



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: What Parents Should Know About Teens – Part 1

Guest(s): Shaunti Feldhahn and Lisa Rice

Air Date: April 14, 2026

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 ministry of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. Parents, let's be honest, when your sweet little girl suddenly acts like being seen with you a fate worse than death, or your well-behaved son starts pushing every boundary in sight, well, congratulations. You have now entered the teenage years. On today's edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, Dr. Dobson sits down with authors and researchers, Shaunti Feldhahn and Lisa Rice, to unpack what's really going on inside your teenager's head. Drawing from extensive surveys and real life conversations with kids, they will reveal why freedom is such a driving force for teens and how parents can respond with both wisdom as well as grace. Here now to introduce today's conversation is Dr. James Dobson, here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: We live in a very tough time to be a parent, and it's an even tougher time to be a kid, I think, to be a teenager. There are just very few certainties for either generations now, and the pressures of the culture put everyone on edge. And we want to offer some suggestions and advice today that may be helpful. I've spent a good part of my professional career writing for teenagers one way or another, including *Preparing for Adolescence*, which by the way, was originally written not for the public, but for my own daughter who was 13 years of age. And my church heard about it and said, "Can we use those tapes?" And I let them use them and a publisher heard about it. And from there, it went on to a 30 year record with that particular book. It was followed by *Parenting Isn't for Cowards* and portions of *The Strong-Willed Child* and *Bringing Up Boys*.

Then I wrote *Life on the Edge*, which is a book to help young people deal with the more difficult and life challenging issues that they face between the ages of 16 and 26. So this is really a topic that I have dealt with over the years, almost a lifelong interest for me. And still, there is so much more to be said in a changing world. And so we're going to talk about raising teenagers again today and taking a fresh look at that with two guests who are with us. Shaunti Feldhahn is back with us and Lisa Rice. Shaunti needs no introduction to our listeners. She's a public speaker, the author of many best-selling books, including *For Women Only: What You Need to Know about the Inner Lives of Men* and a companion

book, *For Men Only*. And it's a pleasure to have Shaunti back with us. Welcome back.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Thanks, Dr. Dobson. I appreciate that.

Dr. James Dobson: Lisa Rice is a screenwriter, a youth speaker, and a leader. She's also a wife and a mother and a professional analyst. We want to talk about what that means. And together, the two of them have written two books *For Young Women Only: What you need to know about What Guys Think*. So we welcome both of you. Lisa, this is the first time you've been with us. I'm glad to have you here.

Lisa Rice: Thanks for having me.

Dr. James Dobson: How did the two of you meet? How'd this collaboration come about?

Shaunti Feldhahn: Well, you know what? We actually lived across the street from each other.

Dr. James Dobson: Really?

Shaunti Feldhahn: Yeah. We were friends from church. I bought the house across the street from her with Jeff when our daughter was imminent and we got to be best friends and then they rudely moved away.

Dr. James Dobson: And you were telling me, Lisa, that you have the house on the block where the teenagers come.

Lisa Rice: That's right. We're the Kool-Aid family. And it's actually your fault, Dr. Dobson. We always tell people that because ...

Shaunti Feldhahn: Yes, they do.

Lisa Rice: About, I don't know, 10 or 12 years ago, I was listening to one of your broadcasts and I was just minding my own business and you were talking about orphans and you were talking about kids of divorce and about how they're feeling isolated and angry and how they need a lot of extra tender love and care. And at that time, the Lord put that burden on my heart to just take in these kids and to sort of be an orphans and widows family. And my husband was in total agreement. And we said, when we have kids and when they're up, we want to be that family. And so we have done that. We have a big house with a revolving door with billions of kids that come in and out.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Yes, they do.

Dr. James Dobson: So when you're talking about orphans, you really mean children in the vicinity, in the neighborhood whose parents maybe don't have as much time for them as they should and who are just kind of lost.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Let me give you an example. I have to brag on my friend here because literally, I mean, she's the mom that if a kid misses the school bus and his parents have gone to work, they'll say, "Mrs. Rice, can you take me to school so that I don't get a tardy mark?" And she'll say, "Sure, hop in the car" and drive them to school. Or they're these sweet kids whose parents unfortunately just kind of don't keep track of them much and they're always over at their house. And "can I help you with the chores?" And I mean, it's truly, it's like their home is the home for every kid in the neighborhood and all of their friends.

Dr. James Dobson: When I was growing up, there were many parents like you in the neighborhood who watched out for us, who cared for those who were neglected. And if I ever did anything wrong, you can bet my mama's going to know about it by the end of the day. So it was kind of a shared responsibility. Now, boy, you're all on your own in most neighborhoods, aren't you?

