



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Learning Styles – Part 2

**Guest(s):** Cynthia Tobias

**Air Date:** August 13, 2024

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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 back to Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Now, we know that our education system is far from perfect here in this country. And whether kids are in public schools or private schools or homeschooled, the ultimate goal in education is to give new generations of citizens the chance to succeed, survive, and hopefully improve our world. Listen to this quote from Abigail Adams, the wife of the second president of the United States, she once said, "Learning is not attained by chance, it must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence." Now, Abigail Adams never had a formal education, but she loved to read and that proved to develop her intelligence and her love of learning, which served her well as First Lady. Abigail Adams truly understood that there is real value in an education.

Now, today here on Family Talk, we're going to hear the conclusion of a classic program featuring Dr. James Dobson and his guest, author Cynthia Tobias. She's a best-selling author, speaker, and a noted authority on educational philosophy. Cynthia Tobias has studied learning styles for more than 30 years in her private practice, and she also served as a high school teacher as well. We'll also hear Dr. Dobson along with Cynthia Tobias answer questions from an in-studio audience about how to motivate a child, and also take a look at the church's educational responsibilities and the concerns about public schools. So now let's join Dr. James Dobson and his guest, Cynthia Tobias, right now on Family Talk.

**Dr. James Dobson:** Let's turn now to the gallery. We've got a gallery jammed with people today-

**Cynthia Tobias:** I see.

**Dr. James Dobson:** ... and see if any of you would like to ask a question or make a comment. If you do want to do that, please give us your name and where you're from, and then a brief question.

**Bill Crow:** Hi, Dr. Dobson. My name is Bill Crow. I teach eighth grade English here in a public school in Colorado. I'm from Monument, by the way. Cynthia, since

you're the expert in education, what in the world is wrong with our public schools today?

Cynthia Tobias: Boy, that would take a long time, but I can probably sum it up in one sentence. I think we're looking at the one-size-fits-all. We're looking for the one right way to teach kids to read, the one best way to teach kids to do whatever we want. Outcome-based education got a really bad name and it's a mess. I mean, we need to just dump that because it turned into a real monster. But the fact is education is still about outcomes. We need to figure out what's the point. Let's call it what's the point education. And if we just say, "All right, but what do we need our kids to know?" then I think we could do away with so much grief in the public and the private school system.

Dr. James Dobson: You taught in the public schools, didn't you?

Cynthia Tobias: Yes, I spent my whole eight years as a public high school teacher.

Dr. James Dobson: You miss the kids?

Cynthia Tobias: I do, but I get to see them a lot. I get to work with the teachers and, of course, inadvertently and indirectly affect a whole lot more kids.

Dr. James Dobson: I'm going to ask you the ultimate question for a teacher, did you cry on the last day of school?

Cynthia Tobias: Yeah. Yeah. I really miss those kids.

Dr. James Dobson: Me too.

Cynthia Tobias: Don't you? You wonder someday in Heaven if you can't roll out some of the videotape to show where those kids went.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, you get awful close to them after 10 months together, don't you?

Cynthia Tobias: If you're a good teacher, you sure do.

Dr. James Dobson: Thanks for the question. Next question.

Alan Scott: Hi. I'm Alan Scott, I'm a pastor, and wanted to know what do you say to us in Sunday school and Christian education concerning this? What kind of corrections would you like to see in the church?

Cynthia Tobias: One of my favorite groups to talk to are Sunday school teachers and workers because I'll ask them, I'll say, "Do you think that school makes kids feel valued, makes them feel good, makes them feel loved?" And of course the answer is usually no. And then I say, "Do you think on Sunday then that kids want another day of school?" And yet, for most of the churches and Sunday schools, that's

exactly what we offer them. We want them to sit still, keep the feet on the floor, more worksheets. I think if there should be one day of the whole week where a child is understood and accepted and accommodated, it needs to be at church. Because kids like me, the strong-willed kids, as soon as we get old enough, there's no reason for us to come to church. Why would we want to get beat up again for the sixth day when we've had to put up with it for five days?

Although there's no simple answer to your question, I think if anybody should hold the standard high, it ought to be those of us in the churches and in the Sunday schools who say to a child as soon as they come in, "You know what? God created you uniquely, and He loves you and I love you. Now, you bug me sometimes, but I still really like you, and I'm going to figure out some ways to show you what your strengths are." We need to be a place of encouragement on Sunday that they couldn't find anywhere else.

