



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** The 40-Year War on the American Family

**Guest(s):** Suzanne Venker

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Dr. James Dobson: You're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I am that James Dobson and I'm so pleased that you've joined us today.

Roger Marsh: Well welcome to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh and on today's program, we're going to hear a little slightly different format. Instead of hosting a guest in our studio, Dr. James Dobson himself is the special guest, this time on the Suzanne Venker Show, where he'll be sharing insights from his decades for advocating for the American family. For nearly 50 years, Dr. Dobson had been sounding the alarm about serious threats facing our family. In this enlightening conversation with Suzanne Venker, he'll discuss how issues like abortion, divorce and fatherlessness have deeply impacted our society. As a mother and family counselor herself, Suzanne Venker brings valuable perspective to their discussion about raising boys in a culture that often seems hostile to masculinity. Together they'll be exploring the fundamental difference between boys and girls, the critical role that fathers play in healthy development and why understanding these distinctions matters now more than ever before. Here now is host, Suzanne Venker with her special guest Dr. James Dobson, on today's edition of Family Talk.

Suzanne Venker: Welcome to the show Dr. Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: Suzanne, I am delighted to be on your program. I've been following your career, the things you write, the things you do, and I'm a fan of yours.

Suzanne Venker: Well, so am I of you. And it's been one of the reasons why I wanted to have you on. So, we're going to talk specifically, of course, today about raising boys in a culture that's very hostile to men and masculinity. And there are parents who are literally at a loss as to how to make their sons feel as worthy and as valued in this society as their daughters, which is a topic that is literally never discussed.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, some things are eternal and it doesn't matter what the culture does. There are some things that are right, and some things that are wrong. One of them is that boys and girls are different, very different. And many women, especially who are raised without brothers, don't know that there is this vast difference. And they've been taught that the only differences between them is the ability to

bear children. The truth of the matter is a little boy in the womb is bombarded by testosterone that changes his brain and the girls of course are bombarded by estrogen. And that is... just makes the world a difference. And if you don't know that, then you wonder "what's with these little boys? What's going on here? I don't understand him." Speaking of how many women feel. So, I wrote the book *Bringing Up Boys*, and that's been a very successful publication of mine.

Suzanne Venker: I believe that a mom's job with a boy is pretty much done by the age of 12 or 13. And that's a little bit of extreme by saying, "done." But, what I'm trying to say is that at that point, you become, as the mom, less of the profound influence and the man at that point or the father steps in and really becomes a huge force in the boys' life.

Dr. James Dobson: Between 18 months and 5 years of age, that transformation begins. It's often very threatening to a mother to see that she's losing something there in the relationship. It's because between those preschool years and then after, a boy really needs to begin to see that there are those and there are these. And I'm one of these. I remember when our son was five years of age, we would get in the car to go to a restaurant, we'll say, and Ryan, our five-year old would say, and he didn't mean this in an insulting way, he said, "Hey dad, the girls are going to sit in the back seat and I'm going to sit up here with you." It was his way - he wasn't lording it over his sister - he was saying, there's a difference between the two, and I'm one of those.

Suzanne Venker: There you go. Yep.

Dr. James Dobson: And therefore, the mother really is often threatened by this and tries to hold on. It's a mistake to do that. That transformation needs to take place. And if it doesn't, something is lost in his understanding of his sexual identity. That's controversial stuff, Suzanne, but development, I have a Ph.D. in child development and I'm telling you, that's what occurs.

Suzanne Venker: Oh, I don't disagree with you in the slightest. And I think that is probably one of, if not the biggest, problems in our society today that, A, they don't know what you just said is true, and, B, even if they did, they're not willing to talk about it. Because, of course of the culture we live in, that if you want to deal with something and solve it, you've got to say things that are difficult, very difficult to hear.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. They're two great developmental crises in a child's life, typically. We've just described one for a boy. The second is adolescence. The girl only goes through the second one because she doesn't have to transfer from the relationship with the mother to the father. So, there's less tension there early than there is for a boy. And of course, then they both go through a great crisis in the adolescent years when they're bombarded by different hormones.

Suzanne Venker: And one of the things I've heard you talk about, which I really liked, and 100% agree with, is that if you don't want that adolescence to be difficult, which it is for so many people, the best way to do that is to start building that relationship with your children from birth, in the early years. You want to talk a little bit about that and how they're connected?

