



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Let's Talk: Conversation Starters for Dads and Daughters

Guest(s): Dr. Michelle Watson Canfield

Air Date: December 1, 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: Well, hello everyone. I'm Roger Marsh, and today on Family Talk, we are kicking off our annual Best of Broadcast programming! Every day for the next few weeks, we'll be airing some of our most popular shows from 2021. You'll hear interviews featuring Dr. Jack Graham, Kim Meeder, Allie Beth Stuckey, and more! Now, if you miss any of these favorite interviews, or if you would like to have your own copy of them all, we've got you covered. Just visit drjamesdobson.org/bestof2021 to request your copy of our 2021 Best of Broadcast CD set. It includes 18 interviews in all, and it's yours for a suggested gift of \$50 in support of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.

Now, for our first 2021 best of broadcast, we're featuring a conversation with Dr. Tim Clinton and Dr. Michelle Watson Canfield. They discussed Michelle's latest book called, *Let's Talk: Conversation Starters for Dads and Daughters*. Dr. Michelle Watson Canfield is a licensed professional counselor, author, and speaker. As founder of The Abba Project, a program for dads of daughters ages 13 to 30, she equips fathers to connect with their daughters intentionally and consistently. She and her husband, Dr. Ken Canfield, are the co-chairs of the Father-Daughter Initiative at the National Center for Fathering. They make their home in Portland, Oregon. Sit back, relax and enjoy this popular broadcast, right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Michelle, thank you for joining us here on Family Talk.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Well, thanks for having me.

Dr. Tim Clinton: As we get started, interesting, your book, *Let's Talk: Conversation Starters for Dads and Daughters*. You open up with a story about a guy named Phil Knight. He was actually one of Nike's co-founders.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Tell us why that story attracted you?

Dr. Michelle Watson: Oh my goodness. Here's this man who is an icon. And to think that here's a man that says, "Here's everything about my life," but at the end of the book, he has this couple line powerful thing about regret. "If I had it to do all over again, it had to do with being a different kind of father." And I think we would be wise to listen to someone who is seasoned, who had all the money, if you will, that he could have anything at his fingertips. And yet he says, "At the end of my life, if I could do it over, I would be a different kind of father."

Dr. Tim Clinton: It's interesting, virtually every dad I talked to, when I get them alone, Michelle, I'll ask them how are you doing as a dad? You know what they'll say to me?

Dr. Michelle Watson: What?

Dr. Tim Clinton: I think about it all the time.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Yeah, there you go. That's a great question.

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

Dr. Michelle Watson: I love that we're starting with that. We're saying, "Dads, listen to Tim's question and ask themselves that."

Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, Michelle, you have given your life to fathers and daughters. You want to see something special happen there.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Tim Clinton: And I know that's the heart of this book, but take us into that calling, where did it come from for you?

Dr. Michelle Watson: It is a crazy calling and truth be told Tim, I would disqualify myself from this calling. As a woman ministering to men, what? That's crazy, right? I've had men sometimes say, "What are you doing telling us how to be a better father?" But then I've had others say, "Who better to know the ins and outs from, and to learn them, than from a woman?" So really, my heart is all about equipping dads to be the dad they want to be, and that their daughters need them to be.

But it all started in December of '09. I was reading in Luke 1, and I got to verse 17 where God says to John the Baptist's dad... So look at that, it's a father-son kind of interaction. He tells this man's dad, and he's not even yet born, "Your son is going to help turn the hearts of fathers," not the heads, but the hearts of fathers to their children.

And I just heard God whisper to my spirit, "Michelle, that's what I want you to do." I'm like, "What? Turn the hearts of... Me? No." I had mentored women from the time I was late teens, so this was a really crazy assignment. And two

days later, I was blow drying my hair and just heard the name, *The Abba Project*, Abba, meaning daddy in Aramaic. And men love a project, hence the name.

So, the next month, January of '10, I invited 11 dads whose daughters at the time were my counseling clients, in their teens or their twenties, and said, "Would you want to join me once a month for six months to see if there's a change in you, your daughter, or your relationship?" 10 of the 11 said, "We're in."

Dr. Tim Clinton: Wow.

Dr. Michelle Watson: And I have had so many people say, "Men do not add more to an already full plate," and yet there was a felt need. That's what I truly believe is that these men didn't know where to go to ask for directions.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Sure.

