



## Broadcast Transcript

**Broadcast:** Being a Smart Stepmom – Part 3

**Guest(s):** Laura Petherbridge

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Dr. James Dobson: Hello everyone, you're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. James Dobson and thank you for joining us for this program.

Roger Marsh: Well welcome to Family Talk, a production of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Roger Marsh and today we're concluding a powerful three-part conversation about navigating the complex dynamics of stepfamily relationships. Our guest once again is Laura Petherbridge, a true authority on this challenging topic. Having grown up with two stepmothers herself, and then having become a stepmom herself, Laura brings both personal experience and professional expertise to this conversation. She's the author of four insightful books, including the book called *The Smart Stepmom* and that will be the focus of the conversation today. During the next half hour, Laura and Dr. Dobson will address the delicate relationship between children and their stepparents. They'll also offer hope and encouragement to single moms who feel they've failed their children by not remarrying. Laura's compassionate perspective might surprise you as she challenges some common assumptions about blended families.

You know remarriage has become increasingly common due to high divorce rates and many children struggle to adjust to new parental figures in their lives. This transition can be particularly difficult when loyalties are tested and boundaries are unclear. Laura Petherbridge offers practical wisdom to help step parents establish healthy relationships without trying to replace biological parents.

Laura Petherbridge is an international speaker who frequently contributes to the Christian Broadcasting Network and Proverbs 31 Ministries. She's also featured in the DivorceCare DVD series which is used by 14,000 churches worldwide. Previously, Laura taught divorce recovery training at Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida. Well there's a wealth of wisdom ahead in this final installment of our step family series so let's join Dr. James Dobson and his guest, Laura Petherbridge as they discuss practical advice for creating healthy step family relationships. We'll begin with Laura expressing some key advice to step moms as they enter a new family.

Laura Petherbridge: It's really important that the stepmom not try to take over that mom role. Yes, she is the woman in the home. Yes, she is the mother of that home. But she needs to embrace the fact that these children already have a mom. So, try very hard, as hard as it is with our female intuition and our female instincts to not just try to take over as a woman, as a mom in the home, to let those kids guide the direction of how the relationship is going to go.

Dr. James Dobson: Is that what you mean by freedom?

Laura Petherbridge: Yes, absolutely. It's so important for a stepmom, and if she can, to even say this to the biological mom. Now obviously she's going to say it to the children, "I'm not your mother. I'm not going to try to be your mother." But it's even a good idea if she can say it to the biological mom. "I want you to know that I am not here to take over your role. I want to just be the best role model for your kids that I can. If I can do something that will help to bridge the gap between these two homes, please let me know what that is."

There are some stepmoms right now hearing this, and they're cracking up laughing, because they're going, "There is absolutely no way I could have that kind of a conversation with my stepchildren's mother. She won't allow it." But you know, sometimes over time, especially if things have gone on for a little while, it's possible that you could have that kind of conversation with the biological mom. "These are not my children, and I have to learn, every circumstance is different, but I have to learn the boundaries of where my role begins and where my role stops."

Dr. James Dobson: Now that's a little different if you have very, very young children.

Laura Petherbridge: That's correct.

Dr. James Dobson: The man you married is the father of a baby.

Laura Petherbridge: That's correct.

Dr. James Dobson: You probably do have to play a more active mothering role.

Laura Petherbridge: And that is especially true today, because one of the trends I'm seeing is more and more biological moms leaving their children, either because of an addiction, they're in rehab, or there's a reason that they're not in the child's life, or they're leaving the family to go pursue another relationship or something, and they're leaving their children. And I'm finding more and more stepmoms telling me that they are the full-time mom, in particular for these younger children.

Dr. James Dobson: And those children are wounded, too.

Laura Petherbridge: Oh, and are they going to be when they become teenagers, then that's a whole other show. But how to parent this child and love on this child who has this

deep wound of their parent walking out. So, that's a big increasing trend that I am seeing today. And it was even scarier, to be honest with you, it was more, "This is not what I bargained for. I don't want this. I love this man and he's good to me, and he's a great guy, and we got married, and I made that vow. But I think I would like to get out of this." And the reason I'm saying that is because I don't want the stepmoms that are out there that are thinking that, to think they're abnormal. It's very normal to feel that way, that this is so much more than I thought it was going to be. I really would like to just get out of this.

Dr. James Dobson: Took you about two days to figure that out.

Laura Petherbridge: Yes, it was about 48 hours before I went, "What have I done?"

