



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: The Three R's of Parenting – part 2

Guest(s): John Rosemond

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Dr. Dobson: Hello, everyone. You're listening to Family Talk, a radio broadcasting ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. James Dobson. And thank you for joining us for this program.

Roger Marsh: Welcome to another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. On today's program, Dr. Dobson will continue his conversation with John Rosemond about imparting godly character to your kids. In this second half of the interview, the two will examine how to develop responsibility and resourcefulness in your kids. Let's listen now to part two of the three R's of parenting, building character in your kids right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Dr. Dobson: John, in that conversation yesterday, we focused primarily on the issue of respect, which is a cornerstone of parent-child relationships. In fact, I've written 18 to 20 books now, and the word respect probably underlies everyone of them, one way or another, whether it's on marriage or relationships with people outside the family, and certainly on the issue of child-rearing. But we talked about that last time. Let's go onto the other two that you have discussed in your book, A Family of Value, and the second one is responsibility. Explain how you mean that and how in the world we teach that.

John Rosemond: Well, there are actually two aspects to that. When I use the term responsibility, I'm using the term in the sense of teaching children to accept responsibility for their own behavior. And I'm also using the term to refer to teaching children to accept instruction and assignment from adults, who are legitimate authority.

Dr. Dobson: Teach them to work.

John Rosemond: Teach them to work, yeah. So, there's two components to that. And the way you teach the first is you understand that when a child misbehaves, he is not going to give, when confronted, in all likelihood, the young child especially, a valid explanation of why he misbehaved. And in this regard, I oftentimes refer to Genesis 3 and I point out to parents and I believe that's Western civilization's first parenting book, and the only one we really probably ever need.

John Rosemond: But in this very interesting parenting story, the parent comes to the first child who has misbehaved. This parent knows the child has misbehaved. The child knows he's misbehaved. He says, "What have you done? Explain yourself." And instead of saying, "Father, please forgive me. I got carried away. Just the circumstances caused me to lose sight of the big picture and I did the wrong thing. I throw myself on your forgiveness." This child does what human beings do, and that is, he points the finger at somebody else and says, "It wasn't me. It was her."

Dr. Dobson: Woman now gave us.

John Rosemond: Right. Well, the story doesn't end there either, the father then goes to the woman and says, "Well, you explain yourself." And she does the same thing, it wasn't her, it was the serpent. And I tell people, this is a story of children and parents, that when you say to a child, "What have you done?" You can't expect a completely reliable answer. And you mustn't get led down that primrose path by the child's explanation.

John Rosemond: You have to let this child know you know what the right explanation is. You are going to pay basically no attention to his protests and rationalizations and defenses. And you are going to deliver a consequence in his direction. And that is what I believe, over time, firmly done, gently done, lovingly done, as you said yesterday, Jim, afterwards, put your arm around the child and reassure and instruct more than anything else.

Dr. Dobson: Okay. Where does that start, John? Let's suppose you got a three-year-old and he's been playing with all this plastic stuff, all these little toys, all these pieces of puzzles and everything. And there's this mess on the floor. Is it appropriate? Is it right to ask a three-year-old to pick that stuff up and put it back in the box?

John Rosemond: Absolutely. We, my wife and I, tell our three-year-old grandson to pick up his toys when he's done with them.

Dr. Dobson: And he says, "No."

John Rosemond: Well, he doesn't say, "No," because when he has said, "No," our responses just simply been, "Yes, it's the rule. That's the way things are done in Nami and Bobo's house." That's what our names are.

Dr. Dobson: May I call you Bobo?

John Rosemond: Sure. You may, Jim. I've been called Bobo all my life. "But in Nami and Bobo's house, that's the way things are done." And we just turn around and walk out of the room. And one of the things I tell parents in this regard, if you want children to do something, don't stand there. Just give the instruction, walk away. Because, as grandma said, "A watched pot never boils."

