

# FamilyLife Today<sup>®</sup> Radio Transcript

References to conferences, resources, or other special promotions may be obsolete.

## Blended Family Adjustments

Guests: Robbie and Sabrina McDonald and Ron Deal  
From the series: A Blended Family Checks In (Day 2 of 2)  
Air date: June 29, 2018

---

**Bob:** When Sabrina McDonald married her husband, Robbie, a few years after her first husband, David, had died in a car accident, she faced a dilemma as she was raising her children.

**Sabrina:** I wanted to keep David in their lives; you know? I felt like they were missing something, because he wasn't here. I wanted to keep the stories alive and keep his legacy alive. I was grasping at not forgetting him for *them*, because I didn't want them to miss out on their dad.

When I saw their reaction [to watching videos of David], I thought: "They're not missing out on a dad. He is still a part of their life / he's a part of their story, but so is Robbie."

**Bob:** This is *FamilyLife Today* for Friday, June 29<sup>th</sup>. Our host is Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. One of the challenges blended families often face is how to honor a biological parent while you still cultivate respect and love for a stepparent. That's what Robbie and Sabrina McDonald have been working on, and we'll hear from them today. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us. We thought it would be helpful if we brought some friends in this week and had them just take us into the journey that they are on. These are our friends, Robbie and Sabrina McDonald, who are back with us again. Sabrina has worked here at FamilyLife<sup>®</sup>. She became a widow a number of years ago; met Robbie—the two of them got married / formed a blended family. Robbie had older teenage kids; Sabrina had a couple of preschoolers. They have allowed us to be along on their journey and just check in with them, from time to time, and see how things are going with the stepfamily dynamic.

**Dennis:** And we brought Ron Deal, who heads up FamilyLife Blended<sup>®</sup>.

I think it really provides a great opportunity just to talk about: "How do blended families make it work when one brings older kids into a blended family and the other brings preschoolers?"

**Bob:** Yes; and Ron, I wanted to ask you—because I've seen this happen with a lot of stepfamily situations—I've seen situations, where a stepfamily is formed, and where

stepkids develop extremely close, very loving, warm relationships, where the stepkid feels like “The stepparent is the mom I never knew,” or “...the dad I never had.” It’s almost like they are closer there than they might have ever been to their bio parent.

I have to think there is something in the heart of all of us that connects us, in some way, to our biological moms and dads in a mystical sense. We may value, and love, and treasure our stepparent; but they’re never really our mom or our dad. Have you seen that to be lived out in stepfamilies?

**Ron:** Absolutely. I mean, the attachment that you feel to your biological parents is profound. Even when they are deceased, those relationships continue. I mean, we as people, believe—because of God and the way we’re designed and what the Bible tells us—that people are eternal; so those relationships continue, even if in the heart and mind—the psychology, if you will—of a child.

That creates this dynamic for kids, where: “You know, I’ve got a relationship with my biological mom; but here’s Sabrina—she’s great and good—but sometimes, she gets on my nerves. How does that compare to my relationship with my mom?” and “What do I think it would be like if Mom were here?” There is this little fantasy world; and sometimes, that’s very idealistic for children. It’s all very much a part of the family unit. It’s really as if both Sabrina and Robbie’s former spouses are still with them in some sense; right?—certainly, involved in the kids’ lives.

That’s one of the things I wanted to check in with you guys about—is: “How is the grief journey?—I mean, for you, as individuals—you lost your spouses; the kids lost their parents. Where do you think that stands in terms of your family at this point?”

**Robbie:** I think it’s easier for myself and Sabrina on that journey; because we have to, kind of, live it every day. For my oldest son, Will, he doesn’t have to live the loss of his mom every day—he’s got a wife; he’s got a new child; and he’s moving on with his life. He’s got to be 100 percent involved in that now; I don’t think he has to live it every day.

So it’s more difficult for him when he does have to live the grief thing—like when [I] and Sabrina come visit him. He has a more difficult time accepting Sabrina on those terms, because he’s not there every day to see what’s happening; so he’s grieved by his Mom not being there to be the grandparent. He’s grieved that Sabrina is there, trying her best to be the grandparent; you know?—and not being allowed to.

What we—as a family, we grieve together every day; because that blend happens, and we’re there. He’s outside of that, so it doesn’t happen as easily for him.

