



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Learning Styles– Part 1

Guest(s): Cynthia Tobias

Air Date: August 12, 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: Welcome to Family Talk, the broadcast division of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh. Hope you had a great weekend. Of course, the start of the new week also means, for many kids, it's the beginning of a new school year. Kids will be coming back to school and finding what their friends did over the summer. It's really a truly exciting time, and I hope you'll take a moment and say a prayer for the kids who are returning to the classroom this year, even this week. And also be sure to pray for their teachers as well. Pray for their safety and for many positive and enriching experiences that will help shape the minds and hearts of tomorrow's leaders. Now, if you've spent any time around your own kids, you know that they are all so different, and so their learning styles are going to be different as well.

Now, this can be overwhelming for parents when you come to that realization. It can be a challenge for teachers too, as they try to instill valuable lessons into the minds of their kids and students. So if you're a parent or a teacher and you're struggling to connect with a child or a student, where do you begin? Well, we know one thing's for sure, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to education. And on today's edition of Family Talk, Dr. Dobson will address this issue with author and speaker, Cynthia Tobias. Cynthia is a well-respected name in educational philosophy, having written 14 best-selling books. Cynthia worked for 25 years in private practice and another eight as a high school teacher. This episode was recorded several years ago, but the theme of the discussion about the importance of recognizing every child's different learning needs is increasingly more important, even today. Cynthia will also identify the correct and incorrect ways to motivate a child to succeed. So now let's join Dr. James Dobson and his guest, Cynthia Tobias right now on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Cynthia, what led you to this emphasis on individual differences between children?

Cynthia Tobias: I was a high school teacher, high school English teacher, and an enthusiastic one the first year, and a lot of the seasoned veterans and administrators told me

from the very beginning, "Certain kids aren't school material, and you're going to waste your time if you spend all this extra effort and energy trying to get these kids to learn that don't want to. So just drop them through the cracks and teach the ones who'll get it." Well, what bothered me was that the kids we were dropping through the cracks were my favorite kids. They were bright and creative and intuitive and okay, a little obnoxious, but I kept thinking, "We are letting a lot of bright creative kids get by because we're not reaching how they learn."

And then in 1980, I took my first learning styles class, when I heard someone validate what I had believed and what I'm sure you believed as a teacher to say, "The bottom line is the learning is very important and the goal is very important, but there are a lot of kids that have a lot of different ways to get to a very worthwhile goal." And it was like the curtain came open for me and God just placed his hand on my life and said, "This is the message. This is where I want you to go." And I often kid about it. When I first started, I was a freshman at Northwest Nazarene College in Nampa, Idaho in 1971. Told the Lord, I want to be a writer. Didn't want to do anything else.

Dr. James Dobson: You told Him.

Cynthia Tobias: I told Him, that's right. I said, "I don't want to be a teacher anymore. I want to be an editor of *Good Housekeeping* or something." Of course, before I even was through my first freshman year, I knew I was supposed to be a teacher. So 20 years later, almost to the day, is when *The Way They Learn* came out, and it's like God said, "What would you have written about?" He had a calling and a message and a ministry for me, but it took 20 years of teaching and discovery to find out what that was.

Dr. James Dobson: You spoke on that subject on the tape that I was talking about, you gave a presentation to an audience. It was very funny. But it resonated with people. We had 45,000 requests for that tape, and especially to teachers who have stood in front of 35 kids, as you and I have, and wondered how to reach each one of them because they are so different. You can't really generalize. There's some categories, but they're so unique and you really have to study the individual child, don't you?

Cynthia Tobias: You do. And it's not as hard and as complicated as it sounds, but you do have to have an open heart and a willing mind to realize and honor the diversity that God built within us from the very beginning.

Dr. James Dobson: If I had to summarize your theme... Well, let me take a run at that and see if this is accurate. We have misunderstood, in the past, how complex human beings are, and therefore we've grouped them in simplistic categories like lazy and temperamental and bratty, and all the words that we use. The truth of the matter is, they're much more complex than that. And that they are a combination of influences and forces, hormonal forces and urges and drives and inclinations and desires and inherited characteristics, I'm convinced then, and all

that and the biochemistry of the body is inter playing to craft that individual. And if you're really going to meet that child's needs and you're really going to get the most out of him or her, you have got to understand who you're dealing with. Does that put it into words?