Lisa Rice: You really are and it's really sad. A lot of these kids actually haven't gotten basic counsel about their college options. We're just shocked at how little attention some kids get. It's very sad.

Dr. James Dobson: All right. Let's get this clear. I said that you're analysts, you are not a psychoanalyst, you are not psychologists, you are not counselors. You analyze data. You look at the facts and you write about research findings and interviews and things that you discover experientially, right?

Shaunti Feldhahn: Yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: So this book is not a book written by those who have an academic career in teenage life, right?

Shaunti Feldhahn: This is real life. Yeah. No, honestly, the thing that was so interesting about our backgrounds is that we both basically have this analytical background, including graduate work, that allows us to sort of take ... I mean, it could be analyzing the stock market or whatever. Like I used to work on Wall Street as an analyst and taking that same experience to figure out, okay, what's making large Japanese banks tick and applying that same experience to what is making our kids tick? What's going on underneath the surface? And it's really interesting how well that transfers into investigating this stuff. And it's also really fascinating, honestly.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, let's weave our way through some of the observations that you all have made and some of the suggestions and advice that you would offer. And I'd like to start with the issue of freedom. You talk a lot in this book about the way teenagers feel about freedom. This is not a casual thing for them at all. This is a passion, an obsession to be their own person and to stand on their own. That is both a challenge to parents. It is cherished by teenagers and it scares moms and dads half to death. There's the point of conflict there, right? Talk about freedom.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Well, one of the things that a lot of parents really don't realize is that, I mean, thinking about it, this is the first time in a kid's life that they've really been able to do things on their own. I mean, think about it. If they wanted to go somewhere, they couldn't go anywhere without you. I mean, so they're finally getting the feeling of being able to do things on their own and it's addictive. And actually one of the big things that parents don't realize, they're terrified of losing it. So a lot of the things that you see as a parent, you see this behavior and you think, "Oh, that's rebellion or that's a bad heart." You know what? It could just be a kid who's really scared of losing this wonderful feeling of freedom that they've gotten for the first time.

Dr. James Dobson: But parents are scared too.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Oh yeah.

Dr. James Dobson: Because there are things being demanded that they're not ready to grant. And so the possibility of them getting into all kinds of difficulty and leaving the faith and doing immoral things, all of that looms under the heading of freedom.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Well, that's one of the reasons why when we were doing this research and asking the kids ... Now remember, what we were doing was entirely asking the kids what's going on in their heads and trying to understand where they were coming from. And that's the thing that we were really interested to find. It's scary for the parent, but you know what? It's actually really scary for the kid too. I mean, this is a time that they want this freedom and they can't get enough of it and they will sometimes do whatever it takes to keep it, including deceiving themselves and deceiving you as a parent, but they know. They told us point blank, they know they don't know how to manage that freedom well yet.

Dr. James Dobson: This is why a driver's license is so very significant because that represents the biggest step toward being free, doesn't it? I mean, this is why kids, I mean, they long for that. And again, it scares parents. I remember when Danae took her first solo flight and it scared me to death. And to have that car come to a controlled stop was a real thrill. And I handed her the keys that first time and on the way back to the house, I said, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away." And I just could envision all kinds of problems, but that is an issue of freedom.

Shaunti Feldhahn: It's huge. And you know what? And this is something that a parent may not realize because I sure didn't. You know what the kids told us is it's not just the freedom for the sake of freedom, although that's a big deal. And it's not just doing what they want to do when they want to do it, although that's definitely a big deal. One kid basically said, "You know what? When I got this certain freedom like driving or my cell phone, I felt suddenly like a real person." I mean, imagine once a kid feels that way, they say, "I can't imagine living without that." And so that is the reason why parents see some of these things like as rebellion, as, "Oh, well, they were trying to hide something from us. That could be a rebellious heart." You know what? Maybe it is. Maybe there is a real heart issue.

It could just as easily be they were terrified you were going to take that freedom away.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah.

Lisa Rice: We actually did a survey question about this. We asked the kids, when you do something your parents would disapprove of like speeding or whatever, what is the best description for the reason you do it? Nine out of 10 kids said that when they do something questionable, it's not primarily because of peer pressure or rebellion against parents, it's because they're pursuing their freedom and their ability to do what they want to do. And this was true even with Christian kids.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay. Now, I believe that that's an accurate answer from the point of view of the teenager. I don't believe it is true. Teenagers are greatly influenced by their peers and whether they admit it or not, a good part of what they do is shaped by how their friends feel about that.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Well, but all their friends are out pursuing the freedom too. And you're definitely right. I mean, there has got to be something that they're not admitting to, of how much their friends shape them. Absolutely. I mean, we saw example after example of sometimes, and I hate to say it, sometimes there was positive peer pressure that a kid went against because they were going to pursue their freedom and what they wanted to do. And if their friend was saying, "Oh, maybe we shouldn't do that." If they wanted to do it, they'd still try to do it. And I was really amazed at how many times that sort of trumped it. Now, obviously we've all seen examples of where they give in to the negative peer pressure.