John Rosemond: But if the child, if you come back in five minutes, and the child hasn't picked up the toys, what I think is reasonable to do is to either, if you've got the time, just say, "Well, you have to stay in this room until the toys are all picked up." If you don't have the time to pick up all the toys, then say, "Now, the next time you come over, you're not going to be able to play with these toys."

John Rosemond: And inevitably, the next time our grandchild comes over under those circumstances, he's going to say, "Where are the blocks?" And we're going to remind him, "You didn't pick up the blocks last time, you can't play with them today." At which point he's going to do the human being thing and say, "I promise to pick them up." At which point a lot of parents would say, "All right, I'll give them to you then." Not me and Willie. We've learned our lessons the hard way. Yeah.

Dr. Dobson: So, you hold them accountable.

John Rosemond: Absolutely.

Dr. Dobson: This conversation reminds me of when my daughter was three years of age, I was building a fence in the backyard, Shirley was gone and Danae was out there in the grass behind me. And there was a can of nails there that I was working with and I knew Danae was going to pour those out. I could have taken that can and removed it, but I didn't think I ought to do that. And so, she's playing with this can of nails and I said, "Don't dump them out or you have to pick them up?" But she did. She turned it upside down. It went into the grass.

Dr. Dobson: And then I said, "Well, you'll have to pick them up." And she did not want to do that. And she said, "No." And she just not only said no, but I mean, she was passionate about it. She was not going to pick up those nails. So, I just took her in the house and I pulled a chair up next to the window where she could watch me. And I said, "Now, just sit here in this chair and watch me work on the fence. And if you decide you want to pick up the nails, you can come back and do that. But until then, you can sit and watch me."

Dr. Dobson: And she cried a while and then she called to me and said, "I want to pick up the nails," and she came and picked them up. There wasn't any great amount of anger between me and her, there's no reason to get angry. She's a child. She was irresponsible. She was young. And so, I was trying to teach her something, not get mad at her. But she learned as a result of that, that when I said, "You're going to have to clean up the mess that you make that I meant it." And I think it was a good lesson. Now, there were others I won't tell you about where I didn't handle quite so well. But I'm telling you that one.

John Rosemond: We only tell the good stories.

Dr. Dobson: That's right.

John Rosemond: But yeah, and that stands, I think, in contrast with a lot of parents today who have accumulated, voluntarily, too many pressures in their lives and they come up against a parenting pressure of that sort and they just throw their arms up and they act exasperated and their response is basically, "What am I going to do with you?"

John Rosemond: And the child learns absolutely nothing. I keep telling parents, "This thing is an investment, and the final analysis, it's an investment of your time. The time that you invest is going to pay off." You invest, as you did, Jim, with your daughter, the 15 minutes to half an hour that it took to convince her that this was-

Dr. Dobson: Yeah, I could've picked up those nails myself in two minutes.

John Rosemond: Exactly. And see, that is what I call lazy parenting. The parents bends down and does the work, that's lazy parenting. They don't see it that way, but I see it that way.

Dr. Dobson: What do you mean by the term lowering the boom?

John Rosemond: Well, lowering the boom, I think people misunderstand that or are apt to, so I'm very careful to explain it when I use it.

Dr. Dobson: That goes along with intimidation, which we talked about last time.

John Rosemond: Yeah. It goes back to something I heard as a child. And that was, "Well, I guess it's time for me to lower the boom on you." And it didn't mean that I was going to get hurt, didn't mean I was going to get a spanking. It just meant that my parents were fed up with some particular behavior that I'd been exhibiting. And they had tried several means of dealing with this. None of those means had worked. And so, they were going to give me a big message. And lowering the boom might be, when I was 16 years old, taking my driving privileges away for three months, lowering-

Dr. Dobson: That's lowering the boom.

John Rosemond: ... that's lowering the boom. And lowering the boom might've been, when I was eight years old, sending me to my room for a week to contemplate something that I had done. And during that time, I'd go to school and I'd go to every family function. But when we were home, I was in my room and I was awaiting an early bedtime. And it's these things, I'm convinced, they establish a permanent trace memory in the child's mind. And that's what parents need to do with discipline. Not each and every time.

