

Grace, Trust & Adult Children

Dr. Kathy Koch on Releasing Control, Listening Longer, Healthy Communication, and Hoping in God

Program Summary

In this Thursday edition of Mark & Friends, guest host Donna Leland talks with Dr. Kathy Koch about the changing relationship between parents and their adult children. Kathy explains that while parent and child remain lifelong nouns, the active verb of parenting must change once children become adults. Rather than controlling, correcting, or continually directing, parents can become supporters, guides, mentors, coaches, helpers, and cheerleaders. The conversation addresses adult children who have stepped away from faith, parental regret, in-law relationships, grandchildren, communication, and the difficult work of releasing grown children to God. Kathy encourages parents to give themselves grace, avoid judging yesterday's parenting with today's wisdom, pray that God will place faithful people in their children's lives, share their own faith authentically without constant pressure, listen longer, use 'I' statements rather than accusatory 'you' statements, and remember that hope ultimately belongs in God rather than in ourselves or our children.

Key Takeaways

Parent and child remain lifelong identities, but the active work of parenting must change when children become adults. Adult children often experience unsolicited parenting as disrespect; support, guidance, mentoring, encouragement, and availability usually serve the relationship better.

Parents may need to rediscover an identity larger than being Mom or Dad in order to release control in a healthy way. Looking back can help when it reminds me of God's faithfulness, but the past should inform me rather than control me. I should not judge yesterday's parenting harshly with wisdom and maturity I did not yet possess at the time.

When adult children step away from faith, prayer can include asking God to bring other trustworthy believers into their lives.

My own authentic story of what Jesus is doing in me may communicate faith more effectively than repeated pressure about church attendance.

Loving a son- or daughter-in-law begins with honoring my adult child's choice and intentionally getting to know the person they love.

With grandchildren, different does not automatically mean wrong; grandparents support and encourage rather than resume the role of parent.

Listening longer and listening to understand can lower defensiveness and make later conversation more relevant.

'I' statements communicate my feelings more responsibly than accusatory 'you' statements.

My hope cannot finally rest in my children or in my own parenting; I can release them to the God who loves them more perfectly than I do.

Scripture References

Proverbs 22:6, James 1:19, James 4:8, Philippians 4:6-7, 1 Peter 5:7, Ephesians 4:29, Colossians 3:12-14, Romans 12:18, Psalm 103:13-14, Lamentations 3:22-23

Quote of the Day

"We can't hope in our kids. We can't hope in ourselves. But we can hope in God."

Broadcast Notes

Donna introduces a topic close to her heart: relationships with adult children. Dr. Kathy Koch explains that parents remain parents as a noun, but once children are adults they should not continue 'parenting' as a verb unless help is requested. She recommends shifting toward guiding, coaching, supporting, mentoring, influencing, helping, and cheering. The conversation then addresses parents whose adult children have distanced themselves from Christian faith. Kathy acknowledges the grief and urges parents not to judge their earlier parenting with today's greater wisdom. She encourages honest apologies where appropriate, grace for parental imperfection, and prayer that God might use

friends, coworkers, coaches, or other believers to reach an adult child. Rather than repeatedly asking about church, parents can share naturally what Jesus and Scripture are doing in their own lives. The discussion moves to in-laws and grandchildren: honor the marriage, intentionally get to know new family members, look for what is good, remember that different is not always wrong, and recognize that grandchildren are not the grandparents' children to parent. Kathy closes with communication practices: listen longer, ask for more of the story rather than interrogating, listen to understand rather than judge, and use 'I' statements to express concern or disappointment without accusing. Donna reflects that parents are not God and cannot guarantee outcomes. Kathy agrees and points listeners toward grace, prayer, hope in God, and a deliberate release of adult children into His care.