I think I was so wrapped up in getting remarried and being normal again, that I did... There were some warning signs, but I pretty much ignored them. Here's the crazy thing. We stepmoms think, "Well, they're over in their other home with their mom. That won't really affect my home over here that much. It'll only affect my home periodically on the weekends, or every other weekend." And in reality that other home dictates when I put the turkey on the Thanksgiving table. It dictates everything in my life. We call the ex-spouse the ex-wife-in-law, and we do that for a reason, because that ex, whether it's the ex-husband or the ex-wife, is a part of your family, whether you like it or not.

Dr. James Dobson: And always will be.

Laura Petherbridge: And always will be. If the other biological parent doesn't want you there. You know, you show up at Joshua's soccer game, and the former spouse is throwing a fit or acting very abrasively or is doing something that's causing tension, my suggestion to that stepparent is to politely resign. That biological parent is the one that has the relationship and the trust factor with the child. So if a stepmom or stepdad is coming in and automatically thinking they're going to be the heavy hand disciplinarian because the other parent is not doing it, that is a mistake.

For a stepmom, her levels of authority will grow and change over time. In the very beginning, maybe even the first year or two, she would be on the same level of authority as say, a babysitter. Now I want to say she is not a babysitter. Please don't let anybody think I'm saying a stepmom is just a babysitter. But that same level of authority, where the babysitter has the right to, "No, you have to turn off the TV. Yes, you have to go to bed," but she's not really a parent, and she's just under the rule really of the biological parent.

The next step would be similar to a coach or a teacher, where they have more authority in a child's life than a babysitter would, but it's still nowhere near a parent. The next level of authority would be like a grandparent or an aunt or an uncle. That's a family member that has quite a bit of authority over the child. Still not a parent. The goal ultimately is then that both the stepparent, and the biological parent, would be unified in carrying out both having parental roles.

Now this varies depending on how often the child is with them, the age of the child, what the other biological parent feels about that stepparent having a role in their life. So, there's a lot of factors. This is multifaceted. But that is just somewhat of a guideline to help a stepparent understand that they have to move through a process in a level of authority before they get to a place of where the child trusts them.

Roger Marsh: I'm Roger Marsh, and we have reached the midpoint of this classic broadcast here on Family Talk. We'll continue hearing from Dr. Dobson and author Laura Petherbridge after this short break.

With today's Dr. Dobson Minute, here's Dr. James Dobson.

Dr. James Dobson: A tree planted in the middle of a rainforest is a beautiful thing to behold but beneath the surface, its roots tend to be very shallow. Even a moderate wind can send it crashing to the earth. But contrast that with an old mesquite tree planted on the dry plains of Texas. Since it was a sapling, it's lived in a hostile environment which forced it to drill its roots down deep in the earth in search of water. As a result, it can survive even the strongest winds. The same holds true for children. The ones who have learned to conquer their problems are typically stronger and more secure than those who have never had to face them. So our job as parents is not to shelter our kids from every trial and trouble but to give them the tools they need to stand tough and tall during trying times.

Roger Marsh: For more information, visit [drdobsonminute.org](http://drdobsonminute.org).

Okay, let's get back now to this timeless broadcast on navigating the tough role of the stepparent.

Dr. James Dobson: Laura, there is an infinite number of circumstances that we could pose for you that are common. I mean, every family is different, as you described in the first program. And many of them seem like a one of a kind problem, but in fact it's probably pretty common somewhere. Let me ask you the question that I consider to be the most important thing I could raise.

We're also talking to single moms who are out there, who think that there is only one hope for them and for their children, and that's to find somebody that loves them, is going to support them, is going to protect them, take care of them, and live the rest of their lives with them. And they don't know the downside of doing that. They have not read your book perhaps. And what seems like the ultimate solution is really just the beginning of a whole lot of new problems. What do you say to them? Do you recommend that that single mom go on hoping and dreaming for the knight on a white horse, and that that's going to be the answer? What do you say to the single mom?

Laura Petherbridge: Well, I'm going to make a few enemies right now, but I'll answer your question because it is such a significant and important question. Somehow in society and

in the church, we have gotten this notion that a child is not going to be able to grow up whole and healthy and healed and godly unless that woman remarries. And we need to start communicating to this single mom and single dad that they can create a whole, healthy, stable home, without getting remarried. That Jesus Christ is willing to come in and be that daddy that your child needs. That we don't need to get remarried to fill that. Now I know she's feeling tired and harried and financially devastated probably. This is where the church, I got to say, this is where the church is failing, because we should be having families in the church, men in the church, people in the church, that will take a single parent under their wing and become that umbrella and that support system, so that that woman doesn't rush off and marry someone that may be toxic.

