson Family Institute.

**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 my son, Ryan, to participate in this discussion. He has his own podcast ministry called Rebel Parenting. He's the author of a number of books, and also interviewed Dr. Koch recently on his show. In fact, Ryan introduced her to me. Ryan, it's good to have you back.

Ryan Dobson: Appreciate being here, Dad. And it is such a pleasure to talk to Dr. Kathy Koch again. I will tell parents out there, this book is reasonable. You know, every now and then, we get guests on and they ask you to do things that you know will instantly disrupt your family dynamic. Your kids will revolt. You're going to take away all TV and all screens, and we're going to go in the forest and we're going to pick ... It's these extremeisms. Dr. Kathy's book gives you confidence, and you look at it and you go, "Oh, we can do this," and you know it's going to make it better. It has improved my family with Laura and Lincoln and Luci so much, and I'm so thrilled to share it today.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, the book that Ryan's talking about and we're going to be making it the focus of our discussion today, is going to hit home with parents and grandparents who are looking for answers. It's titled *Screens and Teens: Connecting With Kids in a Wireless World*. Dr. Koch, that's a compelling title, and we can guess from it that technology is creating many of the challenges that parents have to deal with today. Isn't it?

Dr. Kathy Koch: Absolutely. And it's here to stay. And we can use it for really good and wonderful ways, or it can be destructive and discouraging and create depression and a disconnection. I love that we put the word connect in the title because that's what families ought to be doing.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, I want to work my way through this book. It's so important that I want to ask a lot of questions that you dealt with in this book, so people will have a flavor for it. And I don't say that about every book that is discussed here on our broadcast. But there's something here for everybody who's raising children, especially teens. Let's begin with this. Many teens, perhaps the majority of them, are obsessed with today's technology. You say that in the book. Describe it for us here.

Dr. Kathy Koch: Right. It's disappointing, isn't it, that they're asking technology to meet needs for them that God can meet for them, and that their parents ought to be meeting for them? They're desperate for connection, belonging, popularity, a security, and they expect technology to do that for them. They look at the number of likes, they look at the number of comments. They look at how many views a video that they've posted has received. No, it's dangerous. And we can stop it in a realistic way so that they don't feel horrifically judged and unable to continue on in the life that they're leading.

Dr. James Dobson: Letting screen time run amok in your home can lead to depression. Many people don't know that those are connected and it sometimes is linked to suicide. That's a shocking thought we can begin with. You talked about that.

Dr. Kathy Koch: Absolutely. The brain development and the heart development, what I think has changed for a lot of children and teens, and even adults, if we're honest, is that our heart has been changed by the influence of technology. Again, patience is a fruit of the spirit. All of us should be able to be patient, but the click of the mouse, the GPS, the instant access to music, the binge-watching of shows, causes us to think about that we can create our perfect little bubble world. We don't have to deal with anything that's sad. We click out of games we might lose. That's how weak we are. And so kids are not ... They're able to escape the trauma, if you will, but they're going to a different kind of trauma.

Dr. James Dobson: Sure.

Dr. Kathy Koch: And it negatively influences, again, their relationships and their heart, and I think they're expectations for how the world is supposed to work. And then they don't know how to deal with disappointment. They fall into the device, the very thing that discourages them is where they turn to when they're discouraged. Frankly, Doc, we're letting that happen. I want to encourage parents and grandparents to walk toward their children and rescue them from that and take the devices away if we can, or when we can, and when we should, and interact face to face and change the culture in our home. We maybe can't do a whole lot about the culture out there, if you will, but we can do a whole lot in our home.

Ryan Dobson: Yeah. Dr. Kathy, can you talk about some of the recent studies that have come out showing how much more dangerous this is for the preteen and the teen girls when it comes to emotion? It seems to be so much more severe. I mean, I've got a little girl, she's nine. She's not involved in any of this at all. But I see other friends of hers that are. And I just think, "I can't let you be damaged by this."

Dr. Kathy Koch: Right. No, I so appreciate that, Ryan. Girls are gaming more than ever before, and not necessarily as violent and quick paced as the boys games, but still dangerous games that will influence their heart away from righteousness, away from other centeredness, to very self-centered, selfish, entitled kind of mentality. I hate to even name some of the platforms that they shouldn't be on because I don't want to even draw attention to them, where they can pretend to be who they're not. And we are created in the image of God to be who He's created us to be for His glory, and when we dismiss that and we deny that, and we pretend we're not. I was actually out in Burbank, California, I did a photo shoot. And I had people offer to Photoshop my pictures. And I said, "Do not do that. We have integrity at Celebrate Kids. Don't touch it. This is who I am. And if people don't like it, they can just get over it." So no, we've really got to stand strong, Ryan, and help our girls process grief.

