



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Marriage Survival Skills – Part 3

Guest(s): Dr. Gary Smalley and Dr. Scott Stanley

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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: Every marriage goes through periods where it seems like you just can't get on the same page and you and your spouse are constantly arguing. It's absolutely necessary for couples to tackle these conflicts in a healthy way and to fight for their relationships instead of with their spouses.
- Dr. Scott Stanl...: For too many couples, too much of the time, they go through their married life walking on eggshells, and there is a sense that they're in a minefield together. They don't know exactly when they're going to step on a mine next, but they know it's not too far from now. And what that leads to is an inability just to relax in your marriage. I mean, it's very clear what people want most from their marriage, it's a best friend and a safe haven, and that's the hope that we start out with. When you begin to associate the presence of your partner with conflict, that's just going 180 from what people want.
- Roger Marsh: You have tuned to Family Talk, a division of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh, alongside your host, psychologist and bestselling author Dr. James Dobson. In just a moment, we'll conclude Dr. Dobson's timeless conversation with Doctors Gary Smalley and Scott Stanley. Over the last two days, they've been addressing healthy as well as destructive ways conflict is handled in marriages. Their conversation is focused on Dr. Stanley's research, which followed hundreds of couples for 12 full years. Through this study, Dr. Stanley's team identified key warning signs that predicted which couples would get divorced and which would stay married. Today you'll hear Dr. Stanley and Smalley field genuine questions from couples who were in attendance that day. Let's get started with the first question for these marital experts on this edition of Family Talk.
- Speaker 3: My question is, and I hope I don't sound controversial, but how do you tie the two together where I was always taught that you don't sleep on your anger and how does that work with taking a time out or dealing with it at a later time?

Dr. Scott Stanl...: My sense of that is this, that if a couple has gotten practiced at really following up, when they've had to take a time out and maybe it's not a good time to talk, for example, I don't think most any couples should talk about anything important past 11 at night. I mean, that just doesn't make a lot of sense. If it's just not a good time, if they're good at following through that next day, "We said we'd talk at eight after dinner. Here we are. We're sitting down, we're talking." When people follow through, they're not going to bed angry because it's easier to lay it aside if you know it's going to be picked up constructively, but if you don't follow through, the whole thing falls apart as far as the value of time out.

Dr. James Dobso...: Yeah, that's wonderful. Anger in marriage is usually a product of frustration. There's a circumstance you can't abide. There are situations you just can't live with and you feel like you can't let it pass. Well, here is a mechanism to say, I'm not going to let it pass, but I don't have to deal with it right now, which reduces frustration and reduces anger and you come back to it when the biochemistry has settled down.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: Absolutely right.

Dr. Gary Smalle...: Plus you have the safety of knowing that when you do get together, you have a structured method that's going to keep you calm and eliminate all four of those basic factors for risk.

Dr. James Dobso...: Yeah. It's really not unlike conflict in society at large.

Dr. Gary Smalle...: That's right.

Dr. James Dobso...: If you and your neighbor live on the frontier in 1870 and there's no law, there is no sheriff, you are much more likely to fight with each other and maybe even shoot it out at the O.K. Corral than if there is a mechanism for coming to an agreement.

Dr. Gary Smalle...: That's right.

Dr. James Dobso...: You can't steal my peaches and I can't go in your garage and get your lawnmower. We have to live within certain rules and certain laws and they're needed in marriage too.

Dr. Gary Smalle...: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobso...: Okay, next question.

Speaker 6: Hi. It kind of hit home the defense about withdrawal. I think that's one that I would rather keep peace at all costs, and so when things kind of come up I might have a tendency to do that. How about a better way of handling that?

Dr. Scott Stanl...: A couple of things that are very important. One is on the female side of a male withdrawer, it's important for women to understand that men are really trying usually not to fight, and it's not that they don't care. It's not that they don't love their wives, just as you said, trying to keep the peace. Of course, the problem is this strategy is terrible because it really ticks pursuers off. I mean, it gets them very angry and if you want to not keep the peace, this is a great way to do it. Now the trick is this, and this is where safety comes in part, as Gary talked about, if as a couple you have times and ways to deal with conflicts constructively, withdrawers don't have near as much need to withdraw. Once that withdrawer says, "Well, I know what to do about this. I know how to handle this."