Practical Applications

Before giving advice to an adult child, ask whether help was requested.
Replace one controlling question with a supportive statement or sincere word of encouragement.
Give myself grace for a parenting decision I made with the wisdom I had at the time.
If an apology is appropriate, acknowledge specifically where I now see that I could have given more grace or space.
Pray for God to place trustworthy Christian friends, coworkers, mentors, or neighbors in an adult child's life.
Share one authentic story of what God is teaching me without turning it into a sermon directed at my child.
Look for something genuinely good to affirm in a son-in-law, daughter-in-law, or extended family member.
When I disagree with how grandchildren are being raised, first distinguish between 'different' and truly harmful.
Practice listening longer: when my adult child stops talking, invite more context before offering my response.
Rewrite one 'you' statement as an 'I' statement that owns my feelings without assigning blame.
Verbally release my adult children to God and remind myself that He loves them more perfectly than I can.

Today's Challenge

For seven days, practice the phrase 'listen longer.' In one conversation each day, resist the urge to correct, interrogate, solve, or immediately tell your own story. Invite the other person to keep talking and listen to understand. If the conversation involves an adult child, end the day by praying: 'Father, I release my child to You. Help me love faithfully without trying to be You.'

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for the children and family relationships You have entrusted to me. Give me wisdom to recognize when my role needs to change. Help me release control and become a source of support, encouragement, grace, and prayer. Forgive me where I have spoken too quickly, judged too harshly, or tried to carry responsibilities that belong to You. Keep me from judging my past with wisdom I did not yet have, but give me humility to apologize where an apology is needed. Teach me to listen longer and to understand before I answer. Help me honor the people my adult children love and give me discernment to know the difference between what is merely different and what is truly harmful. When I am afraid for an adult child's faith or future, remind me that You love that child more perfectly than I ever could. Place faithful people in their path, draw them toward Jesus, and help me share my own faith authentically without pressure or manipulation. I release my children to You again today. My hope is not in my parenting, not in my children, and not in myself. My hope is in You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

About Today's Speaker

Dr. Kathy Koch is an author, speaker, and founder of Celebrate Kids, a ministry that equips parents, educators, and families with practical, faith-centered tools for understanding and encouraging children. Her work emphasizes identity, relationships, communication, character, and helping families respond wisely to cultural pressures. In this Mark & Friends conversation, she applies those principles to the adult-child relationship, offering parents practical guidance for releasing control, communicating with respect, extending grace, navigating in-laws and grandchildren, and trusting God with the lives of grown children.

About Today's Host

Donna Leland is a longtime member of the Great News Media radio family and regularly serves as guest host of the Thursday edition of Mark & Friends. With a warm, conversational interviewing style, Donna welcomes authors, ministry leaders, teachers, and guests whose stories and resources can encourage listeners in their walk with Jesus. Her Thursday conversations are an important part of the Mark & Friends weekly lineup and Great News Media's mission to

educate, edify, and evangelize.

Proofread Broadcast Transcript

Welcome to Mark & Friends. I'm your host, Donna Leland. And today we're going to talk about a topic that's very close to my heart.

It's adult children. Our guest today is Kathy Koch, and she has just released her book from Moody Publishers. It's called *Resolve Conflict and Find Peace and Hope with Adult Children*.

She's going to give us some strategies and also some conversations that I think is going to work for us today. Thank you so much, Kathy, for joining us on Mark & Friends. I'm happy to be here.

Thanks for your interest in the topic. Anyone who writes a book, it must come out of their lived experience. Can you take us back to the point when you had some information and you wanted to share it? That's a fun question.

Actually, yes, I come from a really solid multigenerational family. I grew up kitty-corner from one set of grandparents, and my dad cut a hole in the fence. I grew up about three blocks from the other grandparents.

I went to church with aunts and uncles, went to school with cousins. So I know the benefit of being surrounded by a family, and I'm saddened when I watch what's happening in our culture. And the number of stories I've heard, oh, my goodness, of, you know, adult children who have distanced themselves from parents, parents who have chosen to distance themselves from adult children, just has been really, really hard, really sad, the number of stories that I've heard.

So I was motivated to write the book as I saw that, again, culture is affecting family. Also, Donna, you know, I've been a published author for almost 20 years, and so my audience has grown up. So like my own followers who have been reading my books for years and years now have older kids.

And I've said, you know, Dr. Kathy, can you help me still? And it's been a real honor to write the book. It was hard, but it's a real honor. You know, you say that we as parents, we start off as being a verb.

