



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: How Parents Can Resolve Conflict and Find Peace with Their Adult Children – Part 1

Guest(s): Dr. Kathy Koch

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Roger Marsh: Well, welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. Now, as parents, we know that our relationships with our kids are going to go through a lot of different seasonal changes, but they're really going to shift a lot when they get older. We go from the authoritative figure when they're younger, we guide them through childhood and adolescence into a more supportive role as they reach adulthood and have a balanced, loving relationship with us and our kids. I know for me with my three children as they all got married and started moving into their advanced degrees and their careers, it really has moved into kind of a partnership and even kind of a coaching type of relationship and consulting, if you will, not so much just the "dad said it, so I have to do it." But sometimes though, and we're seeing this happen more often, the relationship between moms and dads and their adult children, those relationships are not harmonious.

Sometimes they're downright contentious. You might even be listening to this broadcast right now and saying, "Yeah, that's me." So the question is, what should parents do if you find yourself in a scenario like that? Well, our guest today here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk has released a brand-new book that's going to tackle this subject and her name is very familiar to Family Talk Listeners. Dr. Kathy Koch is a renowned speaker, author, researcher, podcast host and the founder of Celebrate Kids Inc., whose life's work is shaped by strong family relationships, wise adult mentors, intentional encouragement and a deep confidence in God's design. Dr. Kathy is the author of numerous books, including *Screens and Teens*, *8 Great Smarts* and *Resilient Kids*. Her newest title is *Resolve Conflict and Find Peace and Hope with Your Adult Children*. And the title really does hit it all and that's going to be the topic of our conversation.

Dr. Kathy Koch, welcome back today to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. Dr. Dobson loved having you on the program so much and this is our first conversation since he went home to be with the Lord. But I know that if he were still with us here, he would say, "Okay, Roger, this is mine. I want to talk to Dr. Kathy about this topic." Welcome back to the program.

Dr. Kathy Koch: Well, that is so kind of you to say. I so respected him, good heavens, and it's an honor to be back with you, looking forward to our conversation.

Roger Marsh: Well, especially about a topic and Dr. Kathy, you have taken the tiger by the tail here. I mean, this is a book that is focused on conflict resolution between parents and adult children. And I wonder, I mean, having worked with kids for so many years, why now to dive into a subject like this and to say, "I think we can find some common ground. We can even find some solutions to this subject."

Dr. Kathy Koch: Yeah, I appreciate that question. My audience has grown up. I've been a published author for almost 20 years, which is just remarkable. I just never even thought I would write one book, much less nine. So the people who have been following me for years at events or through my publishing efforts are grown up and they've come to me with questions and then wherever I go, no matter what I speak on to whichever audience I speak to, I'm getting questions about adult children. I also know from talking with other media personalities that it's a common question that they're getting at their ministries or their programs. So it's a rampant issue. And you know what, Roger? I grew up with a phenomenal multi-generational family. I have one brother, we were best friends. We grew up kitty cornered from my mom's parents. My dad cut a hole in the fence and we could walk in between our house and my grandparents' house.

Roger Marsh: Wow.

Dr. Kathy Koch: Just very simply, grew up three blocks from my dad's parents, grew up two blocks from aunt and uncle and cousins and a mile from my other aunt, uncle and cousins, went to school with cousins, went to church with cousins, had lunch every Sunday with grandparents. And so I know the richness of the family. I know how adult parents can or adult children can be blessed still by their parents because I was and I know how the grandparents can be influential in the family as well. So I didn't want to write the book. It was a hard book to write because you can't go back and parent over. And yet I was called, I had enough confirmation that yes, Kathy, I challenged the topic. So here we are. Glad to be with you today. And only ask the easy questions though, Roger.

Roger Marsh: Right. Okay. Well, of course, this is a simple topic, so I'll just keep it to the "easy questions here." Let's start. First and foremost, I mean, there are maybe adult children who are listening and saying, "Yeah, I had to use the cutoff word here with my parents and I'm not so sure how we're going to reconcile this, but let's go to the parents first. When you go on the road to speak, Dr. Kathy, what is the most common thing that you're hearing from parents about this topic right now?"