Lisa Rice: Just as an example of that, we had a girl admit that she was at a school dance with her friend and there was this dirty dancing going on and one of the Christian girls said to her friend, "Oh, don't do that. Don't go out onto that dance floor." And the girl admitted that she thought, "Well, my parents wouldn't want me to do this. My friend here is telling me not to, but I sure like that handsome guy out there and I'm just going to go." Again, you see how freedom was bigger than even the peer or the parent.

Dr. James Dobson: I think one of the toughest assignments in parenting, especially parenting of a teenager, is knowing how to let go, how quickly to turn loose, and when not to let go. I mean, you talk about tact and wisdom. That takes the wisdom of Solomon to do that. And if you are too late, they'll tear it out of your hands. If you're too early, they get into all kinds of trouble and difficulty.

Lisa Rice: They have to have the consequences. We can't just say as parents, "Okay, so they're freedom wired, so let them have their freedoms." I mean, it is important as parents to know what their favorite key freedoms are. To one kid, it might be the cell phone. To one kid, it might be their wheels. And we actually had a cool story happen right while we were writing this that perfectly illustrates kind of what parents can do about this freedom thing. My daughter, Sarah, called and

she gave us permission to share this. She called me and said, "Mom, there's been a tiny little accident. I'm at church. I just backed up into this lady and it's no big deal. It's just like a little light bulb issue and it's just a little crack or something and I'm just going to take care of it. You hardly even need to come over here." Well, of course, I went over there and found out that basically to make a long story short, she did 900 and something dollars damage to an SUV and my husband and I said, "Woo, light bulbs are expensive these days." And to make matters worse, she was on her cell phone and that's a big no-no in our family.

And so we were right in the middle of this research and we said, "Let's try doing this. Let's have a family meeting with her and talk about this." My inclination was just to yank the cell phone away forever. And after talking about it though, she asked us not to do that. She said she'd be willing to pay the \$960 worth of damage by working four straight months at her part-time job with no take home pay if she could keep her cell phone. And so we said yes. So she internalized the lesson really well, but no rebellion was sparked because her favorite freedom was intact.

Shaunti Feldhahn: Because sometimes, I mean now think about it, there may be times at which taking the freedom away is the appropriate response, but the thing that we're telling parents is figure out what your kid's favorite freedoms are and realize that to the child, that is the nuclear bomb of discipline and use it accordingly instead of, "Well, I'm going to take the cell phone away for a couple days and wondering why'd that make them so mad? That's no big deal." Realize that to them, that's their lifeline to being a real person, right? So this, I can tell you personally watching what Lisa did, Lisa and Eric did with Sarah, this child internalized this lesson, had no resentment. Can you imagine that she would choose four months at a job with no take home pay instead of losing her cell phone for two weeks? I mean, to me, those are not equal options, but she preferred that and she had no resentment and she really learned the lesson.

Dr. James Dobson: This takes me back to some advice I offered many, many years ago, but maybe it's still appropriate that this issue of transferring freedom to a youngster goes from one extreme to the other in the course of childhood so that when a baby is born, the parent holds all of the responsibility for the care and maintenance of a child. He can't hold his own bottle. He can't ask for a blanket if he's cold. He can't roll over. He can't do one thing. You have to do it all and he will die if you don't do it. So you are his slave. You are taking care of him in every respect. That's at birth. And then you come to the other end of childhood and he should be able to leave the home, earn a living, spend his money wisely, decide what a good diet is, avoid harmful things, immorality and who knows what the dangers are that are out there, but it's not your responsibility, it's his.

Now, how do you get from one extreme to the other in 18, 19, or 20 years? How does that happen? Some people live their lives and gear their child rearing practices. According to a philosophy, if you wait till the last two weeks of adolescence and then suddenly dump it all on him, and he sometimes goes

crazy with that. I've seen youngsters come all the way through high school and they go off to college and they just go nuts because they have never dealt with responsibility at all. So what's your task as a parent? It is to begin transferring that responsibility step by step by step. You give the child what he is ready to carry. If he can tie his shoes, you don't tie them for him anymore. He ties them. If he can make his bed, he makes his bed, you don't make it for him.

You're transferring to him responsibility and freedom that goes with it. And so it's an orderly transfer when it's done right. It's easier to sit here and talk about than it is to do, but it is the essence of good parenting from my point of view. You agree Lisa?