I can't tell you how many emails I get from women saying, "I thought I was lonely as a single parent. This is a hundred times worse, and now I've dragged my child into it." Do single parent women sometimes find a great guy and it turns out well? Of course that happens, especially if the person is a Christian. But more chances than not, the child would have been better off... here's where I'm going to lose friends... the child would have been better off had that single parent mom just become the most stable, godly mom and woman, God could make her. And He will meet her needs. He promises it. He will meet the needs of the widow and the orphan.

Dr. James Dobson: Would you agree that she also can look to coaches and uncles and maybe neighbors? But you have to be real careful today because pornography is everywhere, child abuse is everywhere, and it really is a catch-22 for single parents.

Laura Petherbridge: That's why I lean a little bit more, and I agree with you completely, but I lean a little bit more towards another family or a couple taking those kids, so that they actually get to see what a husband and wife raising a family looks like. So they see some role models of what it is to be in a home. But what I long to say to these single moms, these single women, is that somewhere along the line they've gotten the idea that being single is synonymous with failure, and it isn't. It isn't. Jesus loves them and died for them just exactly the same as He did the married couple. And that doesn't mean we're supposed to go out and have children out of wedlock. That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying that if you find yourself as a single parent, stop letting the enemy convince you that your child's going to turn out like Ted Bundy, because it's just not true.

Dr. James Dobson: Before you commit yourself to another man, a second husband, if you will, check him out. Take the time to understand. What were the circumstances of his first marriage not working out?

Laura Petherbridge: Amen.

Dr. James Dobson: Does he have any addictive behaviors? If you see that alcohol's a problem with him, run. I mean, don't walk, run away from him. Or abusive behavior of any

kind. Or a police record. You better find that out. Before you get into another situation, be sure you're not creating a worse one, as you said.

Laura Petherbridge: I often say to especially women, if you date someone long enough and you do not sleep with them, they will reveal to you who they are. If you date someone long enough and you do not sleep with them, because once you have sex with somebody, you have blinders on then. There's an attachment with that person. There's actual a chemical that bonds us and causes us to trust this person.

Dr. James Dobson: Oxytocin is the name of it.

Laura Petherbridge: Yes. But if you date them long enough, and you really keep your radar up, and you keep your eyes open, and you introduce them to your mature friends, that person will eventually reveal to you who they are. Believe them.

Dr. James Dobson: I would go so far as to get a background check on them.

Laura Petherbridge: I just said this yesterday. I just said that to somebody yesterday, is get a background check. I know that sounds crazy, but I would do it. If I were single again, it's not even a question. Because controllers and manipulators and abusers are masterful at hiding that until after the wedding. Masterful.

Dr. James Dobson: And if you've got a teenage daughter, be real careful because child abuse comes out of that. Often, not always.

Laura Petherbridge: Yes, it really is. Boys and girls. And I hate to have to tell people that, but it's really the reality of today. There are some people that will date a single parent to get at their children, and they're very good at just playing the role until they get themselves into that circumstance. We don't want to walk around in fear, but yet we have to be realistic.

Dr. James Dobson: If you are Cinderella and you're thinking that way, you're just looking for any opportunity to meet this absolutely wonderful guy, you may find him, and I pray you will, but don't let it blind you, and you better keep your eyes open. I don't remember who it was, but I've quoted it a number of times, keep your eyes wide open before you're married and half closed thereafter. And that's pretty good advice, I think.

Laura Petherbridge: It is. You're right.

Dr. James Dobson: Laura, as we wrap up this program, there's a question I want to ask about your ministry. Because I know that you talk primarily to stepmoms, and you're trying to help them get through a very difficult time in their lives, but there are other groups out there, other demographic groups, that may not know about you. What about pastors? Do you get a chance to talk to pastors, because they're in a position to really be of help to families, too?

Laura Petherbridge: I would love the opportunity to speak to more pastors. Occasionally I get to do that, but the desire of my heart at this point, after doing this for a while, is that I really could start speaking to leadership, church leadership, pastors, deacons, church leaders, so that they would be able to understand how to minister to stepfamilies in the ways that-

Dr. James Dobson: Because it's very different than...

