



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: What Parents Should Know About Teens – Part 2

Guest(s): Shaunti Feldhahn and Lisa Rice

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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. I'm Roger Marsh, and if you are raising a teenager right now, you already know this, but the child who once hung on your every word now seems to be living on a different planet, the eye rolls, the push for independence, the moments that leave you wondering what happened to my sweet kid and who is this person who's inhabited their body? Well, on today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, we are continuing a conversation Dr. Dobson had with authors, Shaunti Feldhahn and Lisa Rice. On our last program, they explored the major areas of conflict between parents and teens over responsibility, accountability, and freedom. On today's Family Talk broadcast, they'll dig into some surprising research about what your kids actually think, but would never tell you, at least not to your face. From questions about faith to those dreaded words, I hate you, this discussion is packed with wisdom for every parent. So here now to introduce today's conversation is Dr. James Dobson here on Family Talk, opening with a rather surprising revelation.
- Dr. James Dobson: Shirley and I, and I'm not embarrassed to say this, were both virgins when we got married. And the reason was not because I was scared of mom and dad. It was because God was in that car with me and I knew it. And I knew someday I would stand before Him and I knew that He was holding me accountable. And that's what kept me from doing wrong things.
- Shaunti Feldhahn: You know what? I want to give parents right here a tool in realizing something when they're talking to their kids. Because when we did the survey, we were doing a nationally representative survey. This was not just Christian kids, but two thirds of the kids. And I don't even think this really made it into the book. There was so much we had to cut out, but I think it was something like two thirds of the kids said, even if they don't go to church, even if that's not part of their daily life, they think about whether there's a God in Heaven that is watching what they do in secret. And that is something that a parent can use that if even unchurched kids think that way, how much more do the kids who know that from a personal experience, that that's a parent can use that and not be afraid of it.

Really, one of the things that the kids themselves advised, which I thought was terrific, was we had several kids that said, "Mom and dad really, they need to not focus so much on just what's wrong versus right. They need to focus on helping us want to do the right things and praying for our hearts to be molded in that way and to focus on maybe what's wrong versus wise and help a kid say, 'Is that wise? Is that something that is wise in the sight of God? How is that going to affect you?'" And they actually do take that and think about it.

Lisa Rice: Absolutely. And you can praise the good things that they're doing and say, "Wow, I saw how you handled that freedom really well." I bet God's going to be able to trust you with a lot. I wonder what He has for you in the future and turn it into the positive.

Dr. James Dobson: And here's a little more freedom. As a matter of fact, let me tell you how my mother did it. She used Bible studies to do it. And I remember she sat me down one day and we read the story of Samson. This was fairly early on in my life. And you know how the story flows and he got into great trouble and they put out his eyesight and went into slavery. And at the end of his life, God forgave him. But my mother pointed out he never got his eyesight back. There are consequences to sin. And if you sin, God is faithful. He loves you; He will forgive you, but there will be a stain on your life. There will be consequences and there always are those consequences and you can save yourself a lot of pain and maybe the loss of something very dear to you by not getting into that difficulty in the first place.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Well, and that's where, believe it or not, that's where the kids basically said they needed a little extra help from mom and dad to think that through because, and you know this better than anyone Doctor, but what we found in the research is that actually the kids' brains, the part of their brains that processes consequences, it's not there yet.

Dr. James Dobson: It's late in developing. That's one question I want to ask the Lord. Why did you put all of this sexual awakening in a body with a brain that's not quite finished?

Shaunti Feldhahn: I mean, I was really fascinated. The frontal lobe isn't fully developed. The frontal lobe is what allows them to think through the consequences. And so because of that, their brains automatically rely on the centers that are more emotion driven.

Lisa Rice: And impulse.

Shaunti Feldhahn: And so basically means they just give into these impulses and you think, "What were you thinking?" And they told us, honestly, I mean, they sat at Starbucks or stopped them in a mall and they looked us in the eye and they basically said, "Okay, I know that was sort of a stupid move. And I basically need my mom and dad to help me think through where I went wrong rather than just getting mad and grounding me for the rest of my life." I didn't get it.