I know if I can gently move toward her and maybe not even doing the speaker listener technique, but I'm just going to start paraphrasing her. In fact, what does a really good customer service agent do at a department store if you come in angry? They listen. "Okay, so you're really frustrated that this thing broke after you used it twice." I mean that calms people down. That calms down the physiology, that gets things moving the right direction. If the withdrawer has a sense of something better to do, they can try to shift into it and that keeps it safer.

Dr. James Dobso...: Scott, I read some years back that what a man typically most wants when it comes home at night is tranquility.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: That's right.

Dr. James Dobso...: More than anything else. What a woman often most wants is ventilation and those collide.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: That's right. One wants to talk and the other ... And this is sort of the trick. I don't know how this is working out, maybe you have a comment with you and Norma. Many men will talk a lot more than women think they will if it's clear, it's a safe topic. So even if that man comes home, "I'm talked out. I don't want to really talk a lot tonight." If it's a sense of a conversation that's just this isn't going to touch any big issues, this isn't going to be conflictual, a lot of women could be surprised at how talkative men could be when it feels safe.

Dr. James Dobso...: I talked to a man who was married to a rather ill-tempered woman and he talked about the need to not irritate her. It was like being in a room with a very angry bobcat. You would move very slowly, wouldn't you? Very cautiously. You wouldn't jump at the bobcat because you get scratched across the nose or maybe worse. And so some of the withdrawal is a fear of that kind of conflict, which I really believe some men fear can become physical and they'll do something they'll regret.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: I think you're right.

Dr. Gary Smalle...: And see in our marriage with Norma and me, it's not always that it's reverse. I'm the one that wants to communicate and get this out in the open. She's more of an introvert. She's the one that has felt unsafe with me at times, so she will be the one that'll say, "I'm going to withdraw from this" and so she got good at that, but that doesn't solve the problem.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: That's right.

Dr. Gary Smalle...: So I've heard her say, who knows how many times that, "I'm fearful of you at times. I don't feel safe around you."

Dr. Scott Stanl...: Emotionally.

Dr. James Dobso...: Even though you've never been physical.

Dr. Gary Smalle...: No, I've never done anything to her like that, but verbally say, I can get energetic about getting something solved and get into an issue and get it exposed. And she doesn't always feel safe, but see, I'm always in front of the public on something and she doesn't always feel real safe with me. [inaudible 00:08:03] person I'll share everything and anything. Here's my bank balance this month. She's uncomfortable. She has more control about that, so in our conversations I will say, do the same thing with her. I'll just start talking about everything that's on my mind and she may feel a little uneasy and at times she'll say to me, "I feel very uncomfortable with you."

Dr. James Dobso...: After 30 years in this business, we can still learn, can't we.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobso...: Okay. Next question.

Speaker 7: Wanted to kind of build on the first gentleman's question and a little bit of what you've been already commenting on. First of all, about how men seem to need the rules of things to better deal with the problem. And with the panel of men, there

Dr. James Dobso...: [inaudible 00:08:46].

Speaker 7: ... Need for a woman's point of view. I'm not speaking for all women, but I know for myself the need for a woman to ventilate to kind of get to the solution quicker and not to put off the problem fearing that it will procrastinate and then you're still having to deal with your emotional state as tomorrow may come, and it's a busy world and things come in and especially with young children, there's not always the accommodation of a babysitter to take this time out, although it's necessary. Because for a woman, the emotional part just really does build up and I was just wondering, the timeout sounds really nice and it all sounds nice and manly and comfortable for the man.

Dr. James Dobso...: We have just been putting our [inaudible 00:09:36].

Dr. Scott Stanl...: The women show is tomorrow.

Speaker 7: There's an aspect of your cycle and your emotional state and the validation of saying she is emotional and she needs that at this time. So the timeout isn't a good idea, although both have to deal with their emotional state at the time as well. So if you want to make a comment on that.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: Yeah, let me comment about this and obviously this comes up a lot. It's really good that you're asking the question. It's an important question and just even on the physiological level, just to make this point. For men, their physiology starts to calm down as soon as they've pulled back. For women, their physiology really starts to roll then because that is very frustrating and I can get into a little more detail about how we teach timeout. We try to get couples to think about timeout this way.