John Rosemond: But the problem with so much discipline today is that the discipline isn't memorable from the child's point of view. And I keep saying to parents in one regard is timeout, being seated in a chair for calling your parent some vile name, seated in a chair for three minutes for this, that is not going-

Dr. Dobson: It's a non-event.

John Rosemond: Right. It's a non event. What you have to do is come up with an event that this child remembers three months from now. My children still remember some of that stuff.

Dr. Dobson: You talk in that context about the agony principle. There's another one that you need to explain.

John Rosemond: The agony principle, which says that parents shouldn't agonize over anything their children are doing or failing to do if their children are perfectly capable of agonizing over those things themselves. And I formulated that, which it's not new, it's just a variation on a very old idea. I formulated that when I began to see that parents, their children would misbehave and the parent would get into a state of agony and frustration and throw their arms up and start to cry. And I would tell these parents, "Your child is not going to stop doing that, whatever that is, as long as you get upset about it. Your child is going to stop doing that when he gets upset about it. And your job, as a parent, is to make sure that each and every time he does something along those lines, that he gets upset about it."

Dr. Dobson: Yeah. That's why anger is the poorest motivator of children. They don't care if you get mad. No.

John Rosemond: They don't care.

Dr. Dobson: In fact, it's kind of fun to get this big, powerful adult all torn up over something. And so, the anger only signals that you're closer to taking some kind of action. Other than that, it's meaningless to the child.

John Rosemond: That's right. I use the term now, I tell parents, "Don't lose your temper, but it's legitimate to use your temper to elevate your voice slightly, to emphasize a point, to look this child straight in the eye with a very serious look on your face to let this child know you're angry, but you're in total control." I think that's very effective.

Dr. Dobson: Go back to the grandma illustration. We started talking about that last time. What did grandma know about teaching responsibility that today's mothers have forgotten or never knew?

John Rosemond: I think grandma had the long view, Jim, of child-rearing. She understood that her child-rearing, the focus of it, was to raise a child who would ultimately be a good citizen. And she understood that there is no such thing as good citizenship without responsibility. And so, her goal was to use, again, the classroom of her family to teach this child the service ethic, the work ethic.

John Rosemond: One of the things that people ask me, they say, "Well, you talk about not paying these children for jobs. You don't think they should be paid?" I say, "Absolutely not. I don't get paid for mowing the lawn. I don't get paid for painting the living room. These are family obligations." And to me, the minute you pay a child for a chore done in the family, you eradicate just a little bit more that child's ability to understand the service ethic.

Dr. Dobson: I agree with that. I think my take on it is a little different, that there are responsibilities that a child carries within the family because he's a member of the family. But there are occasions when you ask him to carry more than that responsibility, like spending all day Saturday cleaning the garage or things that you would not ordinarily ask him to do. And I don't find it harmful to motivate him and to teach him how work works in the culture, where there is a return for effort, which he's going to have to learn at some point. So, it's a matter of where that line is between the two.

John Rosemond: Right. And I talk about that in A Family of Value. There's a question asked of me toward the end of the book. And I say, "Well, if it's extraordinary, Eric would help me chop wood all day. I'd pay him for that. I'm not going to pay him minimum wage. But I'll pay him for that. Amy helps her mother do spring cleaning. She'll get paid for that." But the day-to-day sorts of things, those are family duties.

Dr. Dobson: Carrying out the trash and so on.

John Rosemond: That's right.

Dr. Dobson: Talk about homework, John, you got a child who's fully capable of doing what is expected by the school and he or she simply ain't going to do it. That means they're not going to do it. You talk about the agony principle or the lowering the boom. How does that link in here to a youngster who will not do academic work?