Laura Petherbridge: It is. It is radically different. And often because they are not a stepfamily, they minister to them in the same way you would a bio family, a first time marriage, and those practices frequently do not work because the couple is dealing with totally different dynamics. So that would really be a passion for me.

Dr. James Dobson: Well Laura, we have had three action-packed interviews on the subject of stepmoms, and I think it could go on for another week or two, but you have to get back to other responsibilities. I have loved having you here. You're very gifted. You really do understand your subject and your issue, even though you said you'd rather God would've given you something else to be an expert in. But we appreciate so much the contribution that you've made to the program, and to the stepmoms that are out there.

We've been talking to Laura Petherbridge today and yesterday and the day before.

I want to ask you to come back. Would you do that?

Laura Petherbridge: I would love to come back.

Dr. James Dobson: You're working on another book now, aren't you?

Laura Petherbridge: Well that's in debate. I haven't decided yet.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we won't press you on that one, but you promise to let us know, okay?

Laura Petherbridge: I will. I will.

Dr. James Dobson: And God be with you as you deal with these stepmoms out there that are hurting so badly. And like I said, you've made a great contribution, and we hope to see you again.

Laura Petherbridge: I'd love to come back. Thank you.

Roger Marsh: You've been listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk and a conversation about the challenges and blessings of stepfamily life featuring our own Dr. James Dobson and his guest, Laura Petherbridge. Laura's honest insights remind us that while blending families is never easy, step parents can develop meaningful relationships with their stepchildren through patience,

understanding and proper boundaries. As a step parent myself, I especially appreciate Laura's message to single parents who feel pressured to remarry, especially her reminder that God can meet the needs of single parent families and that rushing into a new marriage often creates more problems than it solves. Having been through that season I can attest to that as well. Whether you're currently in a stepfamily, considering remarriage or you simply want to better understand these complex dynamics, today's conversation has been filled with practical wisdom rooted in biblical truth. If you missed any portion of today's broadcast or you want to share it with someone who might benefit from this message, visit [drjamesdobson.org/familytalk](http://drjamesdobson.org/familytalk). Once you're there, you'll find the complete program along with links to Laura's book called *The Smart Stepmom*, as well as more information about her ministry to step families. Again you'll find all that information and more when you go to [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). Or you can reach out to us using the Family Talk app.

Speaking of resources for families, we are excited to offer Dr. James Dobson and his wife, Shirley's beloved devotional *Night Light for Parents*. This daily devotional is filled with encouraging insights and practical wisdom drawn from the Dobsons' more than four decades of family ministry experience. Whether you're raising young children or teenagers, married or single, this resource provides heartwarming stories, biblical truth and practical parenting advice that has guided countless families through the challenges of raising children in today's world. Now we'll be happy to send you a copy of the book *Night Light for Parents* as our way of thanking you for your tax-deductible donation of any amount in support of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute today. So you can request your copy over the phone when you call 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. You can also make your request known when you got to [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). That's [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org).

And just as step families need special guidance and support, you know, when you think about it, every parent needs encouragement along their parenting journey. And programs like the one you heard today are made possible by the generous support of friends like you who believe in this mission. Your donation of any amount helps us continue providing trusted biblically based advice to families like yours and to parents facing complex situations like those that we discussed on today's Family Talk broadcast. Now you can make a secure donation online when you go to [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org). That's [drjamesdobson.org](http://drjamesdobson.org).

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Well I'm Roger Marsh and from all of us here at Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, thanks so much for listening today. Whether you're part of a traditional family, a stepfamily or a single parent home, we are here to support you on your journey. Please join us right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust for the family you love.



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

Roger Marsh: Hey everyone, Roger Marsh here for Family Talk. Where can you go to receive support and advice for you and your family? Family Talk interacts with millions of people every day with inspiring advice and tips from Dr. James Dobson on what matters to you the most. Whether it's marriage or parenting, you can be sure our Facebook page will keep you updated with how your family can succeed. Join us each day for the latest broadcast, resources and inspiration. No where else can you hear a thought of the day from Dr. Dobson as well as a special message before you say goodnight. You can be sure every post on our page is created with you and your family in mind. So please take the time to visit us and become part of our online community at [facebook.com/drjamesdobsonsfamilytalk](https://facebook.com/drjamesdobsonsfamilytalk). That's [facebook.com/drjamesdobsonsfamilytalk](https://facebook.com/drjamesdobsonsfamilytalk).