Dr. Michelle Watson: And I'm saying, "Come here," but here's the cool thing Tim, I had no curriculum, nothing. Every month, as God is my witness, He would download... I now call Him Abba. I never was one of those people, "Papa, Abba." Oh, now I'm all in, He's my dad. And He would tell me every month what the next month's theme would be, and I either wrote or collected from other people that I respect, and included their things in this curriculum. And I still use it to this day.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Men, dads get a pretty bad rap in modern day culture, especially when it comes to their families. They're seen as bad husbands, porn addicts, horrible fathers, disengaged. Yet the research shows over 90% of Americans believe that a father makes a unique contribution to his son and/or daughter. And yet, probably the greatest social ill of our day, and most people believe this, is the absence of Godly fathers. I'll say Godly, the absence of dad from the home. Michelle, are you finding that?

Dr. Michelle Watson: Absolutely. I believe that's why this whole ministry even started because I had mentored and counseled women for almost four decades at that point. And so, I heard their "heart hurts" from a dad absence or a void, or from wounds that a dad had caused. And so I truly believe that our country will be healthier from the ground up if we have healthier women.

And so often you can trace it back when you see a woman who I would say doesn't perhaps live with the healthiest boundaries, or lifestyle, or choices, to some broken down relationship with her dad. And so that's where it is, my goal is to really fly, I would say from my planet of Venus to your planet of Mars. I'm bilingual now. I speak Venusian and Martian, and I'm helping dads decode their daughters by giving them practical ideas. I just find men don't need more theory, they already know.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah, they want steps.

Dr. Michelle Watson: They need to step up.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Give me a plan.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Absolutely. Tell me what to do to fix it.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah, give me something I can do. Michelle, the heart of your work is to build a closer, well, certainly a better relationship between dad and daughter. You centered around conversations which by the way, men typically feel pretty uncomfortable with.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Take us there. Why?

Dr. Michelle Watson: Because I believe, and again, men they're listening. I'm over here as the dad whisperer, right? That's the name of my podcast because someone called me that, I didn't come up with that. And I want to give you ideas today dad, as Tim and I talk, that will help you hit it out of the ballpark as a dad, because the truth is your daughter didn't come with a playbook, but I'm going to help you write one, because every daughter is different.

And so, here's a truth that I want to tell you, that's really true for us as women. When we open our mouth, our heart opens. How many of you know, when she isn't talking, she isn't okay? The whole room does not feel okay.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah, mom is quiet, it's not good.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Yeah, that is not good. We could feel the chill. The wall is up...

Dr. Tim Clinton: That is so true.

Dr. Michelle Watson: But when our mouth opens, our heart opens, and when our heart is open, our dad's heart is open. So, it comes back to this whole idea of talking. How can a dad then facilitate a conversation with his daughter? Because here's the other thing about us as women, we figure things out by talking. So dad, imagine the power, if you could ask questions that would allow her to do two things, figure things out for herself, with your support and bond with you at the same time. That is win-win.

So, by having 60 scripts that I have in this book dad, on different themes, different topics, your daughter can even choose them. You don't have to reinvent the wheel. I'm setting you up to succeed by helping your daughter open her mouth with you as a safe witness to her story.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So it's going to take an investment of time.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And we're not talking about huge amounts of time, maybe 20, 30 minutes a day, where you could step into each other's life.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Yeah. And I really love the whole idea of a once a month minimum dad-daughter date, or whatever you want to call it. I've had some girls go, "That's gross. I date my dad." But where you go out one-on-one, you find a rhythm monthly, so when we have something to look forward to every month as a rhythm with our dad, and this is for single daughters and married daughters, and if you don't live around your daughter, you can do FaceTime. You can do any kind of remote connection...

Dr. Tim Clinton: I love that.

Dr. Michelle Watson: To make the bond between the two of you stronger through having conversations. And I even have sections in the book, topics that are about cleaning out wounded areas that you may not even know that you've caused. Say that you were to ask your daughter, "What words have I spoken to you that have stuck with you, that have made you feel better about yourself? And then what words have I spoken to you that have stuck with you that have made you feel worse about yourself?"

Dr. Tim Clinton: We're going to talk about some of those issues in just a moment. Michelle, what's the benefit? You've seen the benefits, what is research showing when this begins to happen between a dad and a daughter?