Dr. Kathy Koch: Definitely concerns about the prodigal child who's walking away from faith. That's obviously huge. And in addition to that, just walking away from family values. I don't understand why my kids don't seem to care about me or their family or their siblings or we raised them to be pro-life and they're not. So just

general lack of values continuing on I think would be huge. Parents who miss their adult children just emotionally are missing them, hadn't thought through what would happen if they got married or moved across town and they just used to know about all the intimate details and used to be involved in them and now they're not. So there's a sadness. They're grieving. There's a whole chapter on grief as you know, because we can get better at that. So those would be some of the general things. Anger, anger at maybe the culture that has persuaded adult children that they can behave and believe whatever they want. Definitely a sadness.

Roger Marsh: It's interesting, Dr. Kathy, when you just were describing some of the emotions that parents are experiencing right now, one I picked up on initially was, well, what happens when an adult child gets married, moves away, maybe they're across country, maybe they might just be across town, but there's a big adjustment that goes there. At the same time though, we are also experiencing where it's a lot more than just saying we had to move so we don't see you that often. It's we just don't see you that often or we just don't communicate. Help us to distinguish between the two because sometimes I think those lines get blurred.

Dr. Kathy Koch: Oh, that's a really insightful point and really important for those of us who are in ministry and counseling roles to understand that. There will be a separation and a launch. That's what we raise them for. I laugh out loud sometimes when I see Facebook posts about a mother saying to their children, "Slow down." And I'm like, "Did you not know this would happen? This is what is supposed to happen."

Roger Marsh: That's the point.

Dr. Kathy Koch: I mean, you've been launching kids all along from a tricycle to a two-wheeler with training wheels, you take off the training wheels, then eventually they got a two-wheeler with hand brakes and then a larger two-wheeler. I mean, we've been launching them into freedom all along. Eventually they were licensed and they drove the car. So it's a natural progression. It doesn't mean there's anything wrong when they separate. You've done a good job if they're separating and if they're launching and if they're able to maintain a semblance of life and handle finances and relationships and education and a career when it becomes difficult, of course, is when they're making decisions that we don't affirm and they're not asking us for help and we are worried because that's what we do because again, we can talk about this perhaps that we have idolized kids and it's chapter one.

Chapter one I think is critically important to the book. So it's natural. We shouldn't assume that because our children don't call us every night that there's something wrong. They shouldn't call us every night. They know they should be getting their own life, having their own relationships and we need our own relationships and our own life as well. You're more than a mom and more than a dad live into that reality.

Roger Marsh: It sounds like a lot of parents right now are dealing with the fact that they may have had some wounds when they were growing up or maybe there were some wounds that happened in young adulthood and maybe they found it convenient to say, "Well, look, here's a mini version of me. In some cases, a mini me looks like me, acts like me." And I can kind of help them by healing myself at the same time. And it sounds like what you're saying is, "Hey, wait, hold on a second. They are them, you are you. And it's important to understand the difference because isn't that the whole goal?" I don't know if it's John Rosemond or maybe it was Jim Burns who said the whole thing with parenting is you're trying to work yourself out of a job. As a parent, you're not supposed to be that involved in your kids' lives forever. That's difficult for a lot of parents to deal with nowadays.

Dr. Kathy Koch: Well, it's difficult, Roger, when you have idolized your children and this is a very common dilemma in our culture. We're created to worship and we're created to worship God almighty. And if we don't, we will worship someone or something else. And I see it a lot. I've seen it probably in my entire ministry where moms in particular get very wrapped up in their children and I think idol worship shows up when you would admit that if your kids have a bad day, you have a bad day and if your kids have a good day, you have a good day. And you know what adult children have told me they resent being responsible for their mom's joy.

I had some adults tell me, "Dr. Kathy, it's too heavy of a burden. So I can't be honest with my mom about the struggle I'm having and I would love her help because I'll break her. And I don't like that she's that upset when my days are difficult. I'm learning how to be an adult." Let me remind everybody listening, this is the guinea pig child. They've always been your guinea pig. You've always experimented and you're still experimenting and figuring it out. But if you rely on them to make you happy, then it's dangerous. Another thing that I'm sure everyone there at Family Talk has seen what we've seen here at Celebrate Kids and that is that a parent wants a child to do well so that they look good as parents. No. God didn't give you children so that you would look good and parenting is hard. And if your children at whatever age stumble, fall down, stay down for a while, lose a job, flunk an exam, something happens with the economy and they go into debt, that doesn't mean you were a bad mom or dad. It is what it is. And so we can't own it. That's not healthy for them and it's not healthy for you.