Not only this idea, "Gee, we could come back and talk about it tomorrow." But timeout can also be used much like in sports to stop it when it's not going the right way and to shift gears and get going the right direction. So we teach couples that when one says, "I think we need a timeout here or why don't we take a timeout," that they have a choice they can make right then. One choice is to shift into communicating more constructively right then, right immediately just as what you're expressing you would often like but more productively so that it's not just going to go on and do something stupid in the relationship that adds to the damage. Or if they're both so hot or if one's so hot that there's just no way this is going to be a good time to recognize that if it's just a bad time, it's just a bad time and we better come back to it in a couple of hours or tomorrow.

Dr. James Dobso...: Scott, if one of the two can be mature and levelheaded, you can accomplish so much you, can't you?

Dr. Scott Stanl...: It helps a lot.

Dr. James Dobso...: If one of the two can parent the other. If a man coming home finds his wife just so intensely frustrated, the washing machine overflowed and he didn't call when he said he was going to and she's just so angry. If he can really just have the maturity to sit down and say, "I know there's a lot going on inside you, why don't you tell me?"

Dr. Scott Stanl...: That's right.

Dr. James Dobso...: And take the hit. So what? Take the hit.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: And you don't get to the other stuff if you're more sensitive to that anyway. If people can just be much more caring and, "How are you doing? How was your

day?" And listening to each other and listening for the frustration, then you don't get a lot of this escalation in the first place.

Dr. James Dobso...: The danger is when you're both in the same hot condition at once.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: That's right.

Dr. Gary Smalle...: And I think what she just said is that that wife has a very valid feeling.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: That's right.

Dr. Gary Smalle...: So that if I do take the time to say, "You are valid, I do want to hear your feelings, I do love you. Can we share it after dinner or if it's right now, that's great. If you needed to say it right now," that would be a form then of validating her.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: Yep.

Dr. James Dobso...: Okay. The next question?

Speaker 8: I'd like to remain anonymous about the question I'm going to ask you. My question has to deal with my in-laws. Excuse me. They've been married for 43 years and they have great potential, but I see when you talked about the negative interpretation, what could we do? What can I do? Or can we do anything to help them?

Dr. Scott Stanl...: I'll go back to something I said before just to be realistic about this because this is a very difficult problem. Nobody can change that pattern, but the person that has it. This is not something we can change about another because there's just no way around and through it. The filter is so great. However, sometimes if we have a good enough relationship with somebody, we see doing this with another, we can gently but steadfastly say things like, "I noticed you really got irritated there when she just came in and asked you for a drink of water. I don't get what that's about. Was there something about that that was negative?" I mean where we can sort of plant seeds of questions or maybe they're even telling a story. "Boy, you can't believe what he did the other night," blah, on goes the story and you're hearing this and you wonder where we can gently nudge or question. "I'm not sure why you're seeing that that way. That doesn't sound that negative to me or could they have had a different motive?"

Dr. James Dobso...: Scott, would your videos be helpful cold turkey for a family like that?

Dr. Scott Stanl...: We did devise the video set as well as the book to be standalone. We do these workshops and train others to do the workshops, but they do standalone. On something as specific as that, there's some in there on the negative interpretations, but that's not a huge portion of the videos. In some way I think

the book has more information on that that might be a little more potent. Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobso...: Okay, next question.

Speaker 9: My question is, my wife likes to come home and vent about a lot of things and what it ends up being is me wanting to rescue her, give her solutions, give her advice, letting her know it's okay, but giving her the solution to her problem so she wouldn't be hurt because of work or whatever. And I find out that she doesn't want an answer.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: That's right.

Speaker 9: And she just wants-

Dr. Scott Stanl...: She wants you to listen.

Speaker 9: That's right. She just wants to vent out and let me listen, but it's difficult for me just to listen, not to talk back, I guess. How do I get rid of that cycle?

Dr. James Dobso...: You've heard that one before, haven't you Scott?