Dr. James Dobson: Cynthia, let me push you just a little bit. In the process of understanding kids and accommodating their individuality and meeting the needs that are there and lessening the requirements in an area that go counter to the temperament and the personality, there is still a need for discipline in the life of a child-

Cynthia Tobias: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: ... where on some occasions you ask him to do what does not come natural for him. You ask him to do what is difficult for him-

Cynthia Tobias: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: ... because you want to train those elements of self-control.

Cynthia Tobias: In fact, none of the understanding of learning style should ever take the place of discipline and structure. Again, you don't lower any standards of behavior. You don't let that kid get by with anything. But for instance, with the strong-willed kid, I have to tell you, one of my very favorite excerpts from your book, *The Strong-Willed Child*, it's stuck with me for years, the illustration you give of the police officer pulling an adult over. You talk about action meaning more than emotion and anger and how as an adult we're scared to death because this police officer, well, he's been nothing but polite and courteous to us, and yet we're still really scared. Why? Because the action he's about to take is notoriously unpleasant.

Dr. James Dobson: And he's under control.

Cynthia Tobias: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: He's not pounding on the hood of the car and crying and saying, "Why do you do this? Why do you drive too fast?"

Cynthia Tobias: Yes. "Are you a stupid person? Don't you realize what you could have done?" I really think that that's one of the keys. When we're honoring a child's style or a person style, we do it within that framework because they know and we know, hopefully if we're good parents, they know what the boundaries are and the parameters don't have to change. It's how we do it. You can have the best techniques in the world and if you don't have a quality relationship with that child, it won't matter. I've got a relationship with my strong-willed child so that there are some days when I just have to say to him, "I mean it, you just need to sit down and you need to do it now."

Dr. James Dobson: You have a lot of practical suggestions in this book, *Every Child Can Succeed*. Share the tattletale approach, the tattletale story.

Cynthia Tobias: It's one of my favorites.

Dr. James Dobson: Mine too.

Cynthia Tobias: This mother had come to me and she was so frustrated because she'd gotten to the point where she knew where all her kids were and what the styles, and she had a highly sequential little girl who had a highly random strong-willed brother. This little girl would come to her every day, maybe 15, 20, 25 times a day, "Mom, he did his. Mommy..." And tattle and tattle and tattle. She said, "I'm so frustrated. How do I get across to her that not everything needs to be told on?" We came up with the idea of buying... You can get a huge roll of tickets for like \$7 for 1,000 little admit one tickets. The mother gave the little girl five tattletale tickets a day. In the morning, you got your five tickets.

Now, she could tattle five times on her brother that day, and every time she did, she had to surrender a ticket. Now, if she had any tickets left over at the end of the day, she would be rewarded for that and she could bank them and have some prizes later. But what started happening was that she had to figure out, "Was this really worth a ticket?" I mean, because she only had five. What happened was she began to tolerate a lot more behavior and differences between her and her brother.

Dr. James Dobson: Next question.

Bethany Arkel: Hi, my name is Bethany Arkel, and I live right here in Littleton, Colorado and I'm age 14. I have a cousin who is 15 and is failing, and he has no desire to succeed. He's the one kid who is falling through the cracks. I am curious as a cousin what I can do to help motivate him.

Cynthia Tobias: One of the best things to do is get to know him. Do you know him very well? Do you feel like you know-

Bethany Arkel: Yes, we have spent many times together.

Cynthia Tobias: When you say he's failing, is he failing all subjects?

Bethany Arkel: Mm-hmm.

Cynthia Tobias: One of the keys is often if you have a kid who's failing everything, it's way too discouraging. The parent's first reaction is to say, "You've got to get these grades up." It's too overwhelming. I mean, I can't even think about getting five different classfuls of grades that I'm failing in at once. I would, if I were you, help encourage him to find one thing that he believes he could really do well. If you could even get his parents or teachers to agree to this, to say, "Forget about bringing all the grades up. Which one of these classes do you think is the most realistic first? I'm not going to worry about those others yet, we will, but let's start with a piece." It's way too overwhelming to just feel that you're a total failure.

Again, pull back to look at the strengths and just keep reinforcing that with him each day. We do it at home now with the little boys. I have a little routine that we go through. They'll come in early in the morning and I'll put an arm around Mike and say, "Hey, Mike, you know what I like about you?" and he'll say, "What?" He loves this part. And I'll say, "Oh, I love yesterday how you opened the door for Mrs. Parker. And you shared that new toy with your brother without being asked, I really like that." I told my husband that I feel like I'll know I'm a successful parent if you can stop my children at any time and ask them, "What does your mom like best about you?" and they could tell you. Because so often I wonder if you asked him today, "Hey, what do people like about you? What are your strengths?" would he even be able to tell you. And if not, as a mom, as a teacher, as a friend or a relative, maybe that's part of my ministry in his life and in this person's life is to say on a weekly basis at least, "Hey, you know what I like about you?" and just remind him of all the strengths that he has at work with him.