And now we need to transition into another part of speech, the noun. Our children will always be children. That's their noun.

How do we make that transition? Can you explain some more about that? Yeah, I'd love to. I'd love to explain that. And yes, thanks for bringing that up.

You know, you'll always be a parent. Anyone who's listening who has birthed a child or been the dad, you know, you're always the parent. And your children are always the noun, the child.

Like I'm older and I'm still a child, even though my parents are with Jesus. Child is your noun. Parent is your noun.

But you can't parent verb unless requested when your children are adults. When they're 18 and older, whether they're living with you or not, when they've moved into that adult stage, they don't want to be parented anymore. It feels disrespectful.

And that's the main thing I've heard. Oh, my goodness. And all the interviews and all the interactions has been the number of times that adult children feel disrespected.

So what do we do, Donna? We guide, coach, support, mentor, coach, influence, help, cheer. What if we were their cheerleaders? So instead of parenting in an active sense, we are supportive and we're present and we're available to help. When they ask us for help, then we step in and we provide the kind of information that we think we should provide.

It reminds me of just basically a mentoring older woman, younger woman scenario, even in a church environment. We're not going to be barking orders. We're not going to be large and in charge in their life and trying to control them.

Who wants that kind of a relationship? We don't ever want that relationship. We don't really gravitate toward people who do that to us. So, yeah, that makes sense.

We wouldn't want to do that to other people. Right. And it's hard.

Right. Like if you're especially for the moms, if you're if you've gotten a lot of your needs met from being a mom, if you were especially like an over parenting mom, what we might call a helicopter mom, you were like super involved. Like I get that.

It was a good way to parent perhaps back in the day. But now you have to choose a transition. And you need you need to discover all that you are like you're more than a mom.

I write about that in the book, that if mom has been your only identity or your most important identity, then it is hard to give up that control and that being in charge. But it won't work. And they're going to distance themselves from you and then you'll have nothing.

So like to choose to be a support and a help and a coach and a cheerleader, that's better than nothing. Amen. Amen.

Amen. I think it in my estimation, it's like you poured so much time and energy and resources into these kiddos. It's like they are your masterpiece.

They are your life work. And then your life work, you know, walks off the wall and starts walking into traffic and hanging out with people who, you know, are blowing smoke on your beautiful masterpiece. And it's just it's so hard to let that go and trust the Lord.

Oh, it is. It is. And he's worthy of it.

He's worthy of our trust. Like if we look back, if we choose to look back and I usually say, you know, you look back only if it helps you move forward. Your past informs you.

It shouldn't control you. But you can look back and you can see God's faithfulness to your children. You can see how often he's answered your prayers for their benefit.

Maybe the answer was sometimes no. And that was actually good. So let's look back and remember that God's for us.

He's not against us. He loves our kids more than we ever could. And to rest in that takes real maturity.

And it really it does take faith. It takes a confidence in God, which is why so often in the book I recommend, again, reading Scripture for specific purposes with our children in mind and then praying and praying optimistically because God is a good God. Raise up a child.

We all know it the way they should go. When they're old, they won't depart from it. But, you know, it seems like before they get old, they depart from it.

Give some words of encouragement to parents who just are watching their kids just trash any kind of a Christian heritage that they were given. Yes. You know, Donna, first of all, I want to say that I'm sad with you.

I understand as much as I can the level of grief and concern and perhaps fear and anger that are being caused by your adult children's decisions to step away from faith, to no longer claim Christ as their savior, to no longer be in church perhaps. One of the things I want to say is that you did the best you knew how to do when you did it is my guess. Yeah.

Donna, I have met very few intentionally bad parents, right? Yeah. You know, you parent with the wisdom you have in the moment. You do what you think is right.

And it's okay if your kids are moving away. What I mean by that is don't necessarily beat yourself up over it. One of the things I read about in the book is that we look back with today's wisdom and we judge ourselves very harshly.

And that's not appropriate. When you raised your children, maybe you weren't even a believer. Or maybe you were a babe in Christ, if you will.