Roger Marsh: It's not easy to admit that, but case in point, my own kids. I mean, the kids turned out really well until they weren't for a season. I mean, every kid has that moment. And I remember thinking, I'm so proud of my ... I mean, my daughters are in grad school and there's a son doing ... And then all of a sudden, one by one something would happen. I was like, "Wait, who are you? You can't be my kid because..." then God brought me back to the foot of the cross and said, "Yeah, these are My kids and you have been interested to raise them." And it was a powerful reminder of what you just said. Dr. Kathy Koch is our guest today here on Dr. James Dobson's family talk. Her brand-new book is called *Resolve Conflict and Find Peace and Hope with Adult Children: Strategies and*

Conversations That Work. And we have a link for the book up at jdfi.net. Dr. Kathy, in your new book, you open things up by saying, and I love this phrasing, "Parenting is a noun. Children is a verb." Help us understand what that means.

Dr. Kathy Koch: No, parent and children are both nouns. The idea is that you can't parent verb when they're older. You're not in control, right?

Roger Marsh: Yeah.

Dr. Kathy Koch: You thought you were in control when they were younger. Actually, you never were. God was.

Roger Marsh: Yes.

Dr. Kathy Koch: God orders the steps. Let's remember that. But now that they're older, if you parent as a verb, "move your juice, remember to wake up early for your interview tomorrow. Hey, did you see the weather forecast? I know you're going golfing tomorrow, but it might not work." If you smother them and try to still control them and teach them and over parent them when they're adults, you're going to resent that. That's disrespectful. One of the major things that we know is that they don't appreciate the disrespect that they're shown. So you'll always be a parent. There will always be a child. Those are nouns that will always be true, but you don't parent verb unless they invite you to. You counsel, coach, mentor, support, help, cheer, you're available, but you don't parent verb. You wait to be asked. If they ask you, "Hey, dad, I know there was this time when I was in high school, if I remember right and you were struggling with your job and were kind of dissatisfied, wasn't sure what to do. I'm kind of in the same boat. How did you figure out what to do? Do you have any advice?"

Celebrate that moment and provide advice and then call in two or three days and say, "Hey, Jonathan, I'm still thinking about you. How's it going? Do you want to have another conversation?" But if you know that your son is struggling with a job dissatisfaction and does not ask you for input, then don't provide it. That feels like he's not trusted. It feels like he's going to feel immature in that relationship with you and it won't do you any good. So you pray and you maybe look for teachable moments and you maybe spontaneously say something that would invite dialogue, but mostly you just wait in the silence and you pray and you hope that he'll reach out to you. If he doesn't pray that he'll reach out to somebody else and then he'll figure out how to live in this moment.

Roger Marsh: Yeah. And some parents get this and some parents have a tougher time with this. Talk about some of the reasons why, Dr. Kathy, it is so difficult. I mean, the simple reality is some parents, you kind of get the door slammed in your face once and go, "Oh, wait a minute." And you start to adjust. With others, the door slams and they just pound harder on the door like, "Let me in. I want to help you." Why do you think it's so difficult for some parents to transition from that part from authority figure to more of a supportive role?

Dr. Kathy Koch:

Oh, I love that question because if we keep pounding, we are really going to do damage to the relationships. So I love that you asked that question. Again, I would go back to idol worship. If you have used your children to ... And I don't say that lightly because you know what, Roger, you know what I know. Nobody wants to do this badly. Nobody who's listening to us was intentionally bad. You all did the very best that you knew how to do, but you have to learn that they are their own people and you have to remember that your role is to raise them up for God's glory and God's good and you've done that as best as you can. And now if they don't learn how to grow and handle the valley experiences, they will continue to be immature and fragile and that's going to be really unhealthy.

So if you have idolized your kids, if you have dependent upon your children to meet your needs, security, I can trust my kids. Identity, I'm a mom. They're mom. Belonging, see those kids, they're mine. They're amazing. Purpose to raise up kids. They're amazing. Look at how well they're doing. And competence, I'm a really good mom. If you try to meet those needs in just being a mom or a dad, you're at great risk. Jesus meets those needs. Our security is found in Christ. Our identity is in Christ. Our belonging is to Christ. Our purpose is to fulfill the great commandment, the great commission and to win people to Christ. And our competence, what do we do well is found in Christ. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. But if we lose sight of that and we're using our family to meet our needs, it could be grandchildren. It could even be a spouse.