Dr. Michelle Watson: Every area of a daughter's life is better and strengthened and stronger when she feels connected to her dad. Now, did you get the words, feel connected?

Dr. Tim Clinton: Wow.

Dr. Michelle Watson: So, a dad oftentimes will say, "No, our connection is strong." But if you ask a daughter that question, dad, that would be a great one to ask your daughter, "How close on a scale of zero to 10, do you feel we are?" You might think, "Man, you're hitting an eight," and she may actually go, "I feel we're about a four." And then you could follow that up with, "What could I do to be a better dad to you?"

Because again, back to the research Tim, I love that you brought that up. Some of the specifics of every area is your daughter will get better grades in school. She's more likely to finish high school and attend college. She will have less body dissatisfaction and healthier weight, significantly less suicide attempts, greater self-esteem. She will delay sexual debut. Okay, come on. Do I hear an amen?

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah, I've read numerous times about a daughter's decision to engage in sexual activity is related to dad.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Yes. And we are not hearing that everywhere. That it's her bond with her dad that makes all the difference, affects every area of her life. Even another thing I love to say to men is that as a father, you build a bridge to God as a father. Now, again, just like I told you, I would disqualify myself from this assignment to speak into men's lives. I imagine many of you listening would disqualify yourself from a role as a dad to model God as a father, what a profound privilege.

And so, dads, at the end of the day, none of us feel qualified, but that's why we need the holy spirit to empower us. We need Jesus alongside us and we're under the father's wing and He'll do it so we don't take the glory.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Michelle, in your book you talk about the process of engaging with your daughter. You really want dad and daughter to participate kind of in a laugh, love, look, lament process.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Tim Clinton: And you also talk about the significance of active listening that dads need to understand that she needs to be heard. Take us down that road real quick?

Dr. Michelle Watson: Yes. So the truth is that oftentimes as women, we feel that we have to shout to be heard. There is so much noise. There are so many other voices. And when we know we're loved and heard, and paid attention to by our dad, it does something in the core of our being. There's something that happens because we as women internalize our dad's view of us.

So, dad, you are a mirror. Your daughter looks at her reflection in you. And when you show her, "I believe the truth of who she is, which the world does not tell her." It tells her a different message than the word of God, right? Like, "Give him what he wants." Or a lot of dads say, "I'm really uncomfortable with those topics. I'm just not going to go there. Mom can go there."

No dad, I've seen that men would often rather do nothing than do it wrong, but dad, doing nothing is doing it wrong. You've got to have these conversations. And that's why even in this book, I have conversation starters, Tim, that are going to get uncomfortable for men, but they're important and vital about sexual debut and sexual harassment, same sex attraction and cutting and vaping.

Some of the harder ones like that, but then we've got everything from fun lighthearted ones like what kind of wedding do you want one day? And what colors do you want. And what colors do you want, and what place? I once had a dad with his eighth grader say, "She wants to get married in a villa in France. I never knew that. Who do you think is going to pay for that?" But dad, you get to engage her on all kinds of topics and even ones that you might think, "Suicide. No, she doesn't deal with that." I guarantee she has a friend who has, so you can alter questions in ways that will fit your daughter's needs and wiring.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You're listening to Family Talk, a division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. Tim Clinton, your host. Our special in-studio guest, Dr. Michelle Watson Canfield, brand new book out called *Let's Talk: Conversation Starters for Dads and Daughters*. Michelle, I want to get down to that practical stuff, because this is such a gift to dads and daughters by the way. You get real practical. You talk about dates and you talk about messaging that you want to make sure there's a message that you want her to get from dad. And then you begin to take on and dads through how to have tough conversations, important conversations, loving conversations, the whole bit.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Right. It's all of that the whole bit, but like you said, it's everything from affirming your daughter. I have found so many dads in the groups that I coach and lead, that these men oftentimes back to them doing nothing rather than do it wrong, don't even know that the soil of their daughter's heart will soften because seeds that you plant into her heart space that say, "You are worthy. You are beautiful. You are valuable. You are worth waiting for."

In fact, one dad I talk with, he said that the day before we'd had a conversation, his 16-year-old daughter said to him, "Dad, my friends just told me that I intimidate guys. And they say, it's bad. Do you think I do?" And he said, "Yes, you do. And it's awesome. Keep it up."

Dr. Tim Clinton: I love that.