And you weren't all that enthusiastic about reading the word yourself. And now you are, you know, 10 years, 15, 20 years later. But to look back with today's wisdom, how many more, you know, radio shows have you listened to and sermons have you heard and prayers have you prayed and Bible studies have you attended that now make you live with some regret? But back when you parented, you probably did the best that you knew how to do.

So give yourselves grace. Forgive yourself if you need to. You know, talk with your kids.

If you're still in a relationship, you know, let them know, hey, I discovered now, you know, in my maturity that I could have parented you with more grace. I could have given you more space to discover how the world works rather than maybe you did feel that we controlled you. But can you believe that we controlled out of love? Like it wasn't that we didn't love you that caused us to parent the way that we parented.

It was the deep love we had for you. And maybe our inexperience. You're the guinea pig kid, right? Like Donna.

You know, the guinea pig kid who was a guinea pig when they were six and you tried taking off the training wheels. You know, that kid is still the guinea pig kid. And you don't know how to parent an adult.

You've never done it. And again, you don't parent an adult. You walk with.

You lead. You follow. You guide.

You support. So it is tricky. But I want to say, give yourself grace and space.

Don't look back with tremendous regret. Pray that your children will connect with other believers. You know, one of the things that every parent listening would love would be that they'd be the one to rescue, right? They'd love to be the one to rescue.

You know, you'd love to be the parent, the mom, the dad, the grandparent who says the exact right thing to get your kid back into church, right? Or you're the one who prays the exact right prayer and therefore your kid says, man, I've got to give God another try. And I hope it is you. Like that would be amazing for God to use you in that way.

But it might not be you and it's not about you. It's about your kids. So can we humbly pray that they would have a friend at work who turns out to be a believer, that they would have a coach at a community softball league or a player at first base who happens to be a believer, happens to be by God's design, and they strike up a friendship and lo and behold, that person admits that, hey, you know, I go to church and it's great for our age group.

Do you want to go with me? Like that would be amazing. Let's pray that. That's a beautiful prayer.

I love that. You know, I woke up. I've got a couple of kids I'm concerned for.

And the Lord just gave me that whole phrase of kicking against the goads. And I thought, that's right. That's what these kids are doing.

They were raised knowing the good things of God. You know, they tasted of people who knew the Lord Jesus personally. And it just feels like the season of life.

They're just kicking against those goads. Right. Right.

That's really a good statement. And, you know, that reminds me, Donna, to say to you and everyone listening, that your story can't lie. The Scripture can't lie either.

But what I mean by that is if you've got adult children who are resistant to, you know, why aren't you in church or, you know, I don't understand why you've forsaken the Bible when it used to be something that you woke up with and went to bed with. Like, can you help me understand what happened? We don't necessarily have to have those conversations. In fact, I don't think we need to say every time we see our adult kids, are you going to go to church on Sunday? Like, they know that you want them to go to church.

And let me remind everyone listening that it's not church that saves us. Now, we're called to worship together and we're two or more gathered. You know, the church is obviously significantly important.

And yet what's most important is a personal, dynamic, growing relationship with Jesus Christ. That's what we talk about, but we don't talk about it every time because they know what we want for them. And your story doesn't lie.

You can talk about, man, you know, could I tell you about the choir concert Sunday at church? Like, it was exhilarating to sing, once again, how great thou art and to look out at the congregation and watch some of them weep when they came to this deeper understanding of the greatness of God. I just want you to know, like, I'm still enjoying music. And I loved it when you were in kids' choir.

Like, you can add that if you want. But share your story. What's the last verse you read that was, you know, convicting? And you're just, you're having coffee with your daughter.

She's talking about what she cares about. You can talk about what you care about. And you don't have to end it with, you know, what verse has affected you lately? Yeah, just being authentic.

Just like you said, you know, sharing life. Let's talk about those kids who, you know, are walking in the faith and they're just, you know, functioning adults. But now they go off and they get married.

And they bring someone else back into the dynamics. How do we, you know, deal with the in-laws, the whole in-law, out-law situation? Right. Carefully, right? Carefully.