So here's the thing, one of the lies that technology teaches them is that they can be happy all the time, because they pay attention to only the things they want to pay attention to. So they create this little world again, where they can be happy all the time, which means, Ryan, that these girls and guys are not learning to process difficult emotion. They're stuffing or running from grief and fear and

hate and disappointment, discouragement. We have got to do a better job of hugging our children when they're sad and letting them feel the sadness, rather than immediately running from that, and then helping them process. Were you a cause of it? Well, how did it happen? How can we pray it through? What are we going to do next to avoid it?

Dr. James Dobson: Just listening to you all talk about the need for parents to be involved at this point and to limit in some degree the obsession that we're talking about, but I can hear parents' words coming back. "How do I do that?" They're befuddled. Kids resist any effort to change that like crazy. And one youngster that you mentioned in your book said, "If you take away my cell phone, that's like cutting off my right arm." That's the way they feel about it and they don't want you telling them what to do with it. Give some advice to parents on how in the world they do that.

Dr. Kathy Koch: None of us here want to suggest that this is easy. We don't want to suggest that there won't be some type of a pushback. But you know what, we have to be willing to do what's right, even if there is pushback. We have to be willing for our children to be upset with us. We have to be the stronger authority here than the device that they're paying attention to. And we need to say no, and we need to say yes. And you'll notice that I'm using the word we. We need to say, "We need to make some changes here. We need to put our phones on silent during every meal. We need to stop using devices at 9:00 PM so that we sleep better. We need to have a silent car so that the conversation will happen, so no devices."

Now talk radio in the car, great talk radio, maybe that's okay, but nothing else. So I think, Dr. Dobson, one of the main things that we need to do is own our own part of the dilemma. Children tell me on a regular basis that they don't want to start a difficult conversation with their mom if she has her phone nearby because as soon as it rings, or bings, or buzzes, the children know that half of their mom's attention is now wondering, "Who was that? Is it okay that I didn't answer them immediately? Will they think that I don't love them anymore." And so we need to put our kids first, and we need to make some hard changes on our own. And when our kids see that we have sacrificed for them, and we've put them first, it's so much easier for them to walk with us because we're supposed to be the leaders.

Ryan Dobson: Yeah. We, as parents, escape into the screen as well. When I am feeling anxious, or sad, or depressed, and I pull up a game and I click a few things away and I erase a few blocks on a screen, I feel better. And it's taken my personal growth with a therapist to learn how to process my emotions better to get off my screen, that then allows me to be there for my kids when they want to process their emotions, when they want to talk. I have a greater capacity to speak to them, to communicate with them, to feel with them, to have empathy because I've done that personal growth work.

Dr. Kathy Koch: We all have our escape. I was raised with jigsaw puzzles, so I have a jigsaw puzzle app on my phone. And if I don't want to finish my book, it's very easy to do a jigsaw puzzle. And so we're all being human here. You know what's interesting, the personal computer was invented 40 years ago, and the World Wide Web, 28 years ago, and the iPhone, 14 years ago. So people who are 14 and older, 28 and older, 40 younger, we've all been affected by this. And our brain was more developed when we began to use technology, so it doesn't have the same addictive pull as it does on younger people. Young parents, let's just be honest, we're overwhelmed. These are difficult days, and it's very easy to question. Where is God in this? And yet, oh, He would be so glorified if we would turn to the Word in our time of need, and if we would silence our confusion through prayer by ourselves and certainly with a spouse and with our children. I think that those are some keys.

And let me add this before I kick it back to one of you. Dr. Dobson, I'd love to tell young parents, it's not your fault you bought your children a device. You don't need to be feeling guilty about this. It is what it is. No parent who gave a child access to a device expected them to become rebellious and self-centered and impatient and argumentative. And so what we need to do is though, own it. And we say to our children, "It's not your fault. It's not my fault. I'm not a mean mom. You're not a bad kid. But it is what it is. Give me back my phone." And if I've paid for it, it's my phone, so part of it is: How do we even give it to a child? It's on loan. Right? And you earn the right to use it, whether that be social media, texting, gaming.