Dr. Michelle Watson: She was like, "Really?" One word from dad can make all the difference in how a daughter stands up, stands alone, stands apart. And we need a nation of women that know who they are and whose they are. And dad, you are a key part of that process.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Michelle, I want to identify a challenge I think for a lot of men. I think they would agree with me on this, that loving our daughters up to puberty is pretty easy. We can hold them, hug on them, kiss on them. But something happens there that makes it a little more cumbersome or difficult. What's happening?

Dr. Michelle Watson: Obviously, because this has come up, as you can imagine.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You have those conversations with mom or whatever.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Right.

Dr. Tim Clinton: And there are mom conversations that have to take place, but dad kind of shifts.

Dr. Michelle Watson: I would agree. I've had conversations with dads in *The Abba Project* and with daughters as well. I've talked on both sides of this issue. And what dads have often told me is they start feeling uncomfortable as their daughters are developing...

Dr. Tim Clinton: Sure.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Because they don't want to touch them in the wrong spot.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Right.

Dr. Michelle Watson: And then I've asked daughters, what have you noticed? And I've even sat side by side, getting a pedicure with a woman that opens up all about that issue of, "I know exactly the day my dad stopped hugging me." And years later, right before he died, we talked about it and he said, "It was because I thought I would be touching you in the wrong place." But she internalized that rejection as, "Something is undesirable about me, you don't want to get close to me anymore."

Dr. Tim Clinton: He didn't mean that at all.

Dr. Michelle Watson: He didn't mean that at all. He thought he was being respectful, but she internalized that as, "My body is gross now. You don't like me anymore." So dads, you've got to press through that discomfort. And I'm going to say one more thing Tim, may make some men uncomfortable, but dad, you are a covering over your daughter's life, and if you are looking at pornography, it has to stop now.

I call that holes in the covering, and what happens is when you are looking at things like that, that is going to affect how you relate to your daughter, because you're going pull up images that you've seen, that will transpose themselves over your budding daughter. That might not be something every dad wants to hear, but I'm saying do this for the sake of your daughter.

I believe something happens in the spiritual atmosphere of a home when a father is engaging in that kind of activity. And I know that men oftentimes... I actually speak at a lot of men's conferences now, kind of pre-COVID...

Dr. Tim Clinton: Of course.

Dr. Michelle Watson: The bulk of them, of the workshops around pornography. I've had some men go, "Okay, enough with this already. It's every year." But yet I would say to those listening, this is not intended to shame you, but to inspire you to say even though I am either filling a void in my own life or numbing something through that action, let your love for your daughter change this inside of you. Love her more than loving that activity.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Interesting. In your book, in your *Conversations for Dads and Daughters*, what you're doing is you're helping a dad have that conversation with his daughter.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So you're helping with the questions and helping with the response so that there's something beautiful that's taking place there.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Exactly, and dad, sometimes that whole face-to-face orientation is a bit uncomfortable for you, that looking at someone's eyes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Well, a lot of men struggle with relationships, period.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Right, exactly. And so the research says shoulder to shoulder orientation is a lot more comfortable for men. So here you are at a table looking across from her, dad can feel really uncomfortable. But if you can look down at a book in between, or even write out the answers of what she's telling you, that's what I mean about writing the playbook.

Your daughter will feel heard, she will feel listened to. Again, she will internalize the truth that she is worthy of being listened to because she has something valuable to say. So, dad, I start with "lead her to laugh" because neuroscientists confirm that when we laugh together, our brain releases chemicals.

Dr. Tim Clinton: So you're starting at lead her to laugh.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Yes, lead her to laugh, dad.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Get started.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Sometimes daughters go, "All my dad does is just put rules in place and the disciplinarian, wait till your dad gets home." Dad, bring some laughter back, put funny music on. You can just Google like funny videos and watch them with her online. You will laugh together and bond because your brain releases chemicals that strengthen bonding and long-term relationships. How's that for win-win?

So that's the first section. Next one is "lead her to love." You're leading your daughter to love herself more, so that out of a full love tank, she's able to love the people around her with more, I would say efficiency. And so that is another key section.

Next one is, "lead her to look." And this is where it's looking deeper. It's getting under the surface at some of the harder areas. And dad, if you don't weigh in with her on some of these subjects, then every other voice will be heard and will be, I would say the most important to her and she won't know what you think, but then the next one is "lead her to lament." And actually, my husband, Ken Canfield, just newly married for a year.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Whom we love and appreciate here at Family Talk.