Bethany Arkel: Okay, thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: What does it do to that 15-year-old boy who's failing five classes for his mom or dad to get real mad at him?

Cynthia Tobias: A lot of it depends on his style. If he's the more compliant kid, he may just feel terribly guilty and he may just withdraw. If he's a strong-willed kid, it may just increase his resolve that they can't make him, they can't force him to want something.

One of the examples I give on a videotape called "Who's Going To Make Me?" is a parent who says to this kid, "These grades have to go up or else." And one of the things you need to do is you need to say, "Wow, an F in science, did you want an F in science?" And if he says, "Yes," then you have to back off because you can't at that point make him want another grade. So you say, "How about a D in English, did you want a D in English?" "No." "What grade did you want?"

"Well, have at least a C." "What do you think it'll take?" "A miracle." "Well, how about you and I try to work on the miracle together?" Again, getting around to you don't let him off the hook, you don't just let him not do anything, but instead of hammering at him, backing off a little and saying, "What do you think would motivate you?"

Dr. James Dobson: Next question.

Pam Chappelle: Hi, my name is Pam Chappelle, and I'm from Colorado Springs, and I'm the mother of five unique individuals. I have my-

Dr. James Dobson: What are their ages?

Pam Chappelle: They're 10, 8, 6, 5, and two.

Cynthia Tobias: Wow.

Dr. James Dobson: Why don't you write the books?

Pam Chappelle: No, no, I'm here for advice.

Cynthia Tobias: She's here-

Pam Chappelle: Right. My question is, what suggestions do you have for the child who does not fit in that one-size-fits-all classroom? Because I'm concerned for my younger children who do not fit that those unique gifts that they have are not going to get squelched and they feel bad about themselves.

Cynthia Tobias: There's a whole chapter dedicated in *Every Child Can Succeed* to how specifically to talk to teachers. I got a whole bunch of my colleagues, trusted teachers and colleagues, together and said, "You know what? Let's just write down some of our very best ideas of all times for how parents can talk to us as teachers without putting us on the defensive and without feeling like they're asking for special favors."

Dr. James Dobson: You said there are four words that teachers love to hear.

Cynthia Tobias: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: What are they?

Cynthia Tobias: When you take your child in to talk to that teacher conference, you say, "What can I do?" You say, "Robert doesn't learn like you teach. I think that's really good for him to get stretched that way. I'm wondering though, what can I do to help him understand how you teach and what can I do at home to build on his strengths?" Again, filling out a profile or even just writing a quick summary to each child's teacher that says, "Here are the things I'd really like you to know

about my child's strengths and learning style," and giving the teacher the opportunity to respond to you. A lot of teachers are very thankful for that because if they've got 25 or 30 kids, it's great that a parent has taken time to do a little homework and who obviously knows their child, each child, to present to the teacher just a quick little encapsulation or a summary, that will go further than you can even imagine.

I personally feel that homeschooling is like many things. It is a calling. I've talked to some wonderful homeschool parents, and it's so evident in talking to them that God has called them to this. They would do anything for their children, as all of us would, but God has called and equipped them to homeschooling almost as a ministry. I do believe that some of us who aren't called to it, we may falter. Like anything, it's not the answer for everything, but for those parents who have felt that this is what they're supposed to do, I believe that God will give them the strength and the wisdom in order to do the very best job they can with their children.

Dr. James Dobson: That might be an option for Pam, though.

Cynthia Tobias: It may be or a private Christian school. You have to, of course, sometimes get creative.

Dr. James Dobson: Next question.

Teddy DuPont: Hi, I'm Teddy DuPont, and I'm from Longmont, Colorado. That sort of leads into my question. It's very difficult now to determine what route to take as far as educating your child, whether to do homeschool or Christian school or public school. I have a 12-year-old daughter in middle school, seventh grade, and I was wondering, what are some things that I can do or that my husband and I can do as parents to support your child in this and help them grow as a Christian in a public school?

Cynthia Tobias: Well, of course, you're your child's greatest advocate. I've heard that many times on these airwaves. If you've done your homework and you've done the best you can in rearing your child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, it is important to surround them with love and with Scripture and with prayer. But I also think it's very important, especially at age 12, that your daughter understand herself and what her strengths are, how God has gifted her, and some of the drawbacks and limitations even. For instance, as a strong-willed kid, I need to know that I may have a propensity to get in trouble if I use my strength of will in the wrong way. It may be especially easy for me to do that depending on what crowd I fall into. Again, it takes more time, it's an exhausting proposition to be a parent, but the time that you can spend really helping your child get to know who she is and what her strengths are will help her stay committed to the God who designed her in the first place.