John Rosemond: Well, one of the things that I find along those lines that I've written another book called Ending the Homework Hassle, in which I summarize 10 years of work that I'd been doing with children and families within which there were children who were exhibiting those kinds of problems. One of the things that I discovered was that, in almost every one of these circumstances, the child's parents were doing what they thought was the right thing, but it was in fact totally counterproductive. And that is, they were sitting down with the child at the kitchen table every evening, pushing and prodding the homework process through to completion. And the child, the whole time, was resisting all the parents' efforts. And the parent, by the end of the evening, 9:30, 10:00 would be ready for a straight jacket.

John Rosemond: I began telling these parents to manage homework the same way my parents managed it. Like I've said to people, "I never had an original idea. It's all just

brought back from the past." But my parents, and I talk to people who are my contemporaries, and they tell me, "Yeah, this is the way it was done in my family. You were to do your homework in your room." Your parents didn't really ask you if you had homework, you came home from school, you were just expected to do it. And if at bedtime you suddenly said, "Oh, I forgot to do my homework." The answer was generally speaking, "Yeah, it's too bad. Wake yourself up at 5:30 in the morning and if you can do that, you can do your homework then, but it's time for bed."

John Rosemond: In other words, extract the parent from that situation and put the child pretty much on his own, which causes the parent, unfortunately, to fear that the child is going to get failing grades, which is in fact, going to occur for a period of time. One of the things that I become aware of with children is that very few children want to fail. If they see that the track that they're on and the choices that they are making is going to result in failure, nine out of 10 children will pull themselves up by the bootstraps and do what they need to do to get on a different track.

John Rosemond: And I found that confirmed time and time again in my work with families. And again, it's nothing more than just the agony principle. Here's a parent sitting at the table, agonizing over whether the homework gets done. Stop that, let the child agonize over it.

Dr. Dobson: But you don't let him sit and watch television instead of-

John Rosemond: No.

Dr. Dobson: ... doing that. Let's talk about that third R, John, of resourcefulness and that does link into television. You feel that today's generation of young people is not as able to think for themselves and find creative things to do as previous generations were.

John Rosemond: And take on challenge. America was built by very resourceful people. People who came here with nothing and using the resources of the land built the strongest nation there's ever been. And resourcefulness to me is the ability to do a lot with relatively little, which is what our forefathers and our foremothers did.

Dr. Dobson: Has television cut into that resourcefulness?

John Rosemond: Tremendously, tremendously. You can't encourage that kind of passivity by letting a child watch two or three hours of television a day and possibly be helping that child bring forth the best in himself, nor can you help a child bring forth the best in himself by giving him a lot of toys. One of the things that I'm aware of is that people our age, our generation, Jim, when we were five years old, most people will say they had five store-bought toys or less, maybe a couple

more. Today's five-year-old child has been given, according to statistics, 250 store-bought toys.

Dr. Dobson: Unbelievable.

John Rosemond: Yeah.

Dr. Dobson: When I was five years old, the war was just starting. I was born in 1936. And so, you couldn't buy a little car or anything made out of metal. And there were very few toys. And when we did get one, we cherished it.

John Rosemond: Absolutely.

Dr. Dobson: Or we made them.

John Rosemond: Which is why today's children don't take care of their toys. They get entirely too many. When our children were nine and six, we had them pick out 10 toys a piece, gave every other toy away to a Christian charity that distributes toys to children in the Western mountains in North Carolina called Cornerstone Christian Ministry. And basically told our children, "You will never have more than 10 toys again, you may get a new toy, but to keep it after a week, you have to give a toy away." And so, we kept it at 10 toys from that period in time. And it was amazing. The level of sibling conflict was the first thing that I noticed, it dropped dramatically. And one of the conclusions that I've subsequently made is that a lot of the sibling conflict has to do with the fact that we're teaching our children, unwittingly, to be greedy, to be jealous of anything any other sibling gets that they don't get.

Dr. Dobson: How in the world do you control all the others who give mountains of materialistic things to your kids? You talked earlier about grandma. Grandma is sometimes guilty of this.

John Rosemond: Oh yeah.