**Bob:** Sabrina, just before we sat down here, you were sharing a memory that you had from when you were married to David before he passed on—it was a fond memory; right? I’m just wondering, “As those memories come, is the grief less in those memories today than it was three years ago or five years ago?” I’m also wondering: “Robbie, from

your perspective, when Sabrina shares a warm memory from her marriage to David, does that feel threatening to you at all? Can that invade the relationship?"

I'm sure, Robbie, you share fond memories from your first marriage. How are you guys processing that and living that out? What's that like in the marriage relationship?

**Sabrina:** Well, it's just like Ron was saying—the people that pass away—they're still a part of our lives. We knew that when we got married. The kids—they're still a part of their lives, especially for his children, who were much older when she passed away; so they remember her. They have a life with her; their entire childhood was with her.

So, me coming in—I'm just an extra. I'm an extra part of the family. I'm almost like a teacher, or another aunt, or something that comes in. I'm not their *mom*, and I know that; so Kari is a part of our family too. David is a part of our family; so when I tell stories about David, they want to hear about it.

Although, it was interesting—about, I guess it was last year—was the seventh anniversary of David's death; and we were only married for seven years. To me, it was a big anniversary; and Robbie was going to be out of town. I thought this would be a really good time to have everybody come over—my family come over and watch some movies about David and just kind of remember him, because he was loved. Everybody in my family loved him. I haven't really given my family the opportunity to grieve together, because I felt it might be a little inappropriate with my being remarried; but he was going to be gone, and it was the anniversary.

I was going to have my whole family over, and we were just going to watch videos of David. My daughter said, "You know"—she was seven; she was only three months old when he died—I said something about him being on video. She said: "I've never seen David on a video!" I said: "Oh my goodness! His own daughter has never seen him walking and talking, so I've got to do this for *her*."

Well, it turned out that Robbie came home anyway. He came home earlier than he thought. I thought, "Well, this is going to be really *weird*, having him sitting there in the living room while we're watching videos of David." Then, we were watching the screen. I am enthralled—you know, watching all of this—and the kids saw him for a few seconds; they'd seen him—they are like: "Oh cool. There he is. Well, that's interesting."

They just kind of walked off; and I'm like, "Don't you want to watch this?" They were like, "No." Then, I heard Katherine say, "Daddy! Da-da"—so something: "Daddy this" and "Daddy that." She comes running over and runs into his lap, and—

**Bob:** —to Robbie?

**Sabrina:** —to Robbie.

**Ron:** Robbie; yes.

**Sabrina:** I said to myself: “It’s time to let all this go. That was a previous life, and this is a new life.” Even though he’s still a part of their past / he’s still a part of their genetics, they have a new dad and a new life.

**Bob:** So, what does “Let all of this go” mean, and what does it feel like?

**Sabrina:** For me, I wanted to keep David in their lives. I felt like they were missing something because he wasn’t here. I wanted to keep the stories alive and keep his legacy alive. I was grasping at not forgetting him for *them*, because I didn’t want them to miss out on their dad.

When I saw their reaction, I thought: “They’re not missing out on a dad. He is still a part of their life / he’s a part of their story; but so is Robbie. He is also a part of their story.” I don’t want, any longer, to separate the two. I don’t want it to be: “Okay; here is your dad—this is your *real* dad—and this guy is your new dad.” To them, they are both a part of their lives.

**Bob:** Does that feel okay to you?

**Sabrina:** It did then; it did then.

**Bob:** Does it today?

**Sabrina:** Well, yes; I mean, the day that that—

**Bob:** —that happened?

**Sabrina:** —video happened, it was a turning point for me. I knew then that: “They are going to be okay.” Up to this point, I worried that they weren’t going to be okay—that the loss of their dad was just this *huge* problem in their life that needed to be *fixed* or somehow mitigated for the rest of their lives. I was wrong. The Lord had provided for them exactly what they needed.

**Ron:** It sounds, to me, like your mom heart was reassured that day: “Your kids are going to be okay,—

**Sabrina:** Yes.

**Ron:** —“and Robbie is a real blessing for them.”

**Sabrina:** Yes.

**Ron:** Yet, your wife heart was sad in some ways—

**Sabrina:** Yes; yes.

**Ron:** —that it was time to turn the corner.

I just want to kind of point out an observation that I'm making. I'm not sure this is exactly right, but there is a little bit of a common dynamic I think in your story that many blended families can relate to. On the one hand, you're turning a corner with your kids. They are younger in age when the stepdad came into their world, and he's a *huge* part of their life.