Dr. James Dobson: Absolutely. Suzanne, it's really important to build a relationship of love and respect. You can't depend totally on strong, forceful discipline, that has to be there. My first book was called *Dare to Discipline*. I believe in it. But, there has to be more than that. And one of my colleagues, Josh McDowell, said it better than I ever will. He said, "Rules without relationship leads to rebellion." And when you get into the adolescent years, you have to have more than, "I told you so," that has to be there, but also to build a relationship. My parents did that and my father did that by taking me hunting with him. And things happened out there in the relationship between him and me that didn't happen any place else, in his showing respect for me, him listening to me and talking to me. I tried to do that with my own son, and then we found skiing, which was a wonderful way to build that relationship that I'm talking about. But, both of those ingredients have to be there. And if either one of them is missing, you've got trouble.

Suzanne Venker: This is one of the reasons why I love your books, because you can absolutely tell how committed you are to child development. Of course, that's how you started your whole career, I think.

Dr. James Dobson: It is.

Suzanne Venker: Yeah. And it's infused in your books with respect to not only how to raise children, but how to discipline them properly and that love and bonding component to that that is so integral to being able to discipline, that if you've established that trust and respect, you actually don't end up with a lot of discipline problems. And I think because of the way parents raise their children today, so vastly different from the way it used to be, they're not connecting those dots. That if you're not there to do the work in the early years, number one, that if you insist on being their friends, rather than their parent, these more modern ways of parenting are not going to work. And that's why you have so many problems in adolescence.

Dr. James Dobson: That's what I tried to get at very, very early in my writing career. I mentioned my first book. On the cover was a little triangle, you might call it a fulcrum, with a line going across from left to right. And at the left side, at the end of the line was the word love. And at the right end is control. And the key to everything is getting that in balance. If you tip it too far to where you are mean and aggressive and constantly punishing and demeaning them and all of that, you create one kind of problem. But, that tips the scale in the other direction. If you are so loving, if you will, that it makes you become permissive and you don't really have the leadership that you need, you create another kind of problem. And it tips back and forth. So, getting those things in balance is one of the really important tasks of good parenting.

Suzanne Venker: Tell people what you meant in *Dare to Discipline* when you said that, "The secret to discipline is action, not anger."

Dr. James Dobson: Now, that is so important. Many people try to control by getting mad and they yell and they scream and they threaten and all those kinds of things. That does not work with children. They really don't care if you get angry. The same thing is true for us. If you're driving a car and you're going too fast and the policeman stops you and he comes up and he doesn't have anything to do to you, but he can only yell at you. You just keep on driving. But, it's when he takes out that little book and that notoriously unpleasant experience of getting a ticket takes place, that you are influenced by what he has to say. It's the same way with children. When you say "do something" and they don't do it, you must take action. Not yelling and screaming. Screaming does not do any good, it's counterproductive.

Suzanne Venker: Okay. I want to back up a little bit, and I'm going to read something that you wrote that some might consider controversial, but I don't because I happen to agree with it. I can't remember where I read this, so, you can correct me if I got it wrong in any way. But, you said "There is no issue today that is more significant to our culture than the defense of the family. Not even the War on Terror eclipses it." So I guess I'm dating you just a bit, so this must've been right when everything was going on with the War on Terror. So, maybe we were in the throes of it when you said that.

Dr. James Dobson: The culture has been at war with the family for as long as I can remember. And it is really why I got into this field in the first place. I knew it when I was in college and that's been long time ago, where I shared with my friends, "the family is in trouble and we need to do what we can and make a difference." And that was before graduate school. It was before the University and all of those things that preceded it. Because the family is under attack and it is the ground floor, it's the foundation. The entire culture sits on that. And it has for 5,000 years. Our institutions, our government, our way of life, everything depends on - the next generation - depends on the stability of the family. And if you undermine it and if you weaken it and if you make it difficult for it to function as our government does and as the media and the culture at large, then the whole super structure can come down and that's what's happening now.