Dr. Dobson: Grandma and grandpa love to give things.

John Rosemond: Primary perpetrator along those lines quite often.

Dr. Dobson: And they go to birthday parties and eight kids bring an expensive gift. That bothers me. It always bothered me. Christmas time was always a time when I felt guilty, because I gave too much to my kids. That was a mistake I made, Shirley made. We had a hard time controlling that one.

John Rosemond: Yeah, well, Willie and I made it early on. What I would say there is, encourage the grandparents to keep the toys at their house, so they're going to the grandparents house was a really special occasion. This is what Willie and I do.

We give very few things to the grandchildren, other than things that are stored in our home.

John Rosemond: The second thing is that we told our kids, "If you get gifts from other people on birthdays and special occasions that you may play with them for a week and any gift you decide to keep, you have to give one away. And so, you're limited to 10 toys forever." But now we did tell the grandparents and other relatives that that proscription didn't include art supplies or musical things, or books, or things of that sort, even hobby supplies. And both our children got into hobbies. And so I think that there's a way of managing that, that is probably not going to suit grandma to a tee, but is going to be felt by her to be at least something she can go along with.

Dr. Dobson: Give us a general overview, just a one statement overview of your approach to child-rearing. What matters most?

John Rosemond: My approach to child-rearing emphasizes and a focus on character development. I think we've been, this generation of parents has been misled into focusing too much on what I call the secular aspects of child-rearing, which are boosting your child's IQ and producing a Mozart by age five or a future soccer champion by age seven. What we need to be doing once again is using the workshop of the family to produce the kind of citizens that America will need 20 years from now and ongoing to remain the strongest nation on the face of the Earth.

Dr. Dobson: John, I knew I would love talking to you. We've waited too long to get together. Let's do it again.

John Rosemond: I'd love to.

Dr. Dobson: The book we're talking about is A Family of Value, and this is good, practical, common sense stuff.

John Rosemond: Thank you, Jim.

Dr. Dobson: Appreciate you coming all the way to Colorado Springs from North Carolina?

John Rosemond: Gastonia, North Carolina.

Dr. Dobson: Gastonia.

John Rosemond: Right next to Charlotte.

Dr. Dobson: I was there in 1974.

John Rosemond: That's right. First Baptist Church.

Dr. Dobson: You know that?

John Rosemond: Yes, I knew that.

Dr. Dobson: You knew that.

John Rosemond: I was in that audience.

Dr. Dobson: Oh, come on.

John Rosemond: No, I was there.

Dr. Dobson: You got to be serious.

John Rosemond: No, I was there, First Baptist Church, 1974.

Dr. Dobson: That blows me away.

John Rosemond: Absolutely.

Dr. Dobson: That was a fun time that weekend. Did you come up and say hello?

John Rosemond: I don't think that you and I met on that occasion.

Dr. Dobson: Thanks a whole lot. All this time I've been saying, "John didn't come say hello to me." It is good to have you here and we do need to do it again.

John Rosemond: We certainly do, Jim, and I look forward to it. Thank you.

Roger Marsh: You've been listening to nationally syndicated columnist and education expert, John Rosemond, on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. If you weren't able to hear the first part of this informative interview, be sure to go to our website, drjamesdobson.org, and listen to that or any of our other past broadcasts.

Roger Marsh: Here at Family Talk, we care about you and your family, and we want to provide you with materials that can support you in marriage and in parenting. We're making a great resource available for you today, Dr. Dobson's book, *Your Legacy*. In it, Dr. Dobson stresses the importance of teaching the next generation about Christ by living out our devotion to him in both word and action. Dr. Dobson said about his book, "I've written many books in the past 40 years, but *Your Legacy* is, I believe, the most significant. It provides the punctuation for all that has gone before."

Roger Marsh: For information on how to receive your copy of *Your Legacy*, simply go to our resource page at drjamesdobson.org. Thanks for listening today and be sure to

join us again tomorrow for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.
I'm Roger Marsh.

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