



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Motivating Your Child to Learn – Part 1

Guest(s): Cheri Fuller

Air Date: November 10, 2025

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, welcome to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Parents, let me ask you a question. Does your child seem more interested in video games than in vocabulary? Or perhaps more excited about recess than reading? Well, if so, you are not alone. On Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, we're bringing you a classic conversation that addresses this very challenge. Dr. Dobson sat down with author and speaker Cheri Fuller to explain how parents can reignite their child's love of learning. Cheri Fuller is an award-winning author of more than 40 books and also a former Oklahoma Mother of the Year. So whether your child is struggling in school or simply going through the motions, today's Family Talk broadcast offers practical wisdom you can put into action right away. So let's listen in now as Dr. James Dobson and his guest Cheri Fuller discuss motivating your child to learn.

Dr. James Dobson: I was thinking today about a rather typical scenario. I'll bet you there are a lot of parents that can identify with this. Junior's in elementary school and mom sends him off and then about six hours, seven hours later, he comes home from school and he's lugging his lunch pail and his baseball mitt, and he has two or three textbooks with him and some crumpled papers peeking out from underneath the pages. Mom's excited to see him and she says, "How was school today, honey?" And he shrugs and he says, "Oh, all right." And then he makes a beeline for the cookie jar and she says, "What'd you learn in class today?" He says, "I don't know, nothing really." She says, "You have any papers for me to put on the refrigerator?" He hands her this mess; this I mean his notebook is a disaster area. His handwriting is a disgrace to the whole family.

She begins to unfold those papers and he missed seven on a very simple spelling test. She knows he has ability to have gotten them all right. She opens a math paper and he missed 22 problems out of 48, and it's kind of hard to put those on the refrigerator. And then she spots a note from the teacher, I'm sure if not early in the school year, sometime during the next nine months, that scenario will occur for many parents. If you asked that mother and her husband what they most are in need of their family, they would say it is information about how to motivate these kids, how to get 'em interested in school, how to make 'em want to learn. How to light the fires of curiosity and make them want to learn.

And we have a guest here who has spent a lot of time thinking about that and just wrote a book on that subject in fact. She is Cheri Fuller, former teacher, a parent of three, author of the book, *Motivating Your Kids From Crayons to Careers*. She's here today to help parents learn to enhance their child's natural curiosity and communicate the value of learning to their kids. Cheri, you've heard the introduction. You have also heard that explanation or that description of family life from many, many parents, haven't you?

Cheri Fuller: Yes, I have.

Dr. James Dobson: Let's put myself in the role of the father representing the family I just talked about, and I come to you and I talk to you about the motivation of our children and I say, Cheri, what am I going to do to get those kids turned on to learning? They really don't care. They only care about playing. Is it something I've done? Is it my fault as a father? Is it my wife's fault as a mother? Give us some help.

Cheri Fuller: Well, first of all, I'd say to you instead of saying what did we do wrong, say, well, what kind of learners are we? Because the kind of learners that you are, if you're an avid reader, your children will not necessarily imitate you instantly, but it has a powerful impact. And so I'd ask you, what are you really interested in learning and have you ever shared that with your child? I know a dad who's a geologist and he shared with me how he has collected rocks all of his life. He has rock collections and he's collected animal bones and all kinds of interesting nature things, and his natural tendency is to share that with his little girl, Melissa and take her on nature hikes. And so he finds that she's very motivated in science and she has the best show and tell collection that any first grader ever had. And so I'd ask you, what are your interests and most important, what are your son's interests? What is he really interested in because that can be something that can spark his motivation. And what's his talent or his skill? Maybe the child isn't even motivated enough to go to the library, but we collect up some books, maybe get him a subscription to a magazine in his interest.

Dr. James Dobson: Did you imply a minute ago that what I'm interested in as a father is relevant to the motivation and the learning of my kids? I work 10, 11 hours a day and I'm not even able to go up to the school. You're saying that who I am influences what they do off at the local school that I don't seem to have any relationship to.

Cheri Fuller: Instead of looking at our deficiencies at parents, if we look at, well, what are my assets? What can I share with my child? Maybe I'm not the greatest science. I mean science is not my strong suit, but I love reading. I can transfer that love of reading. If you're excited about learning anything, whatever your field is, you can take your child to work with you and let your child catch some of the excitement for some of the projects you're doing. And this is a great boon to motivation. Often a child sits in a classroom all year and year after year and they don't see the connection between the classroom and the world out there where real people are doing interesting things. One thing that sparked the motivation

of our kids is when we have people for dinner that they share with them what they're doing.

We have a friend who's an orthopedic surgeon and he's been creating a new knee joint and he shared this with Chris and with Justin. He shared the process he's going through to work on this and this really sparked an interest in them and I think for our children to see not only what I'm doing and what I'm interested in, but see other people, role models of adults who may be one is a missionary and very passionately interested in the work that they're doing in Haiti and let our children be exposed to what's really going on out there.