The family is falling apart, especially in the inner city. You think of these kids that are raised without fathers and their greatest influence are the gangs that are around them, it's disaster. The family is intended as a two person job. Suzanne, I'm considerably older than you, and it goes back before the 70's. The 60's were a disaster. The late 60's where everything traditional, everything that represented authority, everything that represented, what I consider to be the biblical mandate with regard to human life, all went awry. The sexual revolution came out of there. And we're still dealing with that today.

In 1969, if you can believe this, Congress, in its great wisdom, decided that those who were raising children, those who are feeding and caring for and

medicating their kids and making school lunches and binding up scratched knees, those that are investing themselves in that enormous effort to raise the next generation properly, those people that are doing that should pay higher taxes than those who are living together without benefit of marriage. And believe it or not, that became the law of the land, that families would be in a higher tax bracket. It's called a Marriage Penalty Tax. That continued to the Nixon era, the Ford era, Carter, Reagan, Clinton, Herbert Walker Bush, and all the way up to George W. Bush who's the first one to change that. And then of course, Barack Obama rolled it back to where it was.

So, the family has been in the cross hairs. It's been discriminated against. Why our government did not understand that everything depends on the strength of that family. But, in so many ways, it has been discriminated against, and the courts have made decisions that were untenable. And then, of course, the feminist movement came along and it was the Coup de Grace, which is what you've written about. So, it's been going on for a long time. And the family now is struggling mightily to survive.

Suzanne Venker:

And marriages, getting more to, specifically, to what I see every day with my coaching. If you just talk about marriage, moved away from the family, per se, just marriage itself, we know that marriage rates are down. So much of it has to do with the messages, in my opinion, again, you can correct me if you think I'm wrong, that boomers sold to their millennial children. And let me explain what I mean by that, because this is what I deal with, mostly, with my work, is this message that marriage is optional in life. You might want to do it. You might not. You might want to have children. You might not. But, the number one thing you should be focusing on is your education and your career.

And of course, this message is specifically given mostly to women because men are falling behind in school, and they're given no thought whatsoever to marriage and motherhood. So, that they map out their life, this is all they ever hear from day one, as though they are literally going to be in the workforce constantly their whole life. And they don't make space in advance for marriage and motherhood. So, they get stuck down the road, pretty much in their 30's going, "Oh, I forgot to get married." Right? And then all of a sudden their options are limited. And they, even if they do find a spouse, they have a really difficult time with the marriage relationship because they've spent 10 years of their life living solely for themselves.

So, let's talk for a moment about that vital role that fathers play and what happens when that relationship has been broken with a son, and if you want to talk about daughters too, that's fine too, as a result of divorce and father absence.

Dr. James Dobson:

It has a devastating effect on both sexes in a different way. Boys grow up often without a real understanding of what it means to be a man. How a man thinks, what his responsibilities are. All of the things that you have just talked about. Girls need their fathers as much as boys, but in a different way. For girls, the

relationship with the father is critical to self-esteem. When a father walks into a room, a girl's eyes light up, he is important to her in a different way. He's the first male to show her respect, if he does. To kiss her, to hold her, to call her his little girl and building her self-worth. There's something that she gets from her father that she does not get from her mother. They operate in a different arena. And you take the father out of the picture.

Speaking of boys, again. I often have single mothers say to me, "I hear what you say, but what do I do about it?" And the only answer is that you have to have a male substitute, whether it's an uncle or a coach, or a teacher, or a neighbor or somebody that will show a boy what it means to be a man and teach him the way men think. This matter of the family is absolutely critical... This is human beings. This is what we believe, and what we, the difference we make in the culture. So, I can't overstate that too much.

Suzanne Venker: And the result now with divorce today, again, going back to millennials, because they are right now between the ages of 25 and 40, and we're essentially, based on what we were just talking about, you have boy-men who are walking around, they're saying where have all the men gone because they won't grow up and they're still boys, because so many of them lacked a father in their life.

Dr. James Dobson: That's it.

Suzanne Venker: The women, based on that self-esteem and that broken relationship and not seeing what a good man looks like, are at a loss as to what men are even about. Where their role is with a man. And so, that, it should be no surprise if their marriages are strained and not working out because they'd really are, it's like, they're shooting blanks, basically.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, that is so well said, because what is a girl to do? She has that ache inside for our relationship with her father. If he's abusive, if he rejects her, what's a girl to do? She is going to look for it someplace else. And sometimes she finds somebody that doesn't have the right motives in the relationship. And sometimes she finds a guy who is himself disturbed and not a real role model, provider. So, everybody loses when marriage breaks up.