- Dr. James Dobson: What thinking adult would get into a car driven by a 16 year old half-drunk teenager? I mean, that's not smart. Yet, kids will do that and tear down the road, out of control. 15 years later, they wouldn't think of doing that.
- Shaunti Feldhahn: I mean, the kids, they go between these things of being very unself-aware, like jumping immediately to some impulsive stupid thing and being very actually aware of it later. Okay, that was really dumb. And basically saying this is where they need mom and dad. This is one of the things, honestly, that was another huge surprise in the research is that we think our kids are constantly basically just wanting to yank that kite string out of our hands and just wanting us to let go. You know what? It isn't true. We actually asked the kid which type of parent they'd prefer. Would you rather have a parent that basically lets you go and do whatever you want to do and doesn't really hold you to the rules and doesn't stay on top of your homework? Or would you rather have a parent who does stay on top of you and does stay on top of your homework and who you're with and all of that? You know what? Three out of four kids said, "Okay, I may not ever admit it to my mom and dad, but I want that take charge parent."
- Dr. James Dobson: See, that's very encouraging. You see that in divorced parents where one parent is very, very permissive and just allows the kid to do anything he wants to and the other parent is really trying to do what's right and hold the line and teach and discipline and train and all of that. And the youngster will often choose the tougher of the two parents. They'll try the other one for about three months and then come running back. It doesn't always work that way, but it does.
- Shaunti Feldhahn: Well, we were amazed. I mean, all of your parenting books say parents need to be the take charge parent. This is your job. But we were amazed that the kids actually agreed with this. I mean, they'll never admit it. This is sort of a secret thing. We're blowing their cover here, but you know what? Moms and dads need to know that that is good ammunition to be aware that secretly inside, they are wanting you to take the rings.
- Dr. James Dobson: There is another subject I want to make sure we get a chance to talk about. I really appreciated what you had to say about anger, parental anger in the book, because it is possible to deal even with very frustrating, rebellious behavior firmly, but without blowing up. Kids hate to have you blow up at them. Even if they're out of control, there's got to be a parent here in this relationship. You can't both be adolescents. And it came out, didn't it? That the questions that you asked the youngsters, they said they did not like to be yelled at.
- Lisa Rice: That's true. And so many of them, Dr. Dobson, while we were talking, would say, "Well, I would tell them that, but they'll freak out." Or, "I tried to talk to them, but they freaked out " And so we thought, "Well, let's figure out what freaking out really means." So the next several focus groups, we said, "Guys, what is freaking out?" And basically what we found out is that it's any negative or even positive overt display of emotion. Parents are really not allowed to do that. You have to be kind of level.

Shaunti Feldhahn: They're allowed to freak out, but we're not.

Lisa Rice: They're all over the board, but a parent is not allowed really to have-

Dr. James Dobson: Did the issue of the mother daughter thing come out, the two women in the kitchen kind of thing. I don't know if you all discovered that, but I mean, it is real that there is conflict that occurs with boys, but a mother and daughter can have cat fights. And I mean, it can get very destructive at times. Did any youngsters, any of the girls talk about that conflict with their mothers?

Lisa Rice: Actually, yes, that did come up. In the chapter that we wrote about attitude adjustment, we call it, about the different ways that boys and girls are wired, we found that the girls, when they're feeling really insecure, the number one thing that you'll see is lippiness. "Fine." They'll answer fine or "I got it."

Shaunti Feldhahn: You know what? This is one of these areas that it opened my eyes to something I had never known where there's actually a developmental shift that's having to happen here, where that little girl who wanted to dress just like you, which is of course where my daughter is right now. She loves nothing more than if we walk out of the bedroom and we're both wearing black pants and a pink shirt. I mean, she's like in heaven and I'm sure that's going to change because there comes this point at about age 12-ish, 13, where it's almost like a switch flips and they go into a different developmental stage and their whole life before then has been sort of looking at mom and dad and saying, "What is it like to be a woman? What's it like to be a man? What do my parents think about this or that?"

And suddenly they're no longer thinking, "What is it like to be mom and dad? Who are mom and dad?" They're thinking, "Who am I?" And it's almost, some of the kids described it. It's almost like they've been born again. They've popped out of the womb again at 13 and they're kind of like, "Uh, who am I?" They've sort of woken up to the fact that they're their own person. And from then on, for the next few years, they're in this quest to try to figure out who I am. And it drives them absolutely nuts when mom and dad seem to not get that they're a different person than the one who lived there a few years before.

Dr. James Dobson: And don't have a clue as to what's going on in school. When I taught school, I was only 24, 25 years of age. I'd allow the kids to hang around after school and that's where they did the talking to me and I'd be grading papers or whatever and they would come in and they would just long for my attention and for me to say, "You know what? You're really a very bright person. Has anybody ever told you that? Anybody ever told you that you got a great future ahead?" You start talking that way and kids...

Shaunti Feldhahn: Oh, they light up.

Lisa Rice: They lap it up.

Dr. James Dobson: Open up.

Lisa Rice: So thirsty for that.