Dr. James Dobson: Alright, then let's pull the first principle out of what you've just said. That motivation for learning is best sparked by identifying the areas of interest, the natural interest that are there and capitalizing on them.

Cheri Fuller: Right because that's a real key. I mean, I believe that God put those interests in a child for a reason and it may not be something that's going to blossom right now. It may be five years down the road. Your child is interested in writing and so maybe he tries out a little neighborhood newsletter that he writes of a news in the neighborhood and as he's encouraged and maybe given other opportunities, encouraged to try this at school or to submit something to the literary magazine he's going to discover. Maybe that's what I can do. Maybe I can go into a career in journalism.

Dr. James Dobson: One of the great, I started to use the word tragedies, that's too strong of a word, but I think you understand what I mean. One of the great tragedies of human experience is that there is such a great natural curiosity in the early years of development. You look at a three-year-old and he is fascinated by absolutely everything. I remember when our daughter was only 18 months of age, I was in the kitchen one night doing something, I don't remember preparing myself a sandwich or something, and I looked over at my 18 month old daughter and she was examining the knob on the dishwasher and she stood there and she looked at it from all sides. She saw her reflection in it, and I saw her pull her body back and forth to see how the reflection changed as she moved. She turned the knob, she looked at the numbers she felt of it, she leaned over and put her tongue on it. She was checking that out, just a natural curiosity about life. And then you jump 10 years and you see these kids absolutely bored with everything. I mean, the whole world is out there and they're bored to death with learning process. Somehow, we allow that excitement about learning to dissipate and we let them sink into this mire of boredom. It's a sin of bore kids, I think. Speaking personally, I bore very easily as well. I find it hard to sit and listen to speakers. In 20 years of education, I've heard some of the most boring teachers of all times, but it's a shame that we permit this to occur. Would you agree?

Cheri Fuller: Well, I think so, and I think one of the subtle ways that that happens is that as parents, we get so busy that when our child asks, why is the grass turning green? It's been brown in the winter and now it's turning green, and why is that

caterpillar fuzzy? And we don't take their question seriously. We're busy, we're rushing to the grocery store. And that natural curiosity, as you said, is so strong in a little one and in a child. And if we can instead try to take their questions seriously and answer them, and if we don't know the answer, say those. I think what are powerful words? Let's look it up. And if your daughter's interested in why the grass is green in a very simple way, get a book that explains that if you don't know how to explain it. Follow that up with something else. Maybe the child can draw pictures about it. And again, we're leading from what their natural curiosity. I believe children are born motivated to learn. They want to learn. They're reaching out, they're taking things apart and putting 'em back together if they can. And if we can just realize that curiosity is so important because it's part of what keeps a person motivated about life.

Dr. James Dobson: You used a keyword a minute ago, you said, let's look it up instead of go look it up. There's a big difference between those two.

Cheri Fuller: There's a difference. And for me to be able to admit, well, I don't know the answer to that, but let's go look that up together. How many bones are in the body?

Dr. James Dobson: So the excitement in the two of you?

Cheri Fuller: Right and I think a lot of that is wrapped up with dialogue in the family, conversation. A conversation and dialogue is one of the most vital tools that we can use to help children remain motivated.

Dr. James Dobson: In fact, one of the important points you make in the book is that the dinner hour should be preserved or restored to its original purpose, which is a conversation time within the family.

Cheri Fuller: Right and it can be such a wonderful time to talk about what Sally's learning in science that day. Our son often would, in his ethics class this year, he'd share about a debate they were having on abortion and he'd tell us the different sides and Chris would tell us what was happening in the NBA. And so we have this dialogue going on, this conversation, and it's not just a time filler, but it also gives children a chance to reflect on what they've learned during the day and to have parents be a sounding board and give their ideas and to weave together what they're learning with other things that are happening in life maybe with current events and help children see a bigger picture than just this worksheet that they're having to do on whales, for instance. But to tie this in with, well, what's happening with whale around the world?

And so that's what I try to do with, for instance, the chapter on literacy skills and conversation is to say, let's use the resources we have. We're all busy, but we do have a dinner hour. Let's sit down together, let's say grace together. Let's use it as a time not to scold, not to just hand out orders, but to really dialogue together. It encourages children to have thinking skills. In the classroom, a child

may only have 40 seconds to say anything because of all the things the teacher has to do, taking role, giving instructions, the work that they have to do.

Dr. James Dobson: It's that interaction between generations that matters, isn't it?

Cheri Fuller: Right. The live interaction between adult and child is what improves language skills.