Suzanne Venker: No question.

Dr. James Dobson: Suzanne, I understand that you have two teenagers. Is that right?

Suzanne Venker: Well, now one wouldn't want to be called a teenager anymore. She's 20. But, yes. The other one is 17.

Dr. James Dobson: Describe your experience in motherhood, especially in the teen years. What comes to mind when I ask you, what were those years like for you?

Suzanne Venker: So, thank you for asking that. My husband and I have raised our children very counter culturally from day one. Very much so. To the point where we would get flack sometimes. And that was fine. But, by doing that, we firmly believe that they have become the phenomenal kids, that they are, one son, one daughter, because of it. And so, I'm a big proponent of encouraging people to raise their children, pretty much the opposite of every way the culture is telling you to do it. Which sometimes will mean going against what your friends are doing or what your family is doing.

So, just as an example, my 17 year old son, he's a senior, he had his first date couple of weeks ago. And he has been raised by a strong father and a very strong message "this is how you treat women." And it's very old school. We watched, they grew up watching *The Walton's* and *Little House*, and all of those messages were instilled in them their whole lives. So, it would never occur to him to treat a girl anything less than she should be. So, he picked her up the old fashioned way. He goes up and knocks on the door and talks with the parents, the whole nine yards. And he calls her, he doesn't text her. Just very old school way of dating. And I think that people will say, "Well, how did you do that?" Well, it's not really rocket science or magic.

It's just being aware that, as you said at the beginning, Dr. Dobson, some things just don't change and they are a part of how we interact as humans. And just because the culture says to do it the other way, doesn't mean you have to follow suit. So, go ahead and do things the old fashioned way. You can create a child who will become a strong, healthy, independent, respectful adult if you just don't do what people are doing today.

Dr. James Dobson: I consider what you just described as absolutely common sense about how to do things. And yet, we're just off into never, never land with the things that don't work.

Suzanne Venker: And people want to label that as being a conservative or give it some other name. Well, it's not that I'm not per se. It's just that that's not even the right word. My husband says exactly what you just say, "It's not conservative. It's just common sense."

Dr. James Dobson: It is for a fact. And if you go back 75 years, the experts began saying things that were ridiculous. I won't even start to describe them, but I could. Because we have departed from traditional wisdom. I think it has a biblical base and that's my orientation, but it still works and it still makes sense.

Suzanne Venker: And I don't believe in messing with anything that works. That's my theory.

Dr. James Dobson: I have enjoyed talking to you today. You got a new book coming, don't you?

Suzanne Venker: I do. So, it just came out about a month ago. It's called, *How To Be a Wife: Seven Secret Steps to a Peaceful and Passionate Relationship with Your Man*.

Dr. James Dobson: You'll get some flack on that, won't you?

Suzanne Venker: Oh, sure. Oh, sure. But see, it follows the coaching that I do. I work with wives who are practically giving up on their marriages because they were just never taught how to bring out the best in a man, so that you can get the strong marriage that you want. And you just have to get out of that cultural place to be able to absorb the information. And typically when people are realizing that what they're doing is not working, that's pretty much when they call me.

Roger Marsh: You've been listening to a special edition of Family Talk featuring a conversation between Dr. James Dobson and host Suzanne Venker of the *Suzanne Venker Show* about the challenges facing today's families. Their insights remind us that while cultural trends may shift, timeless principles for raising healthy families remain. Now if you missed any portion of today's broadcast or if you'd like to share these important perspectives with a friend, you can go to [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk). That's [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk).

And if you're looking for daily inspiration to strengthen your relationships, I want to remind you about the free reading plans available on the Bible app by YouVersion. Whether you are waiting in that carpool line or taking a quiet moment before bedtime, these brief devotionals from Dr. James Dobson offer practical wisdom for your family's journey. To get started, simply open the Bible app and search for Dr. James Dobson. You'll be glad you did.

Well I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of Dr. Dobson and all of us here at the JDFI, thanks so much for listening. 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.

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