Dr. James Dobson: So you actually tell the child when you hand a cell phone, we'll say, to him or her that "this is not a gift. You do not own it. I still own it. And if you misuse it, I'll have to take it back." You set it up in the beginning with those ground rules.

Dr. Kathy Koch: I believe so because if you're paying for it, it is yours. And I don't care if it's a free family plan. No, let the children know. And Dr. Dobson, I believe it's really important that the children understand that it's their character that earns them the right to use it. It's not chronological age. Actually, spiritual age trumps chronological age. That's one of the reasons chronological age, people will say, "When should my kids get a phone?" Well, when they need a phone. But they get a phone when their character suggests that they won't be warped by it.

Dr. James Dobson: That's right.

Dr. Kathy Koch: So if they're arguing and complaining and whining and throwing a hissy fit when you take it away because it's 9:00 PM, guess what, you just lost the right to use the phone tomorrow. "Well, it's my phone. No, it's my phone, and it's your heart, it's your character that will earn it back, so don't ask for it. Every time you ask for it back is actually a demerit, so just show me that you have softened your heart, that the aggression that we see after you game has dissipated, that the self-centeredness that we see when you're on social media goes away and you pay attention to your younger sister, and kindness shows up as the way that

you treat your mom. You show me that and maybe I'll consider giving you back my phone for a season."

Dr. James Dobson: Dr. Kathy, how can a parent know when how much is too much? How can they assess it's now time to step in?

Dr. Kathy Koch: I think isolation is something to be very alert to, if kids are choosing to be in their room a lot, or even in the same room with you, but their eyes are down on their device, that's dangerous. They're using the device to soothe. It's become their pacifier or their baby blanket, and it's where they go in a time of need, so watch for that. And then I think arguing is a huge red flag. Devices have taught all of us, myself included, that we can have what we want, when we want it, the way we want it. We can be happy all the time because we X out of games we might lose. So we tend to argue and debate with even our parents, who are supposed to be our authority. Mom is kind enough to serve Cheerios and we want waffles, or Dad is grilling steak and we want chicken, or we'd rather do our math, and we've been asked to do our English.

So if kids are pushing back and never quick to be agreeable, first time obedience, Dr. Dobson, is something you've talked about for your entire ministry, and kids are capable of that. So we have to watch for this disobedience, watch for the arguing. We need to call sin, sin. And we need to say, "We all need to take a break here."

Ryan Dobson: I fear some parents think the answer then is just take the phone away. My kid is arguing too much and they're isolating, and they're being difficult, and so the solution, I'll just take the phone away and they're going to behave themselves. I just have to take it away long enough.

Dr. Kathy Koch: Such a great comment.

Ryan Dobson: I don't think that's what you're saying. I've read the book. And I go out and speak to parents, and I hear from them, and they will say things like, "My daughter was totally disrespecting me, and I took her phone away for a week and she's still mad." And I'm like, "Yeah."

Dr. Kathy Koch: Because we have to train them in righteousness. If they've developed a bad habit, and it's partly because the brain and the heart are being transformed and wired by the tools we're letting them use, purposefully and for fun, then we need to be the parents. I swear I'm going to have a T-shirt someday that simply says, "Be the parent," where we train them in right from wrong. And Ryan, another thing I would say is that if parents have bought the lie from technology that they deserve to be happy all the time and they deserve choice, then when the kids argue, the parent argues back. And as soon as you argue back, you're saying to your kid, "You might have more authority here than I realize." No, no, no. We need to stop arguing. And we need to say the phrase that we teach at Celebrate Kids, I love you too much to argue with you.