Celebrate your spouse, celebrate your marriage and yet don't use your spouse as a substitute to God Almighty. It won't work for you. The other thing that I'll say before I kick it back to you is that I think, just in all that, Roger, and I hope that makes sense. I want the moms and the dads who are listening to remember you have many roles. You're perhaps still working. You're perhaps a volunteer at the county food bank. You sing in the church choir. You volunteer as a greeter in the children's wing of your church every other Sunday morning. You are helping your neighbor who had knee surgery and is so sad that the garden might not be weeded so you volunteer to do it. And if you only remember, if you only think that, man, I'm a dad, I'm amazing, then when that relationship goes sour, you don't know who you are.

And that pressure, then that's what forces you to lean in and that's what makes the kids angry and feel pressure that they don't want to feel.

Roger Marsh:

That's such a heavy statement and so loaded with great wisdom, Dr. Kathy Koch, because of the fact that you see a lot of parents who are in this situation and they are saying, wow, I mean, I've got a full life, I've got a full schedule, but I didn't realize that part of that full life was, well, at least I have this relationship with my kids where I am this instead of not being everything that we are hoping to be. In this new book, *Resolve Conflict and Find Peace and Hope with Adult Children* by Dr. Kathy Koch. Dr. Kathy, you talk about communication with adult children and this was a really difficult one for me. I'm a professional communicator and I get paid to listen, right? I mean, that's part of what I do, not as a therapist, but just in our communications world. But you made a statement

with words to the effect of, a lot of people don't listen to understand, they listen to reply. And I had to wonder, wow, I can only imagine how many parent-child relationships are an adult child saying, "You never listened to me. You never gave me a chance to share how I feel." Right or wrong, it doesn't matter. And the parents are saying, "Well, of course I listen because ... " And then they just reply with all these things that have nothing to do with what the child said. Talk about why that listening to reply part and replacing of it, listening to understand is so important in these dynamics.

Dr. Kathy Koch: Oh, no. So good to bring up. And it's true for all parent-child relationships. It's also true in marriage. It's true in any relationship that I'm listening so that when they stop talking, I can talk. No, it's not about you. It's not about you. And we listen to understand. And I think, Roger, not only do we not listen to reply, we don't listen to judge. I think the common reply is judgment. What were you thinking?

Roger Marsh: Yeah.

Dr. Kathy Koch: "Well, you made up your mind very quickly, or what do you mean you didn't call Lisa back? Are you serious you wore that to your interview?" So we're listening. We're not listening with compassion, with empathy, with the goal of understanding or support or coaching or mentoring or love, but because we think we're so amazing. Have you met me? I'm amazing. I am a wealth of wisdom. And again, Roger, the people listening to us, what a privilege that we have that they would listen to us. They're not intentionally doing anything wrong. If you're listening to us, thank you for being here. And if you are replying with wisdom or information or even rebuke, you think you're doing something really well and you may not be doing anything totally horrible, but in the moment, is that what your kids wanted and needed? In that moment, were they sharing with you because they needed you or do they just need to vent? So I think one of the things that we do is we listen with love in our heart. We listen to understand and then we say to our kids, "Man, thanks for trusting me. Do you want some reaction and insight or did you just need to vent?"

"Oh no, mom, I'm so glad you were available because I needed to get that out of my head. I didn't want to go to work tomorrow morning with all of that still bubbling over. I'll let you know later if talking would be good." And then we say, "Great." And we change the subject. We don't say, "Oh yes, but I have such wisdom for you." This is again where we earn the right to be heard by honoring their requests. Again, you parent only when they ask you to if you want to have a good relationship and I think we listen longer and we listen to understand, we listen with compassion, we listen to love. We listen so we know how to pray, whether they know we're praying for them or not.

Roger Marsh: It's so important that we are intentional. I mean, prayerful, obviously they're ... And let's face it, I remember hearing Dr. Gary Chapman one time talking about how we are gracious with toddlers when they're learning how to walk and we don't fuss at them or even bark at them because they fail, right? I mean, they're

18 months old. Instead, it's, "Hey, look at you. You took three steps and then, oh, whatever." When we comes to where we are right now, you've got adult children who are getting older, earlier and staying younger, longer. So adolescence seems to go on forever. Now so we're dealing with these people who you look and say, "You're 28, you're 29. I would think you would be here by now, but they're not." So rather than going into corrective mode, going into listening mode, understanding mode, I'm here for you mode seems like a cop out to some parents, but it sounds like what you're saying is no, that's exactly where you need to be.