Cynthia Tobias: Absolutely. In fact, in the new book on page 24, we have a picture of a puzzle, and a lot of different pieces, saying that we have a lot of pieces that aren't even labeled yet. We have some learning style pieces, which are the fundamental framework. We have personality which is different, and which is different, and gender and birth order. And then there are pieces that don't even have a name yet. Because we know we can never take just one test or one way and figure out what a person is. There are too many complexities and shades.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay, bring that down now to the practical level with parents. How can they get to know those kids? They haven't studied what you've studied, and they haven't had the experience, many of them, that you've had. How can they know what that particular child... They know they're not reaching him or her, he's not studying, he won't work at home, he's hyperactive, whatever the characteristics are, how can they hone in on the individual?

Cynthia Tobias: Two things that are real simple and sound maybe almost too obvious. One of them is the chances are good that there's at least one child in your family that will be nothing like you. So if you have a child who won't go to their room, he won't go to his room and do his homework, he won't do it quietly. That's probably what you would do, but what he doesn't want to do. The second thing that's real simple is just start watching. You don't need a formal test or even to read a book to know when your child is happy and when they're content and when they're productive, not even with homework. How about when your child is playing happily? When they're most satisfied, take notes, mental notes, or even jotting them down. Who's around? What's the environment like? Are they working with somebody? And keep track of that in almost a journal type entry. In a month or two you're going to see, or maybe even a week or two, you're going to see some patterns emerge.

Dr. James Dobson: And begin to understand a little more about. What I have observed, Cynthia, is that the parents who have the kids that are most different from them, especially the mother being most different from a child, usually a daughter, the friction occurs out of that gap. It's a blind date between mother and baby because the mother would never have behaved that way, would never have responded, well, "The child's not doing what I would've done in that same situation."

Cynthia Tobias: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: And it's very difficult to understand, and sometimes there's a term that's used by child developmentalists, the goodness of fit. Sometimes those personalities don't mesh like they should because the kids are so different from the parents.

Cynthia Tobias: And then it's a wonderful thing that we have a God who has a lot of mercy and a lot of grace, because many parents wonder, they're very frustrated, "How will I ever... I can never understand how this child thinks." Fortunately, you don't really have to. You need to accept it and you need to trust God, in his infinite wisdom, to help you deal with it. But one of the things I remind people in the beginning of the new book is that the things that are most annoying about your child right now are most likely what will make them most successful later. I found in corporate, working in corporate America, that you get hired for most of the things you got in trouble for in school.

Dr. James Dobson: Aggressiveness, individuality, creativity.

Cynthia Tobias: Exactly. Tinkering with things. An awful lot of very successful executives won't even talk to you about how they did in school.

Dr. James Dobson: Every child can succeed. Do you really mean what it says here?

Cynthia Tobias: Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: Making the most of your child's learning style, every child can succeed.

Cynthia Tobias: Absolutely. Every single child.

Dr. James Dobson: What about the hardcore underachiever who just ain't going to. You've met him or her, haven't you?

Cynthia Tobias: Yes, I have.

Dr. James Dobson: It's usually a boy.

Cynthia Tobias: We have to ask ourselves again, who's deciding what success looks like? What is the definition of success, and what's the point? And if you get a kid like me who's got a pretty strong will and you've determined for me what I have to do in order to prove I'm successful, what if I just decide I'm not going to do it, because you can't make?

Dr. James Dobson: Cynthia, you have a strong will?

Cynthia Tobias: Imagine that.

Dr. James Dobson: You're tough, Cynthia. Is that right?

Cynthia Tobias: I was a nice quiet kid. You couldn't have traced half the trouble back to me. But I know, as a child, and I know as an adult that I don't have to do anything except die, which I'm willing to do. Now if as a kid I'm willing to die for it and you're not, I win. I'm dead, but I win. And this is very frustrating to parents who are saying, "Look at all this potential. Look at this kid who's getting Ds and Cs and

could be getting As and Bs, you need to work harder, you need to try more. Don't you realize that you'll never make it to college?" And these sorts of messages don't do anything to motivate a kid like me.

Dr. James Dobson: How do we get him or her working?

Cynthia Tobias: I have to be inspired. I have to be dedicated to the goal. I have to see a purpose, a compelling reason to do something. Now my sister will do it because it's important to you, but I'll do it-

Dr. James Dobson: Because it's important to you.