Shaunti Feldhahn: One of the areas here though that I really want parents to hear, especially if they're Christian parents and they are trying to pour that in, because I imagine many of your listeners are trying to pour that into their kids. One of the things we found that was so important about this identity seeking phase though, is that sometimes those same kids are going to act like they're pulling away and they're going to say, "I don't know that I want to go to church with you anymore." They're going to do and say those things that a parent who's been trying to pour all of that will kind of panic and say, "You've heard this your whole life. How can you be questioning this?" And what we found out from the kids is it's almost like the way we describe it is you know your kid has to build their own identity, right?

Every parent knows that, but what we kind of think that means is that they're starting from scratch. You know what? They're not starting from scratch. They are starting from you. The identity you have built into them, how they've watched you is the only identity they've ever known, right? But what that means is if they are going to build their own, it is like they have to pull back a little bit. The way we describe it, it's almost like building a building. You've built a building. They have to now take every building block out, hold it up to the light and kind of say, "I've heard this my whole life. I know this is who mom and dad are, but is it who I am?" And that process will kind of be scary for mom and dad because it can look like rejection.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you're right.

Shaunti Feldhahn: But what we found that was so interesting is that if mom and dad will let them do that and actually walk the road with them instead of kind of flipping out about it, the kid will bring those questions to them more and more. Mom and dad will be more and more part of the process. And then I think it was something like 90% of the kids said that they'll be so much more likely to having that be part of their own building later.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. And they have to make it their own. But there's a period of time where everything you think you've planted has died in the ground. All of these manners that you taught and all of these social graces that made such sense when your kids were younger and even some of your theological understandings for a period of time look like they're not going to come up and there's nothing but dry ground there. And then a few years go by and you see this little green shoot and then it turns out that the youngster is a whole lot more like you than you ever believed would be. Is that the way you found it?

Lisa Rice: That's exactly it. That exact thing happened in our own home. One of my daughters came up to me. I'd said, "Look, I'll pray for you about that situation."

And she said, and it was kind of to test me, I think, but it was also kind of how she was feeling. She said, "Mom, I'm not sure I believe how you and dad do anymore. I'm not sure I believe that God answers specific prayers like that. I don't know that I've seen that." And everything in me wanted to go, "What? You know how you were raised? There's a wonderful God. He answers prayer." I started to freak out, but-

Dr. James Dobson: You stayed cool?

Lisa Rice: Again, because we were doing this research and I knew that I couldn't freak out, I took a step back and I said, "Okay, well, I see that you're questioning your faith. That's good. Why don't you journal a little bit about these things and let me know what you come up with." And then I went in my room and screamed, but it wasn't just a couple months later that this same daughter came in the house and I had to stay home from church one Sunday morning and she came in after church and she said, "Boy, did you miss it." She said, "The pastor was so amazing. He touched on four major things that are happening in my life and read my mail and you missed it." And I just went, "This is the same girl."

Dr. James Dobson: Thank the Lord.

Shaunti Feldhahn: And she said, "God is really showing me these things."

Lisa Rice: That's right. God has shown me this, this and this.

Shaunti Feldhahn: So God, clearly, she had internalized it. And the thing that I was so interested in since my kids are younger and I'm like watching everything, Lisa is the guinea pig, she's going through everything ahead of me. And I'm watching this going, you know what's so important for me is to recognize when my kids get to that point when they start questioning, because what we heard from the kids is that if the mom does do what Lisa stopped herself from doing, if she says, "You've heard this your whole life," or "Get in the car, we're going to church together," or handles it in that way, the kid is still going to question it, but they're going to question it without raising it with you next time.

Dr. James Dobson: They keep it inside.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: In that situation, Lisa, I think it's good to say, "You know what? If God is who I know Him to be and who I'm absolutely convinced He is, He's not threatened at all by your question and He will reveal himself to you if you'll just listen. You'll find out exactly who He is and you'll also find out through your prayers that He answers them, but I'm going to give you time to discover that on your own." I think it's just very important not to be threatened by that because the moment you are, you shut it down.

Lisa Rice: That's right. I found that God is supremely confident in His own ability to handle His own reputation.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, that's right. We have to get in and save it at times. What do you say to a youngster that says, "I hate you. "

Lisa Rice: You know what the good thing we found out about it is even the kids that admit that they would be lippy to their parents and mouth out to their parents or literally say, "I hate you and I despise you." We found out the coolest thing. The last survey question we asked these kids is, "If you found out that it's your last day on earth with your parents, what would you most want to tell them?" The huge, huge majority of kids.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Almost 100%.

Lisa Rice: Out of hundreds of kids throughout the nation, we were literally crying as we saw this come in over our computer. They said, "I would want to let them know how much I love them and how sorry I am for all the rotten things I've ever done and how much I want to be just like them when I grow up."

Dr. James Dobson: That's great.