- Ryan Dobson: That's my favorite.
- Dr. Kathy Koch: It's not good for your heart, or mine, or our relationship. "It is bedtime. But I'm not even tired. It is bedtime. Let me have my device. It's bedtime. We need to stand strong and, again, say no to the no things, and train them and teach them." And you know what, Ryan, one more thing. I wish parents would wait and go on devices when their kids are in bed. You can check a website for a football score. You can go to your banking website. You can do your own recipe research if you want when your children are in bed. But pay full attention to them when they are still awake. So what if we apologized and said, "I'm so sorry that I was unavailable to you. I would love to read that with you. I'd love to finish a checkers game. I'd love to do some research with you about where we could go for Valentine's Day"?
- Ryan Dobson: I think, and on top of that, I apologize because I let you get to this point. I bought the phone. I gave you the phone. I know you're on the phone. I know how long you're on the phone. It tells me every week how long an individual's been on the phone. It's super easy. And I let you get to this point. As a family, we're going to pull back. This is not necessarily your fault. I think that's a tough one for young kids. They feel like they're being blamed for something that was technologically designed to addict them and keep them hooked in. There's adults and psychologists working to trap your children in an algorithmic loop so that they never end it. We have to be the parent to step in and say, "This isn't your fault, but we are still the parent and we're going to step in."
- Dr. James Dobson: To address that need, would it be a good idea to set up the ground rules in advance, how much time, how it's going to be used, how it's not going to be used? For example, I think it's a good idea to tell a teenager when you probably already had the phone for many years, but when that occurs, to say, "We will not bring the cell phone to the dinner table, or when we're with family members, or when it's inappropriate." There's a right time and a wrong time to use it. Let's get that set up in advance.
- Dr. Kathy Koch: The phone has become the modern jackknife. My dad had a jackknife in his pocket all the time. Right? And it was his security thing. No, we can take that away, and I think it's essential, Dr. Dobson. You're exactly right, that kind of thing is really, really important.
- Dr. James Dobson: I've studied this thing. I know what you say. You said, "24% of adolescents report being constantly connected to the internet, and 50% feel addicted to their phones." The kids know it.
- Dr. Kathy Koch: Yeah. That's exactly right. And those percentages would be even higher today. It's a tragic reality.

- Dr. James Dobson: Children who are handed phones by parents sometimes want to keep them busy and happy, and they're being nurtured more by technology than by their own parents.
- Dr. Kathy Koch: It's absolutely true. And it really concerns me because of the habits that they're developing and the lack of connection, the lack of bonding, the lack of nurture that they're not getting from a mom and a dad. And I respect busy parents. I respect that there's much going on. I respect their own trauma, their own depressed, anxious state, potentially because of what's going on. And yet, I need to say with love, please prioritize your children. Please prioritize yourself and your wellbeing. And I love that Ryan has admitted to having been in therapy and recognizing that he's a healthier person, husband, and dad for it. We can all improve.
- Dr. James Dobson: You know, Ryan, every program we do goes by too fast. It's just amazing, when we're finished, we are not yet through talking. And that's why we often have to do another program to cover the subject. Boy, that is certainly true this time because this book, *Screens and Teens*, by Dr. Kathy Koch is chock-full, as I said at the beginning of the program, of good, useful, practical information for parents. And we're just going to say here and keep Dr. Koch here to talk about the other 80% of the book that we didn't have time to get to today. This has been a wonderful interchange. I've enjoyed it. I've learned from it. I hope our listeners have too. Be with us tomorrow.
- Roger Marsh: Eye-opening and convicting words from Dr. Kathy Koch here on today's edition of Family Talk. As Dr. Dobson said, please join us again tomorrow for the conclusion of this important conversation about Dr. Kathy's book called *Screens and Teens*. You know, it's not easy to admit this, but I am guilty of sometimes spending a little too much time on my own phone. That itch to check my notifications every few minutes, it's ever-present most days. And my wife, Lisa, is wonderful about reminding me when I'm spending too much time on my phone, and she and I will put our phones away whenever we can to spend time together at home, whether we have people visiting, whether that be family or friends. When that is the case, we keep our phones on the dock, as we like to say. That keeps them good and charged and it keeps us engaged with friends and family.
- The freedom of just spending time with loved ones, uninterrupted by texts and emails, is something that we guard with jealousy. After all, God created each of us as human beings to be together. We are at our best when we are truly known by those we trust and love. And I think the enemy has tried very hard over the past couple of years in particular to use technology that was designed to bring us closer together to actually isolate us, and even make us feel like we are more alone than we actually are. Dr. Dobson, Ryan Dobson, and Dr. Kathy Koch will discuss that a bit more on tomorrow's edition of Family Talk.
- Now if you'd like to learn more about Dr. Kathy Koch, her ministry called Celebrate Kids, and her book entitled *Screens and Teens*, give us a call. Put that



phone to good use. You can call us anytime, day or night, seven days a week at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. Or just visit our website at [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk). That's [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk). Well, that's all the time we have for today here on this edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. Be sure to join us again next time to hear the conclusion of Dr. Dobson's conversation with his son, Ryan Dobson, and their special guest, Dr. Kathy Koch. Until then, I'm Roger Marsh, thanking you for listening to Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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

Dr. James Dobson: This is James Dobson again. As we close today's program, I just want to thank so many of you out there who make this broadcast possible with your contributions. And I want to tell you how much your generosity is appreciated.