Dr. James Dobson: In fact, the studies have shown for years, I remember studying this when I was in graduate school, that twins develop language more slowly typically than single children because they depend on one another and they get so familiar with the grunts and the groans and the almost nonverbal interaction of one another that they depend less on adults and it inhibits their language to some degree. So if it's true in that context, then you can take the larger picture that the amount of time you spend as a child talking to adults and interacting with adults is directly related to the development of that skill. And so if parents are extremely busy, they send their kids in throughout the day in the formative years to some kind of setting where this kind of language interchange with adults does not occur, then it's a handicap.

Cheri Fuller: And I think too, parents are busy and we all are, but we can take advantage of the opportunities in the car to talk to our children when we're washing dishes. We have opportunities right before they go to bed to talk with them or when we throw the football after dinner and to use those opportunities to ask them what they're thinking and what they're feeling and to share ideas. And it's a powerful tool to motivate children. The education, if it's just happening at school, is just a thin veneer if it's not really happening at home too.

Dr. James Dobson: We're talking to Cheri Fuller who has written a book called *Motivating Your Kids from Crayons to Careers*. So that's what we're discussing and who we're discussing it with. In this book. You talk a lot about motivational busters and motivational boosters, things that assist in motivating children and the things that get in the way. In terms of the busters, one of the most important ones you named was when you move a child from one district to another. How does that break up or bust motivation?

Cheri Fuller: Well, a school transfer can just remove the child, first of all, from the setting that he's secure in or that she's secure in and then they have a whole new set of friends to get used to or to find friends. Often they've got totally different books that are being used. Maybe this school is ahead of them in certain areas, and so they come in with some gaps. Their family is in transition, and so there are certain difficulties and challenges that go with a school transfer, but my point in having a chapter on smoothing a school transfer was how can we keep kids motivated in the midst of that so that their learning can go on? And I think really there can be some great benefits they can have.

Dr. James Dobson: How do you do it?

Cheri Fuller: Well, one of the ways is to really prepare the child for the move and to have a family meeting and to sit down and say, this is what's about to happen in a few months. Talk about it. Of course, the parent investigates what are the best school situations, whether it's going to be a Christian school, whether it's public school, what's the best place that's accessible? Another way that I know of a family that did that was just wonderful to prepare their children for the move was when the parents visited the school, they asked for a boy and a girl their children's age to be pen pals for their children until they got there and it was going to be like four months until the family got there in the new setting. And so a boy and a girl volunteered and they exchanged addresses and they began writing letters back and forth. And so when the family actually got to the new school, they already had a little developing friendship here that really did help in their transition. So I think one thing is helping the child to say goodbye, to also maintain some friendships and some continuity and maybe having an address book and your child can collect addresses and then encouraging them to write.

Dr. James Dobson: Begin to create curiosity about what the new place is going to be.

Cheri Fuller: Right. When we were about to move to Maine with our children, I wrote off to the state and the tourist bureau and asked for information about some of the different points in the state, and of course the ski areas because we'd never been close to a ski area and they were going to be 45 minutes away and some of the historical things that might interest the children and things about the beach and the ocean. We'd never lived there. And it did give them a sense of anticipation and an expectation about, boy, we're going to be in New England and it's a totally different part of the country. And although they were sad about leaving their friends, we were trying to say, this can be an adventure too so that they can begin to have a positive attitude. And I think that really helped.

Dr. James Dobson: It's been my experience in dealing with the adolescent period that almost every student will quit studying sometime between the seventh, eighth and ninth grades. There's so much going on emotionally in there.

Cheri Fuller: Hormones.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, the hormones and there's so much pressure, so many assaults on self-esteem, so many other interests. The opposite sex suddenly becomes so interesting and so on that nearly every youngster will quit working at some time in there. So when that happens, it's very important for parents to know it, to monitor it, and to help him get past that. Tutorials assistance at a time like that.

Cheri Fuller: Often too, when that happens, when you're saying that they stop studying or the grades start to fall, what happens is the parents get very anxious and very upset about this failure, and boy, they don't want this to continue, and so they put on more pressure and they say, you've got to bring this grade up or we're going to ground you, or they begin to really focus on, you've missed 10 points this week on this test, and when that burnout or this decline in grades begins to happen, instead of focusing on those grades and putting more pressure on,

what we need to do as parents is begin to focus on the learning and take the pressure off the grades and try to find something positive to say, if it's not that you brought your grade up this week, appreciate the fact you put effort into it and that it's building perseverance.

Say again. What is your interest? Maybe you're struggling like crazy in algebra two and that's not your deal, but you're going to get through it. Maybe we need to get you a tutor to get through it, but you can get through it, but what is an area you could be good at? Our son, Justin, he was so glad the day he finished algebra and trigonometry and all of that, but what he was really interested in was government, and so we challenged him to try an honors government class. It was going to push him a little bit. An honors English class, but to be with some kids who are achievers who are interested in the subject, and it happened to be something also that he was interested in, and so he saw, well, I can do a little bit more than just the average courses that I'd been in.