Dr. James Dobson: And in this day in which we live, you can no longer afford to be casual about the things that you believe.

Cynthia Tobias: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: You have got to make it a priority. And the child has to know that it is absolutely your priority. I think in days past you could take them to church on Sunday and they just sort of got it and went along with it frequently. Today, there's so many contradictions coming from Hollywood, from television, from rock music, from all the other sources of input that if they don't think you are excited about what you believe, if you serve them watery soup, they will probably be less committed than you are.

Cynthia Tobias: Right. One thing I have found, and of course I'm sure a lot of parents have too, but the Christian videos make a tremendous difference almost for every style of child, because they incorporate so much.

Dr. James Dobson: That's what we're trying to do, is to provide that high quality stuff.

Cynthia Tobias: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: Who's next?

Speaker 9: Cynthia, I was just wondering if you could address the issue of gender bias. As the mother of three daughters and as a Christian woman, I want to see my daughters succeed in school, but I also see that at a junior high level, my daughter's team received, probably 75% of the boys were the ones that received the awards at the end of the year. My daughter got the leadership award, and I want to encourage that, but she was embarrassed by that and felt like she shouldn't get that as a girl.

Cynthia Tobias: I don't specialize specifically with the gender bias, but I will tell you what I have found in the last 10 years of working with this full-time. This transcends race, creed, culture, gender. I worked for six years as a police officer. In fact, my badge said patrolman on it. We would go to a lot of these cultural diversity workshops and gender sensitivity workshops, and what ended up happening is that we would walk out more paranoid than ever. Now, we really didn't want to run into anybody who was different.

This is an approach that transcends gender, so that if we could truly get this into the schools and into the churches where we start honoring each other for our strengths and our values, I really think it would do a tremendous amount to minimize pure gender bias. I mean, there are always going to be some gender differences. Even if you look at learning styles, a highly sequential woman and a highly sequential man are still going to be a different kind of sequential because God created us differently.



Dr. James Dobson: May I stop you?

Cynthia Tobias: Mm-hmm.

Dr. James Dobson: When you use that phrase, there's still a lot of people listening to us who could not define it. Define a sequential person as opposed to the other characteristics.

Cynthia Tobias: The sequential person who needs predictability, needs things in a particular order. Like Vince, the former fighter pilot I sat by on a commercial airliner not long ago, found out he has six kids and three are driving him crazy. I always prayed that God would show me who to give a book to, and I gave him *The Way They Learn*, and he was so excited. As we talked, it was evident to me that Vince was highly sequential. I mean, everything in his life had to be kind of squared away, and these kids weren't checking their charts off on the refrigerator and they weren't keeping those lists and putting those stars on. I said to Vince, I said, "Vince, do me a favor. How do you eat M&Ms?" He said, "Oh, I always eat the primary colors first." He said, "Why? How do you eat?" I said, "Oh, I just dump them in my hand and pop them in my mouth." He said, "No, no, don't you understand, you have to at least sort them. The Mars candy company doesn't have a formula." I said, "Vince, you're a sick man." We kidded about that. But really, my mind does not work that sequentially.

Dr. James Dobson: Cynthia, I'd rather have him as the captain of my plane than you.

Cynthia Tobias: Oh, absolutely, yes. And as a brain surgeon, I don't want anybody in there going, "Close enough," but-

Dr. James Dobson: Close enough.

Cynthia Tobias: ... each of us has those niches. We are drawn to certain gifts. I would just encourage you on the gender situation to not focus on the gender bias, but to focus on the strengths of the individual people that are involved.

Speaker 9: Thank you.

Dr. James Dobson: We have another question?

Jody Smith: Hi, I'm Jody Smith, I live in Monument, Colorado. I have a 15-year-old girl who fits the mold perfectly in high school, and I have a junior high boy who fits pretty well, and then I have a six-year-old who doesn't fit anybody's box. He got in trouble in kindergarten in the public schools for singing in the restroom. He's not a problem to anybody, he doesn't hurt-

Dr. James Dobson: I'm sorry, for doing what in the restroom?

Jody Smith: Singing in the restroom.

Dr. James Dobson: Is that bad? No singing in the restroom. He's heading for trouble, boy. This kid's going to be a real troublemaker.

Jody Smith: Apparently the teacher thought it was bad. It was loud singing, and nobody had ever told him that he wasn't allowed to do that because he was allowed to do it at home.