I think, you know, if we're for the marriage, then we, you know, love is easier. If we were not thrilled that a son or daughter fell in love with someone that we feel, you know, is different or maybe not healthy, then that's a different matter. But because we love our kids, we choose to honor them by getting to know the person.

And hopefully love will be the result of that. You know, the in-laws, the sisters and brothers of the person that our kids marry, all of that can be complex. And, you know, we don't love overnight.

We don't love overnight. That's not realistic. But we can like them and we can choose to get to know them to honor our sons and daughters.

That's what they want to see. Again, the level of disrespect they feel is really strong, even though you don't think you're disrespecting. So they get married.

You're going to have, you know, Easter, Christmas, Thanksgiving, birthday party, Mother's Day, whatever, Father's Day. You choose to sit next to the relative of your new son-in-law, daughter-in-law who you haven't gotten to know yet. And you say, hey, I'd love to get to know you.

You know, what's your life been like? Or, you know, what are your passions? Or, you know, what's your skill set? Or, you know, what gets you up in the morning? Like what do you think about? Like get to know them and let them get to know you. I think those are profoundly important things. And you're not looking to agree with everything.

Oh, Donna, right? Like our culture is, oh, my goodness. You don't have to agree with everything. And you don't have to get angry about everything.

What if we look for what we have in common? Yes. And what if we talked about the positive things? A friend of mine, I tell a story, just a really short story in the book about a gal I know who walks into a home. It might be her daughter-in-law's or it might be the parents of, you know, the son-in-law, whatever.

They're in a home. And they look to fan it. She looks to fan it.

She looks to find something she can be a fan of. And she might say, man, the flowers on your island are gorgeous. Are those from your garden? Oh, you're skilled at that.

The arrangement is just beautiful. You find something to fan, and that's your outlook. And now they're not afraid for you to come over because they don't see that you're quickly critical.

That's so true. I mean, you love your child, and they pick someone to love. And it will just only help our situation if we do the best we can with loving them.

Let's talk about grandkids, you know, these adorable little faces. How do we handle it whenever maybe we're not all that on board with how the grandkids are being raised? Yeah, really relevant question. There's a whole chapter, of course, as you know, on grandchildren, a whole chapter on, you know, when they marry.

I think, again, for the grandchildren, look for what you have in common. Look for what's going well. We have permission to talk about the concerns when we talk first about what is going well.

So we have to choose to do that. You might be legitimately concerned about their eating habits or how late you think your children let the grandchildren stay up or what they're allowed to watch, play with, or read. But one of the most important things to say, and Donna, this won't surprise you, is that they are not your children.

They are your grandchildren. So you don't get to parent them. You've already parented their parents.

Now you get, again, to support. You get to be a friend. You get to be sometimes a confidant but certainly a cheerleader of the grandchildren.

And I think, and what have I also said, Donna, that different isn't always bad. Different is different. Your children might choose different things for your grandchildren.

It doesn't mean that they're wrong. They're different. If they're really wrong, like if you're really legitimately concerned about habits and, you know, the ways they speak or whatever, you know, you can sit down with, you know, your child, maybe your child with the spouse and say, Hey, help me understand why you're allowing these habits to develop.

It just doesn't appear to be healthy to me. Don't say necessarily we didn't raise you that way. Again, that sounds very judgmental.

But just say, Hey, we're confused. Don't even say concerned. We're just confused.

Is this the generational thing? Do you think it's good for your children to believe that they can use their tongue that way? Like what's that going to get them? So you can ask questions. Sometimes we keep our mouth shut, and that's the most helpful thing we can do. Having my kids so close together, I would have loved to have somebody come alongside and do things for them that I didn't have the energy or the bandwidth to do for them.

And I feel like that is the grandparent role is to, you know, just provide that extra bit of love that these little kiddos can really use. You come up with some great communication tips and tricks. Can you share a couple with us? You already shared how to talk to the child concerning the grandchild, and that was a great tip.

Give us a couple more good communication tips. Yeah, thank you so much. You know, one of them would be to listen longer.