Shaunti Feldhahn: And these are the same kids. We cross referenced, honestly, okay, there goes the analyst mode. We cross referenced the same kids who admitted that they would have said, "I hate you: to their mom or their dad or feel "I despise you." Those same kids were the ones who were saying, "I would most want to tell mom and dad I love you and I'm so sorry I've been such a brat." I mean, it was really powerful to know that no matter what they say, the vast majority of kids really do feel that way.

Lisa Rice: So wait a day.

Dr. James Dobson: I think a good answer when that occurs and it does occur is not to blow up, not to get mad, but to say rather seriously, "That is very hurtful. That really is hurtful and that's why you will never ever hear me say that to you. I don't care what conflict we're in, there will never be a moment when I will say that to you because that would wound you deep down inside and because I love you, it also wounds me. And so I don't want you to do that anymore." I find that kids can relate to that or respond to that.

Lisa Rice: They need to know that they've sent a dagger and how that feels, don't they?

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Another one is you don't trust me. You ever hear that?

Shaunti Feldhahn: Oh yeah.

Lisa Rice: We hear that a lot.

Dr. James Dobson: No, you don't trust me. We can't wait to get out of here. These are things thrown at you to throw you off balance. That's the reason for it, is for you to reel backwards and then they have the high ground and you don't let it succeed with it.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Well, we found, you know what the kids advised us to say? The kids themselves said, if a kid says, "You don't trust me." Basically, you can say, "You know what? That's not the point. The point isn't whether I trust you or not." Does a secret service agent need to trust the person under their care? No, their job is to help protect them regardless.

Lisa Rice: And I do trust that you want to do the right thing, but I don't always trust the hormone raging version of you, so I'm going to protect you.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, it's a pleasure talking to you all. The title of the book is *For Parents Only: Getting Inside the Head of Your Kid*. We've done that to a degree today, and this book does it to a greater degree. There's a lot of very practical stuff in here. Lisa, it's good to have you on the program.

Lisa Rice: Thank you so much for having me.

Dr. James Dobson: And we will invite you back. You're continuing to write.

Lisa Rice: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, blessings to you all. I want to say to our listeners with teenagers out there, we haven't answered all the questions. We couldn't do that in 10 years, but if there are specific questions that parents have of any age group, I hope they'll write and ask those questions. We've got a team here that will provide the information we have. We don't have all the answers. We've got some of them. We'll share them with you. And that's what we try to do here, is to put an arm around individual family members out there, singles, anyone who has a need, you call us and you'll find you've got friends here. And I think these programs that we've done on the teen years here have been helpful to people. And if our listeners have found it that way, I hope they will write and tell us. So again, thank you ladies for being with us. Keep writing.

Lisa Rice: Appreciate it.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Thanks Dr. Dobson.

Roger Marsh: If you're in the thick of the teen years right now, I hope you heard Dr. Dobson's heart at the end of today's conversation. You are not alone in this, and you've got friends who want to walk alongside you as well. You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. And on today's program, we heard Dr. Dobson's conversation with Shaunti Feldhahn and Lisa Rice. Fascinating conversation based on Shanti and Lisa's book called *For Parents Only: Getting Inside the Head*

of Your Kid. To hear today's program again or to share it with someone you love. And for more information on that book, go to jdfi.net. That's jdfi.net.

And if you're the parent or a grandparent of a teenager, I want to tell you about an exciting opportunity happening for them right now. The Dr. James Dobson Family Institute is hosting a national essay contest for middle school and high school students. As America nears our 250th birthday, if you can believe that, we are asking students to reflect on faith's role in our nation's founding, and then asking them how God is calling them to carry these principles forward into the future. Now, you can learn more about this exciting contest when you go to jdfi.net, or you can just go directly to our website for the contest itself, and that's drjamesdobson.org/USA250. Drjamesdobson.org/USA250.

Well, I want to take a moment here at the close of our broadcast to offer a word of encouragement and thanks for those of you who count on this ministry for encouragement and truth. Every resource you rely on from the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute exists because families like yours believe this work matters. Your generosity helps us promote and defend the institution of the family. It introduces people to the gospel of Jesus Christ and stands for the sanctity of human life and religious freedom in an increasingly hostile culture. Now, those aren't just words on a page. That is the Christ-centered mission of the James Dobson Family Institute, and it drives everything we do. As we continue the legacy Dr. Dobson established long those many years ago. Now, we need your partnership to help us keep going. And if this program has been a source of wisdom and encouragement for you and your family, we invite you to step up and step forward with a gift today.

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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 listening today. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

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your marriage, our resources provide the practical help you need right when you need it most. Through our daily broadcasts, timeless books, and digital resources, we're here with you every step of the way. Thank you so much for partnering with us. Together, we're building a legacy of faith, family, and freedom that will endure for generations to come.