Dr. James Dobson: You make a distinction in the book between pressure and motivation that you are not real big on parents pushing their kids, and yet there is an assignment Cheri that's due next Friday and it's got to be 40 pages long and it's a whole notebook and it has all this stuff and the kid hasn't started. That's pressure. It's pressure for the parent and the parent translates it onto the youngster. How do you avoid it in a world of homework?

Cheri Fuller: Well, I think one way is when children are younger and they begin to have projects like this is help them divide up this big task, which can seem very overwhelming into small bites and help them see, well, what are you going to do on it this week? Instead of waiting till the last minute, doing some planning together, some brainstorming together, maybe encouraging the child to go in and talk to the teacher about his idea for the science project and bringing in some books that maybe might spark his interest. I think this can help.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Cheri, your book is entitled *Motivating Your Kids from Crayons to Careers*, and this is a 260 page book and we're obviously not going to cover even the basic meat of it in one program. I want to talk to you some more next time. Just tell me why you wrote this book. Why this particular subject? There are many things as a teacher you could have written on.

Cheri Fuller: Well, I think one is from being with children in the classroom and seeing that they really have hopes and dreams. Sometimes as parents, we have great expectations for our children, but we don't realize that they also have hopes and dreams. But for those dreams to be realized of the boy who wants to become a doctor and the little girl who wants to be a nurse or a teacher, then they're going to have to have the motivation to go the distance and to overcome obstacles because it isn't easy. I think about a boy I know who decided when he was seven, he wanted to be like his dentist. He wanted to become a dentist. He ended up going through a small town school and not really being quite equipped for college and for the hard pre-med and pre-dental courses he had to take, and he made not high enough grades and he ended up

changing to a different college and really learning better study habits, having to repeat a whole year.

And then he got into dental school and has worked very hard, but his freshman year he missed passing the final that would mean he could go on to the next year by about a hundredth of a point, and he had to repeat that whole freshman year of dental school, and he continued to persevere because when he was a 7-year-old, he thought, someday I want to be a dentist. And so that helped carry him the distance. And this past year he did finish and he graduated with a 3.0 and he hung that sign out that says DDS, but children have hopes and dreams and how can we as parents help them stay motivated for all the challenges and all the difficulties and sometimes school situations that aren't going to be ideal and their own limitations so that they can realize those hopes and dreams. And that's really why I wrote the book and I wrote it also to say to parents, there's a lot of ways just in the course of family life that we can spark that desire to learn, that we can help motivate children, and it doesn't have to be a drudgery.

Dr. James Dobson: And not just realize hopes and dreams that are already there, but to create hopes and dreams.

Cheri Fuller: Right, and help them develop goals and aspirations. Our daughter's been, she's thought maybe she wanted to be a nurse and now she's volunteering at the hospital and she's getting to be a real part of that scene of helping people and being in ICU, and it's really sparked something within her because as a seventh grader, her self-esteem has kind of been shaky this year, and she's wondered, am I really worth much and is there anything that I can do? And just having that extra responsibility.

Dr. James Dobson: Every seventh grader I've ever met in my life is asking that same question.

Cheri Fuller: But she's feeling better about herself. She's developing some goals. She's saying maybe I want to be a pediatric nurse, and it gives her a little more motivation because science is very hard for her.

Dr. James Dobson: Cheri let's talk some more next time about motivation of children.

Cheri Fuller: I'd love to do that.

Roger Marsh: It's no secret that every child has hopes and dreams buried somewhere deep inside their hearts, and our job as parents is to be their cheerleader and to guide them as they take steps toward those goals. You're listening to a special edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk featuring part one of Dr. Dobson's classic discussion with author and speaker Cheri Fuller about motivating your child to learn. If you missed any portion of today's broadcast or if you'd like to share it with another parent who would benefit from this wisdom, visit drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. Once you're there, you'll also find information

about Cheri book called *Motivating Your Kids from Crayons to Careers*. Again, you'll find all that information and more at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

The Dr. James Dobson Family Institute exists to strengthen families by teaching biblical principles that support marriage and child development through daily broadcasts like the one you just heard. We are equipping parents with practical wisdom for raising the next generation, but we can only continue this work with your partnership. If today's conversation has encouraged you in your parenting journey, I invite you to join us as partners in our ministry. To make a secure donation online go to drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks so much for joining us today. On behalf of all of us here at the JDFI, we truly appreciate your prayers and your support. Be sure to tune in again next time right here for part two of Dr. James Dobson's classic conversation with author Cheri Fuller discussing how to motivate your child to learn. That's coming up right here on the next edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you can still trust, for the family you love.

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