Cynthia Tobias: ... because it's important to me, and something that I care about.

Dr. James Dobson: You believe in the use of rewards.

Cynthia Tobias: I do. But I believe that rewards purely for reward's sake, not necessarily, but rewards in the way of motivation. For example, I don't do much just for the intrinsic sense of just pure love of learning. I do it because there is a reward in it. I can help someone. I can make a difference. If you define reward that way, then I do believe that reward and motivation go right together hand in hand.

Dr. James Dobson: One of the simplistic things that was taught when I was in school is the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. And the implication was there that only intrinsic motivation is really important. And the truth of the matter is a lot of kids don't have intrinsic motivation, that which comes within. They simply don't care. They're not driven by the same thing, and you either provide an external source of motivation or you don't get into their motivational system at all.

Cynthia Tobias: But again, one of the things you can do is teach that child what it is they need to motivate themselves. You may have to start out with a reward or two. You may have to say to that kid who doesn't want to keep his room clean, "Well, what do you think it would take?" And be prepared for him to say, "Well, nothing. I don't want to do it."

Dr. James Dobson: I think nearly all motivation is extrinsic.

Cynthia Tobias: Yes.

Dr. James Dobson: In other words, "I study because that pleases you and I like it when you're pleased with me," or "I study because then I look smart to my peers," or "I study in order to get in college," or I study... It's nearly all extrinsic.

Cynthia Tobias: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: It's just a different source of motivation a little bit.

Cynthia Tobias: Right. And it's not necessarily a negative thing. Again, especially if I, as a child, can be taught what I need, now as an adult, I know what it will take to motivate me when I need to be motivated.

Dr. James Dobson: You mentioned being a strong-willed child. You're writing another book on that subject, aren't you?

Cynthia Tobias: I'd like to. The working title is-

Dr. James Dobson: See, I beat you by 19 years.

Cynthia Tobias: Well, you set the standard, and Dr. Dobson, I am who you talked about. I am that person. It takes one to know one, and when you run into a strong-willed child, you know better than most, you have a wonderful kid. We're talking strength of conviction-

Dr. James Dobson: That's right.

Cynthia Tobias: ... determination, and if you can direct that into the paths of righteousness, you have a kid who's going to change the world. And what worries me is I wonder how many teachers and Sunday school teachers, how many strong-willed kids are we driving away inadvertently because we don't understand how their mind works, because we don't understand that we can't approach them in exactly the same way as we can a more compliant child?

Dr. James Dobson: You talk a little bit here about the attention deficit disorder. You've got some thoughts on that. They're an awful lot of parents out there that are struggling with a child with ADD or at least they think they are. Comment on it.

Cynthia Tobias: It worries me. I've talked to several leading pediatricians, even in the last several months, who are not just concerned but alarmed. In fact, I had two different pediatricians say to me, "I worry that with this much casual diagnosis and this much medication, I worry that we're trying to substitute medication for parenting." And are we really doing a good job as educators of helping parents know how to give those kids strategies? Now you and I both know there are kids who really, truly have some problems that must have intervention, but what about, what if for every kid who truly needs it, what if we're putting nine or 10 on top that are just inconvenient or a behavior problem? I think we have to be careful.

One of the stories I give in the book is, if I take my children to the shoe store and the shoes don't fit, I can't change the foot, but I can't let them go barefoot, they need to wear shoes. I need to change the style to fit the foot. What I'm worried about is that in education, traditionally, we offer very few styles, so we insist that your child choose one of these styles. Now, if none of these styles fit you or your child, well, then you're going to have to alter your child.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, let's run with that. I think we have time to do this. In your first book, you talked about five learning styles, I believe. Was it four or five?

Cynthia Tobias: Five different models.

Dr. James Dobson: Five. Why don't you run over those very quickly and see if parents maybe identify with one of the others?

Cynthia Tobias: Very quickly, we did the environmental preferences that not everybody needs to study at a desk, and some people like brighter light, and some people need to eat or drink while they're working. That's why you can actually have a child who will do homework in front of the television with a can of diet soda and actually get the work done.

Dr. James Dobson: That's me, by the way. If I'm in my office all day, I have C-SPAN or I have CNN or I have television going, and I write books with the television seven feet away-

Cynthia Tobias: Me too.