And I write about this in several of my books. When your adult children share with you about something that's going on at work or in a relationship or whatever, and they stop talking, then we have a tendency to start interrogating, right? And this is true even in friendship and even in marriage. You know, somebody stops talking, and then we say, well, what happened next? Well, how did your boss react to that? Well, why did they do that? So we ask questions, nothing terribly wrong with that, except that questions come across as being judgmental.

Questions will often suggest that we are doubting, and our adult children don't want us to doubt. They want to be confident with us. So listen longer and ask for more of the story.

Because the reality is when you know more of the details, then when you start talking, it will be relevant talk, and they'll listen longer to you. So rather than interrogation, you know, they stop talking and say, hey, keep talking. Well, what do you want to know? I want to understand.

So just give me a little bit more context. Or just I love my details. This is fascinating.

Or my love for you, yeah, I want to know more. Can you keep talking? So I think that's one important strategy, listen longer. And listen to understand.

Don't listen for your turn to talk. Oh, my goodness. Don't listen to judge.

Don't listen to critique. Try really hard to listen to understand. You do it, you know, because we're not parenting anymore.

We're guiding, we're comforting, we're supporting, and it's different. I'm also a huge fan of I statements rather than you statements. So, you know, you disappoint me.

Sounds right, very judgmental, and that's going to cause a lot of our adult children to kind of rise up and be defensive versus, hey, I am concerned when, or, you know, honestly, Jake, I'm disappointed when I don't hear from you day after day after day. Like I love you. Yeah.

And then let your son react to that. So I am concerned, I feel disappointed. Because, again, adult, you guys who are listening as parents, you have a right to your feelings.

You have a right to your feelings. I am concerned. I am disappointed.

You know, I feel somewhat angry when you say that you're going to respond and then I don't hear from you and then I follow up and then you accuse me of being in your business. I'm only acting like I'm in your business because you're not giving me the time of day. See, the you statement sounds much more judgmental.

So you disappoint me. You anger me. You let me down.

Versus I feel like I have a hard time trusting you. It's different from you let me down. So, man, it's hard.

Like practice in front of the mirror. Like, you know, I am disappointed when you don't follow through on commitments. And then don't say we raised you better than that.

Never. This is not about you. Proving yourself to be a good parent.

We just go into default mode of being, you know, just so defensive. That's how I feel I get. It's like, wait, you know, what are you talking about? You know, we gave you everything we had.

But again, it's not enough. And I think I'm coming to that point. It will never be enough because I am not God.

And I feel like that's what the Lord is showing me with all of this. You're not God. They have choices.

You did your best. But your best would never be good enough because you're not God. And I'm kind of resting in that truth.

What do you think about that, Kathy? Oh, that's so good, Donna. Absolutely. We are imperfect.

Our kids are imperfect. They're following so many voices and watching so many people nowadays who are influential. So, yeah, we've got to give ourselves a lot of grace.

And this is why we pray to God. We can't hope in our kids. We can't hope in ourselves.

But we can hope in God. And I pray that our listeners really know that in the knowing of their knowing, that he is the one who's faithful. And he is the one who loves unconditionally when for us that could be harder, certainly.

So, yeah, to give them over to God. In fact, in Chapter 1, I have a declaration of release where we actually verbalize that we release our children to God. Because on our own, our imperfections can cause great harm.

So let's let them rest with God. Thank you so much, Kathy, for being a part of Mark & Friends. And can you give us any details on how we can contact you? I know you've got a wonderful ministry called Celebrate Kids.

Thank you, Donna. Right. Celebrate Kids.

Our website is CelebrateKids.com. And you can find all of my books there. And we podcast six times a week. We'd love for you to follow us.

We have an email newsletter we'd love to send out if you want to subscribe. You can find that on our CelebrateKids.com website. Just connecting with people, just like you love connecting with people, we do too.

And great to be here with you. Thank you for the influence that you have in your area. Thank you so much, Kathy.

You have a great day. You too. And thank you, dear listener, for being a part of Mark & Friends.

We're a ministry of Great News Media. Don't forget to check out all the great resources. Also, the entire transcript of the Mark & Friends program, it's on the Mark & Friends tab.

Have a great day.