His kids—Robbie's kids are older—they were much older / had much different relationship or memories with their mother. So, for you, Sabrina, to come into their life is more difficult. You have less of a central role in their life. It's almost like a little lopsided teeter-totter, a little bit—where on one hand, Robbie's very central to his stepchildren; but you, as a stepmom, are not. I wonder if that creates a little awkwardness from time to time.

**Sabrina:** Jealousy.

**Ron:** Jealousy; okay. You said it—I didn't have to. [Laughter]

**Sabrina:** Yes; I get very jealous. I tell him all the time: "You know, you're in this blended family; but everybody loves *you*, but I don't get to be loved by everyone."

**Ron:** That's hard!

**Sabrina:** It is hard.

**Ron:** I just—we have to comment on this, Sabrina. Thank you for sharing that because *so many* people in stepfamilies today can relate to that. They still feel like an outsider, and other people in the family seem to be really clicking and moving forward. Yet, you still feel like the fifth wheel somehow; and that's hard—like when your heart and passion is to be more engaging, and central, and in a deeper relationship with people; but for whatever reason, they don't need that from *you*.

**Sabrina:** Right; yes. You gave a presentation—what you call the sand presentation—and you show all these different individuals who represented by these vials of sand—

**Ron:** Yes; it's—

**Sabrina:** —pouring them in together.

**Ron:** —it's a ceremony that people do at weddings, where they pour sand in to represent the blending of the family members into one family unit.

**Sabrina:** Right. You show this one person vial that doesn't want to pour in; and you said, "That's okay." I'm thinking: "No, it's not! [Laughter] That's not okay!"

**Ron:** "Ron, you're wrong about that. Don't say that, please."

**Sabrina:** I had to go home and change my mindset and say: "Okay; you know, maybe, Seth only wants to pour in a little bit. I need to be okay with that; and maybe, his son and daughter-in-law don't want to pour in at all. I need to be okay with that." It's being okay with imperfection, which is really hard—

**Ron:** Yes; yes.

**Sabrina:** —for a person who enjoys doing my best; you know? I want to do my best—I want to be liked. I want to do things the right way. I want to be friends. I have to be okay with them not wanting to.

**Bob:** Let me just say—if people want to see the sand presentation that Sabrina is talking about, we've got a video on our website, at FamilyLifeToday.com, so they can see how you set this up and explain the whole thing.

**Ron:** It was part of our original *Blended & Blessed*<sup>®</sup> presentation—a livestream event that people can be a part of.

I think the observation here, for the listener, is: "Yes; sometimes, your heart *longs* for so much more in your family / in the relationships; and it just can't be because somebody doesn't want to pour themselves in the way you wish that they would. You have to find a way to take advantage of what you have with them. It may be very little compared to what you want, but finding a way to be okay with that so that you can have a posture that invites them to pour more of themselves over time. You just can't force them to do it, but you remain open and hopeful."

**Sabrina:** Right.

**Bob:** I think you made a great point here: "Be patient. Give grace. Then, make the family as attractive a place for people to pour in, rather than this compelling thing that: 'You've got to be here!'" That will just push them further away.

**Ron:** Guilt trips, anger—none of that is inviting; right? "I'm not pouring more of myself into you if that's what I get"; right?—but a softness.

I just want to say—with a great deal of compassion for Sabrina and others in your situation—"It is *hard*. This is a hard road, day after day after day, to walk, especially when you look across the living room, and you see good things happening with your son

and daughter and Robbie—not that that’s all perfect—but it’s moving; and it’s moving faster than what you’re experiencing, so it really can be difficult.”

**Sabrina:** Yes.

**Ron:** This is why stepparents—you guys have heard me, Dennis, say this so many times: “This is why stepparents need a hug from somebody.” [Laughter]

**Dennis:** And I just want to say, “Parents of all kinds need a hug—

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dennis:** —“because this whole thing of family mixing together in some kind of perfect sandbox blend—that may be the dream and that may be—

**Bob:** —there’s a goal.

**Ron:** There’s a cat in the sandbox?

**Dennis:** That might be. [Laughter] There sure might be.

I was talking to a friend, not too long ago, where the situation is, not only the sand is not mixing—it’s not wanted. This—we’re not talking about blended families here.