Dr. Scott Stanl...: Absolutely. And in fact, we believe pretty strongly that for many couples, 80, we're just guessing here, but maybe 80% of the things that they believe are problems aren't things that need to be solved. They just need to be aired out and heard. In this case, it is very good that you two have gotten this clear between you that she really wants to be heard, she doesn't need you to solve things. It might help you to do sort of some minimal paraphrasing just, "Wow, that sounds frustrating." Or, "Oh boy, what was that like then? And it sounds like that was really a difficult part." Where you're just feeding back a little bit from her so you have something to say, but what you have to say shows that you're really actively listening and you're interested. And then the other thing you might try to do is shift your mindset to understanding that that listening is really doing something that you aren't being passive. You're doing something very powerful by listening.

Dr. James Dobso...: In the early days of my own counseling experience, when I was at Children's Hospital, there was a woman that would come see me when she was just ready to explode and she usually didn't have an appointment. She'd just show up because she was just so intensely frustrated.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: She was ready.

Dr. James Dobso...: And angry at her husband and so on. And I would deal with her in the wrong way and I would give her explanations and solutions and I found she'd just get madder and madder and, "You don't understand what I'm feeling." And then I realized as this gentleman has said, that's not what she came to me for. And so

the next time she came, I just said, "Well, tell me more. But that must really be tough. Why do you feel that way?" I just let her talk and after about 45 minutes, she'd take a handkerchief out of her purse and blow her nose and say, "I can't tell you, I appreciate you."

Dr. Scott Stanl...: That's right.

Dr. James Dobso...: "You have helped me so much today," and I hadn't said anything. I hadn't given her a single solution, but that's not what she came to me for.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: That's right.

Dr. Gary Smalle...: As a man, what you just said really communicates because you said two things that I thought were great. First of all, you said about 80% give or take of marital struggles and so on are just listening to your mate and understanding them, and that would solve the whole thing in the begin with. But you said the listening is something very active that a man can do that is helpful, and that does bring a solution to the whole problem. I have to know that I'm doing something and so it's always been in the past at times I'd be solving things.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: That's right.

Dr. Gary Smalle...: So I thought that was a great question.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: Yeah, very good question.

Dr. James Dobso...: Just being understood is helpful.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: That's right.

Dr. Gary Smalle...: Yeah.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: That's right.

Dr. James Dobso...: Not changing anything, just knowing another human being understands where I am.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: And letting people, if they're really upset, be upset.

Dr. James Dobso...: Next question.

Speaker 10: I've got a question related to if you're in a conflict and after all said and done, you still don't see eye to eye on an issue, do you have any advice for helping a couple get back together emotionally after that? And I assume I'm not the only one that's ever experienced that.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: Yeah, let me give you the context how I usually answer this question because we also teach a problem solving method that's pretty specific, and I'll just give you the highlight of it, which is we teach people to discuss first and then try to solve. So have a good problem discussion and not move to try to get solutions until they've had good discussions. And then there's some other steps that we recommend in that. But sometimes couples come to us and say, "We've tried this over and over again. We've done this, we understand each other perfectly, and we just flat out disagree. This one doesn't look like it's getting solved."

What I've suggested, which seems to help some couples move forward, which is this. Why don't you go back through and this time solve this question, what are we going to do to protect the rest of what's really great about our marriage from this issue that we can't agree about right now?

Dr. James Dobso...: Good point.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: To try to get the couple joining together with the problem now is this, not us, and we need to solve this to protect the us part. And that shift can really get couples going sometimes when they thought they were totally stuck.

Dr. James Dobso...: Especially on those absolutely unresolvable, non-negotiable issues. Are we going to have another child? Are we going to move? What are we going to do about your parents who have to come live with us? Or those kinds of things. They can tear up everything that's good.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: That's right. And you get that sense going of it's me versus you instead of us, and this is a way to get it back to what about us? How are we going to protect us from this dilemma?

Dr. James Dobso...: Next question.

Speaker 11: Hi. I have a particularly giving husband and he helped me through a really difficult year this year. I lost my father and he's got in this mode of protecting me and I'm ready to get out of that mode. And as I listen to you, I kind of think of it as a part of maybe he's withdrawing a little bit, I need to get on to the next phase, and he's got some issues that he's having to deal with and he's not sharing those with me.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: How is it that he protects you that's causing difficulty?