Dr. Kathy Koch:

I believe that in the work that we've done here, they need to know that you are on their side and like the adult children I've told me, they feel the pressure to keep mom happy. They feel responsible for joy for them to be honest with you and to share that they're struggling in a relationship or with finances or with what, buying a new car or whatever, be grateful that they're trusting you with what's going on in their lives and just wait for the request and then be ready in season to share what you can try not to resent that they don't seem to need you. They did reach out to you, but it's going to be a different relationship. A lot of parents are solution focused. A lot of us are. A lot of us are good at what we do because we're quick to see there's a problem.

In fact, I'll go on record to say because of my style, I can sometimes figure out a person has a problem and solve it before they know they even had a problem. But the Scripture I've read calls us to love and to support, not to make them a problem so that we feel better about ourselves. So this is something that I wrote about. I do understand it's challenging, but there are communication rhythms that we can have. And one of them is, "Hey, how can I help you? Is silence...could I go with you to the doctor to help you listen? Because it sounds like being overwhelmed is understandable. You're trying to make up your mind about hospitality and how to handle inviting your in-laws over. Can I help you or did you just want to listen or did you just want me to listen?" And again, be available, but I think that's really powerful. "What do you need? How can I help you? What do you need? Input, prayer, advice. Do you want to shop together? Could I help you by checking out the local store and then saving you some time because I got more time than you have?" I mean, try to be creative in your offer. "How can I help you? What don't you understand? What do you need?" Those are questions that we can ask, but only ask if you're willing to, in humility, receive, I don't need anything right now. And then don't push. It's going to hurt. It's going to hurt because you want to be there everything. I get that, but you're not there everything. Don't you want God to be there everything, which is why we pray.

Roger Marsh:

Dr. Kathy, when you were sharing just now that kind of scenario, here are some questions you can pose to your adult child who is maybe backing away from you or possibly even in full-blown cutoff mode. The one word I didn't hear in those questions was why? And I had to wonder, boy, I wonder how many times we missed because we're like, why didn't you return my text? Why didn't you pick up the phone? Why didn't you want to go shopping? Why, why, why, why, why?

And I wonder if that might be, that's another knocking on the door that is not going to open. Talk about why it's important for us to really think through. Like you mentioned, I mean, it's just kind of an addendum to what you just said, but to choose our words very carefully.

Dr. Kathy Koch: Oh, I so appreciate that question. Why puts people on the defensive side of things. Why sounds judgmental. Why causes them to believe that we doubt them. Now, you may truly be surprised and then you use more words to say, okay, I wasn't expecting that answer, but I think I'm beginning to understand where you're coming from, but for me to be supportive and for me to understand more about why you've asked me to not reach out so often, could you share with me why you've drawn that conclusion? If not, I'll do my best to still understand you, but it would help me understand if you could share some details. Again, sometimes more words are beneficial, but why is defensive, it comes across as judgmental. We can be legitimately confused, totally legit to be confused, totally legitimate to be curious and concerned and wondering. It's the way that we communicate that and it's the when we communicate it that I think is something that we need to consider. They're not obligated to tell us everything.

Roger Marsh: Right. Boy, this is a great conversation and we're just getting warmed up and we haven't even gotten into the no contact thing yet, but we're out of time for today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. We'll probably need a whole program for that. Dr. Kathy Koch has been our guest for this edition of the broadcast, *Resolve Conflict and Find Peace and Hope with Adult Children: Strategies and Conversations That Work*. That's the name of the new book and it's linked up at jdfi.net. Dr. Kathy, can you join us again next time as we can continue this conversation?

Dr. Kathy Koch: Let's do that. I'd be honored.

Roger Marsh: Well, we're looking forward to that here on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. You've just heard part one of my conversation with Dr. Kathy Koch, founder of Celebrate Kids Incorporated., and author of the book, *Resolve Conflict and Find Peace and Hope with Your Adult Children*. That's been our topic of conversation today here on Family Talk. Here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, our goal is to strengthen families through biblical truth. Dr. Dobson spent decades building a foundation of trusted, practical wisdom for parents and families and we are committed to carrying that legacy forward. If the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute has been a resource for your family, we invite you to partner with us. Now to donate online, visit jdfi.net. If you prefer, you can call a member of our constituent care team. That number is 877-732-6825 or write to us. Our ministry mailing address is Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh and on behalf of all of us here at Family Talk and the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for joining us today. Be sure to join me again next time right here for part two of my conversation with Dr.

Kathy Koch. We'll be discussing how parents can resolve conflict and find peace with their adult children. That's coming up right here on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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