Dr. James Dobson: ... and I do better with noise. It drives Shirley crazy because she's got to have it absolutely quiet if she's going to think.

Cynthia Tobias: Exactly. And the point is you get done what you need to get done. Does it matter if it's exactly the way everybody else wants it? We talk about modalities, and those are familiar to most listeners, the highly auditory child who actually doesn't need to hear as much as they need to hear themselves talk. This is the kid who's got that thinking noise going on all the time. He may not even talk. My auditory child doesn't talk that much. He just makes noise. There's something in the backseat all the time. The highly visual kid who looks like a daydreamer in class, but I'm just getting... "I'm trying to get a mental image of what you're talking to me about and you didn't show me anything." That highly active kinesthetic kid who needs to just move, whether it's just squirming or fidgeting or changing positions. We talk about the model of the more analytic versus the more global learner.

Some people are highly analytic and remember exactly what was said. Others of us are, what we call, global, big picture, which means "I remember the gist of it. I know what the concept was, I just didn't remember exactly what was said. Which is why I can walk out of a sermon or a class and say, 'Oh, it's just exactly what I needed to hear.' And someone can say, 'Really? What was it about?' Well, I told you, it was exactly what I needed to hear. You didn't tell me I was going to have to tell you what it was about. You need to warn me ahead of time what details to listen for. As a learner, you need to talk me through things instead of handing me a manual to read something, because I don't read directions much, I just look at them and go, 'So what did these say? Can't you just interpret for me.'"

Again, in school, if you're highly analytic, you have a much better chance of looking a lot smarter than if you're highly global, because the teachers get frustrated with you. "Why do you always ask for your own set of questions? Why can't you just sit down and read something, for heaven's sake, that I put together for you?" And this can be frustrating. We talk about the Gregoric model, which is the concrete versus the abstract. The person who's more literal, "Just say what you mean. I don't want to look between the lines and read in hidden agendas."

Dr. James Dobson: Those people hate poetry.

Cynthia Tobias: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: They love prose.

Cynthia Tobias: That's right. And figuring out what it means. "What do you mean, what does it mean? Just read the words." Versus the abstract, who's very good at picking up on hidden agendas and intuitive in between the lines, the sequential person, step by step, beginning, middle, end versus the more random person. As long as you get it done, does it really matter? If you have to go every single step. "Do I have to balance my checkbook? As long as I'm not overdrawn does it really matter that every single month I have to write every single thing down?" When you put those combinations together, we have four in the book we talk about, the highly concrete and sequential kid, the abstract and sequential kid, the abstract and random, and the concrete and random. And then of course we just barely touch on the multiple intelligences, which are the many different ways of being smart.

Dr. James Dobson: That's not only true of children, but it's true of adults as well.

Cynthia Tobias: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: It's like a basketball coach. In the NBA, if Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, the greatest center of all times, was asked to play guard out front, he wouldn't have made the NBA.

Cynthia Tobias: Exactly.

Dr. James Dobson: Because he wouldn't handle the ball that well. But you put him under the basket and he's the best of all times. So you got to know how to fit people to the job.

Cynthia Tobias: And we're not trying to level the playing field, we're trying to choose the right positions. Just as you say, a quarterback is not going to do a kicker's job very well.

Dr. James Dobson: Okay, Cynthia, we're coming very near the end. Let's do a global look at your three books, *The Way They Learn*, *The Way They Work*, and *Every Child Can*

Succeed. If we're talking to a parent right now who says, "I don't know that child. I don't know how to reach him or her. Something's not working." Which of those three books would be a place to start to understand that individual?

Cynthia Tobias: *The Way They Learn* would be the starting place as far as identifying, and then *Every Child Can Succeed* would give you the nitty-gritty, very detailed strategies on what to do with it. The advantage of buying both books would be at the end of this one, and there's an appendix, a profile, a copyright-free profile, that helps parents fill it out with their child.

Dr. James Dobson: Really, this book is very practical. It's filled with specific advice. It's not just a collection of stories. It deals with what to do next.

Cynthia Tobias: Right. If this is it, this is probably why it happens and here's what to do.

Dr. James Dobson: And you find tremendous resonance with parents on these subjects. Tell me what they say to you.