Dr. Michelle Watson: And he said he believes this lament section is the most important of the whole book. He said, "Really, you could have called this Let's Talk and Listen. It's all

about a dad learning to listen better and listen well, and then even ask, "Would you be okay if I gave input right now?" Because she may say, "No, I've had enough talking. That's too much emotion. Let's go play or whatever."

But this lament section Tim, is all about a dad hearing about her heart hurts, that maybe you've caused or others have caused, but imagine the power of a dad cleaning out a wounded area that he may not even remember, from third grade, where she's still playing and replaying a message.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Holding it in her heart.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Come on, there you go. And she doesn't even know how to tell him, and he doesn't know to ask her. And I've even asked dads in *The Abba Project*, "How many of you are married to a woman or were married to a woman who still has daddy issues?"

Dr. Tim Clinton: Yeah. We call it father thirst or father hunger.

Dr. Michelle Watson: There you of.

Dr. Tim Clinton: That brokenness, because of my relationship with my dad.

Dr. Michelle Watson: There you go. Every hand goes up when I ask that.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Interesting that you're bringing that up Michelle, because I put in my notes here, the hurt, the mental health. Oh, by the way, yes, sex, the sexting craze that's out there. All those issues are addressed in here. These are meaningful conversations and the good stuff too. How do we love each other better?

Dr. Michelle Watson: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: How do we make sure that you know, without a shadow of a doubt, that your dad loves you?

Dr. Michelle Watson: Absolutely. Absolutely. And then what I love in this book, and I don't say this to exalt myself, but to say, "Dad, I'm in the background cheering you on, whispering going, "Ask her this question this way," And I think you're going to get a different answer. And if she doesn't like it, just blame me, just roll me under the bus. I'm your fall guy. You can't do it wrong, and I know you want to get it right.

And then the last section, I flipped the script, and it's "lead her to listen." Because again, we live in a culture where we're doing so much technologically, instead of face-to-face.

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

Dr. Michelle Watson: And so, your daughter then gets to ask you questions about your life, dad, and get to know you better like "What mistakes have you made? What have you had to learn the hard way? What do you wish someone would have told you that you never knew?" Questions that I believe open up a different kind of conversation to bond the two of you.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Michelle, I love that verse in Scripture, that prophetic verse, Malachi 4:6. It says, "And He will, and God will one day turn the hearts of the fathers toward their children, and the hearts of the children toward their fathers." And Michelle, imagine what would happen? Maybe as a result of this broadcast, if one dad-daughter relationship changed...

Dr. Michelle Watson: You're bringing tears to my eyes on that one.

Dr. Tim Clinton: How beautiful is that?

Dr. Michelle Watson: That's what we want, don't we?

Dr. Tim Clinton: And that's the cry of the heart.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You know that God made us to love and be loved.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Yeah.

Dr. Tim Clinton: We get that piece right, we're blessed. We get it wrong, we live in great sorrow.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: You know that?

Dr. Michelle Watson: Yes.

Dr. Tim Clinton: But it's the desire of the Lord to bring that to fruition. We're so honored to have you. I know Dr. Dobson loves you and your husband, Ken, and the ministry you guys have. And on behalf of our team here, Dr. Dobson, his wife Shirley, their family, our entire Family Talk team, we salute you and thank you, and pray God's added blessings on the great ministry he's called you to. Congrats on your new book too, by the way.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Thanks Tim.

Dr. Tim Clinton: Thank you for joining us.

Dr. Michelle Watson: Oh, my pleasure.

Roger Marsh:

For additional information on any of our broadcast guests this month, go to drjamesdobson.org/broadcast. And, to request your copy of our 2021 Best of Broadcast CD set, visit drjamesdobson.org/bestof2021. Again, that's drjamesdobson.org/bestof2021.

And now before we leave the air today, a special announcement. All throughout the month of December, thanks to the generosity of some special friends of our ministry, we have a matching grant. This means that right now, your gift of any amount to the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute will be doubled. To donate, just go to drjamesdobson.org. That's D-R James Dobson dot O-R-G or give us a call. You can make a donation over the phone when you call (877) 732-6825. That's (877) 732-6825.

Thanks again for listening to Family Talk today. I'm Roger Marsh, inviting you to join us again next time for another program from Family Talk's 2021 Best of Broadcast collection. It's coming your way next time right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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