Lisa Rice: Absolutely. I do. Absolutely. It's letting that kite string out a bit by bit as they can handle it.

Shaunti Feldhahn: And to realize, honestly, that what's going on in their heads is they will take it. I mean, they will take that kite string if you don't let it out. The kids, I hate to say it, even the good Christian kids admitted, you know what? They'll find a way to do what they want to do if they don't feel like mom and dad are trusting them with these things. And so that's where it's our job to help them manage that well.

Dr. James Dobson: Erma Bombeck. You remember Erma Bombeck?

Lisa Rice: Oh yes.

Dr. James Dobson: Great writer. I loved her work and she wrote a book called, *If Life is a Bowl of Cherries, What Am I Doing in the Pits?* And I just remember one story, I believe that was in that particular book of the kite. And she said that letting the get go is a matter of letting the string out. And the farther you go, you realize you don't have much string left and you start to worry about it and you start hanging on and the kite begins to tug at you. And finally you're to the end of the string and you have your arm up in the air and you're holding on to the tip of that string and it's pulling and it's tugging. And then one day you let go and it soars free as a bird into the blue sky the way it was intended to be. That's how it's supposed to happen. But you start grabbing the string for a 14 year old or 15 or 16 year old and it's going to cause you grief.

Lisa Rice: Very true. Very true. And one of the huge things that was so fantastic during the middle of this research that we found that's a huge help, I think for parents, is that right around that age of 16, 17, if we can, as parents, move them from the fear of mom and dad to the fear of God, this whole freedom thing will work itself out. We had a situation where my kids said, "Dad, we want to do something." I can't even remember what it was. And my husband said, "Oh, you know your mother wouldn't like that." And I said, "Oh, it's not about me. They're not going to stand before me one day." And that night the girls came and they said, "Would you pray with us about this and that?" And I saw that the

conviction of God had come on their hearts and it was no longer, I thought, wow, if they can move from being scared of us and our rules and what we'll think to fearing God, this is our key.

Roger Marsh:

Both parents and children alike must have a healthy fear and reverence for our holy God. And when we as parents can help our teenagers move from fearing mom and dad's rules to fearing the Lord, well, that really changes everything. You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk and a conversation Dr. Dobson had with authors, Shaunti Feldhahn and Lisa Rice. Now, if you missed any part of today's broadcast or if you want to share it with a fellow parent who's in the trenches like you are, go to jdfi.net. And if today's discussion has you thinking more deeply about the parenting journey ahead, I want to point you to a free resource that can help. We've developed a special 10-day email series called "Raising the Strong-Willed Child." Of course, it's based on Dr. Dobson's landmark book with that same title. Whether your teenager is testing every limit or your younger child is already showing that independence streak.

This series is packed with practical wisdom to help you lead your kids through even the toughest seasons. To sign up, remember it's absolutely free. Just go to jdfi.net and search for that title, "Raising the Strong-Willed Child." And before we leave the air for today, I want to take a moment to thank you as a friend and a partner of this ministry who helped make the James Dobson Family Institute possible. Every broadcast you hear here on Family Talk, every article that you read, every resource on our website, all of it exists because of generous folks just like you who step forward and pray for us and provide support for this work. Your donations help us promote and preserve the institution of the family. You help us share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others and equip parents with biblical truth they can put into practice today and every day.

If you believe in that mission, I encourage you to join our team. You can join us by giving a gift of any amount when you go to jdfi.net. You can also call us at 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. Or if it's easier, if you'd prefer to drop us a line, you can 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. Once again, our ministry mailing address is Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, or you can just use those initials JDFI for short. P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80949.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh and from 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 right here next time for part two of Dr. Dobson's powerful conversation with Shaunti Feldhahn and Lisa Rice, continuing their discussion on what parents need to know about teenagers. 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.

Dr. James Dobson:

Does divorce make people happier?

Roger Marsh: With today's Dr. Dobson Minute, here's Dr. James Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: The Institute for American Values in New York studied 5,232 married adults on many variables and identified those who reported themselves to be unhappy. Then five years later, many of those unhappy couples were interviewed again. The results of these interviews were astounding. They revealed that a full two-thirds of the unhappily married spouses who remained married were actually happier five years later. Surprisingly, the opposite is found to be true for those who divorced. Researchers confirmed that divorce frequently fails to make people happy because it introduces a host of complex new emotional and psychological difficulties. This study debunks the modern myth that someone in a troubled marriage is faced with a choice between either staying in a miserable relationship or getting a divorce in order to be happier.

Roger Marsh: For more information, visit drdobsonminute.org.