Cynthia Tobias: I've had some great letters. I had a letter from a lady just the other day who, she heard the little sound bite that Briargate Media put out, little back-to-school specials. She wrote the letter. She says, "I can't tell you how much I love *Every Child Can Succeed*." She said, "I was in my car listening and you came on talking about the book. And I turned the car around and drove to my Christian bookstore right then." And she said, "In 24 hours I had read the book," and she proceeded to tell me about the child that she was concerned about and how it had made a revolutionary difference. And of course, that's what we live for. That's what we are in this whole ministry for.

Dr. James Dobson: It sure is. And that must be very gratifying to you.

Cynthia Tobias: Yes, because again, it's not me. The thing I love is that I didn't make any of this up. It was all... It's all solid empirical research done by great scholars, but it's pretty boring for the average person to go to the intellectual cul-de-sac and read. I just brought it out to the street where everybody lives, and translated it. And in much the same way as we lift up Christ so that people are drawn to him, that's what this is doing, lifting up these wonderful, liberating, practical things and telling people, "You know what? You're okay. You've got a great kid. And your child is okay. There are many, many strengths to build on. There's no place to go with weakness. But when you can identify your child's strengths, we can help you find ways to help them succeed for the rest of their life."

Dr. James Dobson.: What a word of encouragement to end on, your child's okay. In this day and age, parents fear the child's not okay. And that is an awesome thought, that this little person that I've come to love, that we brought into the world, that I'd give my life for, is not making it. He's not okay. But most of them are okay, and they'll be more okay if we'll understand them, right?

Cynthia Tobias: You've got a great kid. That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: Cynthia, thanks for being our guest today. This is very practical information that parents can use, and there's even more in the books, and there's a lot there that we didn't get around to talking about. Cynthia, I know you have to leave, and thanks for being our guest, and blessings to you.

Cynthia Tobias: You too. Thanks so much.

Roger Marsh: Well, I hope today's conversation has been encouraging to you if you're a parent or if you're a teacher who's been struggling to connect with that child in your life. You've been listening to Dr. Dobson's classic interview with author and speaker, Cynthia Tobias, here on Family Talk. If you'd like to share today's program with a friend, remember you can do so easily from our Family Talk app or just go online to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. That's drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. And by the way, while you're on today's broadcast page, remember to get more information about Cynthia Tobias and her helpful books as well. Now we're getting closer and closer to election day, November the fifth of 2024, and as decision 2024 heats up, make sure you stay informed on all the latest voter and policy related issues that affect you and your family. You can do so by checking out the brand new Dobson Culture Center.

Just visit drjamesdobson.org and then click on the Culture Center tab at the top of the page. Many of us want to see positive changes in our community and all across the country, and I pray that we will all have courage as believers to get out and vote this election season. But most importantly, to pray, to pray for our nation, to pray for our fellow citizens as we consider whom and what issues to vote for. Also be on the lookout for the Decision 2024 Podcast. It will be featuring some familiar voices who will inform you on all things election related, brought to you by the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute and the Dobson Policy Center. And finally, as we conclude our program today, a reminder that the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute is a listener supported ministry. It's only because of your faithful financial support and your prayers that Family Talk can continue producing the encouraging and insightful programs you enjoy each and every day.

Please prayerfully consider partnering with us financially. When you give to the JDPI, your tax-deductible donation helps us maintain a strong Christian voice in the public square, and that influence can literally transform lives. Every dollar you donate will help us as we fight for the cause of the sanctity of human life and also traditional marriage, God-ordained gender identity, and a biblical worldview that we as parents and grandparents can teach to our children and grandchildren. You can make a donation online through our secure website at drjamesdobson.org. That's drjamesdobson.org, or give us a call and make your contribution over the phone, 877-732-6825. And to send through the US Postal Service, our ministry mailing address is the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code, 80949. Well, we're

just about out of time for today, but I want to encourage you to join us again tomorrow for the conclusion of Dr. Dobson's powerful conversation with author Cynthia Tobias. Here's just a brief preview of what you'll be hearing on tomorrow's classic program.

Cynthia Tobias: 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. 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. And it may be especially easy for me to do that depending on what crowd I fall into." 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.

Roger Marsh: It's going to be a great program. We're also going to hear Dr. Dobson and Cynthia Tobias answer questions from a studio audience. That's coming up tomorrow, right here on Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk. I'm Roger Marsh. Thanks for listening.

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