Dr. James Dobson: The question is how she knew that he was singing in the restroom.

Jody Smith: He had been in there a long time, so she went to check on him. Anyway, my question is, this year we have moved him to one of the new blessings in Colorado that we're allowed to have now, is the charter schools that are popping up all over the place. He's a totally different kid. He loves school now, and last year he didn't. His teacher's wonderful. What I want you to comment on for us is the new charter schools, if you know anything about them and that they have a little bit more leeway in working with different styles of children.

Cynthia Tobias: I do think that charter schools and some of the initiatives that are coming about now can be a very good thing or they can be a very bad thing. If it turns into something where it's just slower and louder from the same old thing, I think we have to be careful. Again, if you've got a school that gives you the flexibility of saying, "What's the point? And how can we lay down our accountability and figure out different individual ways to still get them to that accountability?" I think that's just what we have to keep in mind. Otherwise, a lot of the schools who started out well will still turn into a traditional classroom again.

Dr. James Dobson: I have some people who will write and say, "You're promoting home schools to the exclusion of Christian schools or public schools." When we talk about public schools, they will say, "What's wrong with home schools?" When we talk about Christian schools, they say, "Well, what's wrong with public schools?" The truth of the matter is we have not taken a position on that because it fits into the message that you give. You have to select the school and its philosophy and how you're going to approach the education of your children according to what you know about those kids and according to what's available. Home schools are not for everybody, but they are for some people.

Cynthia Tobias: And it's back to that shoe store analogy, the idea that it's the style that has to be different for each kid sometimes.

Dr. James Dobson: Cynthia Tobias has written three books, *The Way They Learn*, *The Way They Work*, and the new one, *Every Child Can Succeed*. And again, you would recommend that parents read these sequentially, you use that word.

Cynthia Tobias: Not necessarily. Well, you could start with *Every Child Can Succeed* because you'll get the essence and then you'll get a ton of practical ideas. But if you haven't read *The Way They Learn*, I would get the two together just so that you can go back and forth. And actually, with *The Way They Learn*, we often

recommend that if your kids are 10 or 11 or higher that they actually read and give them a highlighter or a pencil and go through the book and check off things that really speak to them, and that'll help you identify it.

Dr. James Dobson: In closing, let's talk about you. You speak all over the country. How does an organization reach you, and are you available to speak?

Cynthia Tobias: Yes, in fact, we have a whole staff of people. We're doing some exciting things with whole family conferences and with one-on-one assessment for kids. We have an organization called Apple St., which stands for Applied Learning Styles. We'll have been in business 10 years January 1st for myself. It's God's business. It's been God's business from the beginning. He has first priority in every way, in stewardship of time and money. We certainly welcome anybody who wants more information to call our office.

Dr. James Dobson: We'll get that information across. Now, go home and hug those two kids.

Cynthia Tobias: Oh, I'd love to do that.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay. Thanks, Cynthia. It's a pleasure working with you. I'm glad to get acquainted with you, and we'll do it again.

Cynthia Tobias: Love to.

Roger Marsh: Well, it is our hope and prayer that you as a parent or if you're a teacher listening to this broadcast today, that you've been encouraged by this inspiring two-part program here on Family Talk. Our children are uniquely created and deserve and require a distinct approach to learning. By the way, if you'd like to learn more about Cynthia Tobias or her organization, visit [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk).

If you're in the middle of the parenting season right now, you know it is difficult work. Even children who are sweet and easygoing come with their own set of challenges. And to encourage you on your parenting journey, we've developed a free 10-day email series based on Dr. Dobson's best-selling book called "The New Strong-Willed Child." This series is designed to equip you to wisely lead your kids through even the toughest trials. Now, it's absolutely free to sign up. To get yours, all you have to do is click the link at the bottom of today's broadcast page at [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk).

Election day will soon be here, and this is not a time for believers to sit back and be timid. You need to stay informed on all the latest voter and policy-related issues that will be affecting you and your family on November 5th. And to do so, check out the Dobson Culture Center. When you visit [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org) and click on the Culture Center tab at the top of today's page, you'll find information and resourcing that you need to make the best vote possible and to truly make your vote count. Many Christians don't actually vote in presidential elections,

it's true. I pray that we will all have the courage to vote during this election season, and most importantly, to pray.

By the way, be on the lookout for the Decision 2024 podcast featuring some very familiar voices, very informative voices that will help you get up to date on election-related issues, and guiding you as to how to vote. It's coming soon from the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. Be looking for it by the end of August. I'm Roger Marsh, and you've been listening to Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.

Announcer:

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