Speaker 11: I guess he would be overprotective of me in a lot of circumstances where he doesn't need to be anymore anymore. It's been several months and he's got some issues at work going on that we should be sharing together and talking about.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: Do you feel in general, like you two can talk about sensitive things or is it kind of hard to do?

Speaker 11: Yeah, we always have been able to.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: Then I think this is what you talk about next is how you're feeling that you want to change the mode again a bit and get free of some of this pattern where you really share together what's it been like to go through this time and how does he view the pattern. But one of the things that we see, and we believe real strongly that if it's not safe and it sounds like it's pretty safe for you two, which is really good, and I mean emotionally safe now. If it's not safe, couples can't talk about what's really going on. You might be able to tell real clearly what's going on because of the anger and the defensiveness, but they can't talk. But when it's safe, a couple can talk about just about anything in terms of if the commitment's clear and the love is clear and there's some skills to communicate well, I think I would bank on the sense of safety that you have to bring this up directly.

Speaker 11: Okay.

Dr. Gary Smalle...: Did I hear that you said there's some things going on at work, you'd like to share that burden with him?

Speaker 11: Right.

Dr. Gary Smalle...: But he's protecting you by not sharing those things, but you want to now reenter his world. Is that what you were saying earlier?

Speaker 11: That's right.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: Yeah. And that brings up another thing that comes out in marriage is people want to feel like they make a difference in the life of their partner and in some way that's a very positive way that you could maybe frame it to him is say, "I want to be helping you out again too here. I feel like you've been giving to me so much for a while here." People need to know that they make a difference to their spouse.

Dr. James Dobso...: Well, thank you so much, Scott.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobso...: This has been wonderful. Gary, I appreciate so much you bringing Scott and his work to our attention on the book and the video series that's been written, Fighting For Your Marriage, written actually by four professionals?

Dr. Gary Smalle...: Three.

Dr. James Dobso...: Three.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: Howard Markman, Scott Stanley, which is me and Susan Blumberg.

Dr. James Dobso...: Well, there's an open invitation to both you gentlemen to come back anytime you want to be here.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobso...: And the response of our gallery I think speaks for itself. They're an awful lot of people who can benefit from these understandings. Let's do it again.

Dr. Gary Smalle...: Thank you.

Dr. Scott Stanl...: Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Well, it is our prayer here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute that these three programs we've aired during the course of this week have ministered to you in your marriage. Conflict touches every relationship, and it's important that we all learn to deal with conflict in healthy and constructive ways each and every day. When you put that principle into practice with your focus on God, you really can change your marriage. Now, if you would like to learn more about the book called *Fighting For Your Marriage*, just visit our website at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. You can also listen again to any part you may have missed or you can share these programs with a family member or friend. Again, go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

Now, if you and your spouse would like a closer relationship with the Lord and with each other, be sure to sign up for our 10-day marriage series. It's absolutely free. To take the challenge all you have to do is visit drjamesdobson.org/tendaymarriageseries. Then simply input your email address and click on the signup button. From the day you sign up, and then for the next 10 consecutive days, you'll receive an encouraging email from Dr. James Dobson about how to strengthen your marriage. Now, the email will also include some words of wisdom from Dr. Dobson and some questions for you and your spouse to answer as well as a prayer to say together at the conclusion of each day's devotion. Again, to sign up for our free 10 day marriage series, all you have to do is go to drjamesdobson.org/tendaymarriageseries.

If you're a parent, you know that you pour so much of your life into maintaining your marriage and also the demands of daily life, but you also add to it the incredible weight of guiding your kids through this confused and turbulent culture that we're living in. To walk alongside you and better equip you with timeless biblically based advice and tools, Dr. Dobson has bundled two of his most classic books, *Bringing Up Boys* and *Bringing up Girls*, and put them together in one bundle that we'd be happy to send to you as our way of thanking you for your gift of any amount in support of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute today. It's easy to get your copy. Simply click the link on the broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. Again, that's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. Well, I'm Roger Marsh and I pray that God continues to guide you on your walk with Him, and that he will continue to

richly bless you and your family as you grow stronger in your relationship with Him. Thanks for listening. Join us again next time for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

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