**Ron:** A biological family?

**Dennis:** I’m talking about a biological family.

I wanted to ask Robbie how it feels, to him, to watch the woman you love not be able to be the insider that you’ve been able to become.

**Robbie:** Yes; I’m stuck in the middle, because I have to try to maintain the relationship I have and cultivate the relationship between *them*. It’s—that’s difficult, in itself. It’s hard to see, because I know how much she cares for my son and my daughter-in-law and my grandson now. I can see that, but it’s hard to make them see that. It is difficult, but I think that goes back to what I said in the beginning: “You just have to learn how to love and how to treat each individual.”

**Sabrina:** We were talking earlier about how I had made the mistake of pressuring Robbie into being the disciplinarian and how he really needed to be the one that loved. In this case, I’ve tried really hard to press myself in as the one who loves. To have a relationship that’s not wanted and did exactly what Bob said—it just pushes further away, to the point, where—particularly, Robbie’s daughter-in-law—she said: “You know what? I know *you* want this to be a great, loving relationship”; but she said: “I just—I’m not ready to go there. I am just not ready to go there yet.”

That was really hard to hear. I'm thinking: "Why? What did I do?" I even asked her at one point—I said, "What have I done to offend you?" She said, "Nothing." As much as you would think that would comfort me, it was very frustrating; because there was nothing I could do to *fix* it. It's just sit there and have nothing to—go either way—and just really wait on God, and just be patient, and go, "Well, this is one of those things I have to have faith and just put in His hands and go, 'I hope this works out one day.'" [Laughter]

**Ron:** And that is so frustrating.

**Robbie:** Be patient.

**Ron:** And being patient, especially when you really don't have any control or influence to be able to change it. That just speaks to her relationship with Kari, with Robbie, with whatever—it's more about *them* than it is about you; so you really can't affect change there.

Robbie, just—I want to follow up and ask you something. A lot of people in your position tell me that they really are torn between maintaining their relationship with their adult children; and then, recognizing that, if they do that, that kind of pulls you a little bit away from your wife—or it feels like—you feel guilty about doing that; because you have access to them and they want to be with you, but they don't want to be with her.

Then, on the flipside, spending time with your wife and investing in your marriage, somehow makes you feel torn—like your kids are somehow upset with you. Is that something you can relate to a little bit?

**Robbie:** Definitely. Sabrina helps with that so much, because she allows me to do what I need to do to be a part of my son's life. She's like: "Go to Dallas. Go see your grandson and spend that time there, and don't worry about me right now"; you know? She helps with that; definitely. But the part of—we have every day together, so our relationship has grown great; but I only get to see my son, maybe, once a month. So, you know, I have to be deliberate about keeping that relationship strong.

**Ron:** I love that, Sabrina. Thank you for giving him permission. I have to say—I've been involved in a number of situations, where the new spouse did not give permission to their spouse to maintain contact with their kids, especially adult children, and basically said, "It's me or nothing." Let me just caution the listener—every one of those situations I've ever seen turned out to be nothing [of benefit] for the whole family / for the marriage. That is not the posture you want to take.

A posture of grace, saying: "Go and be with your kids as you need. I'm trusting that you'll also be invested here,"—you know, it doesn't have to be one or the other; you can



choose both—"I just realize I need to take a backseat as it relates to your relationship with your kids."

**Bob:** Ron, I can't even imagine somebody being on a stepfamily journey and thinking: "Oh, I'll just figure this out on my own. I'll just go with my gut here."

**Dennis:** Exactly.

**Bob:** "I'll just go with my instinct."

**Dennis:** Right.

**Bob:** If somebody doesn't have coaching and somebody to help them out—they don't have your books—something like that—I mean, can you imagine what it would be like for a couple to try to do this blindfolded; right?

**Dennis:** I can't. Here's what I'd want every couple, who are listening to us, to know:

Whether you've got a blended family or whether you're an intact, nuclear family, children are going to gravitate to one parent or the other. The issue is: "Don't compete with your spouse."

If you're in a blended family, I could see how it would be so easy to compete with the bio parent, trying to win the heart of a child, who isn't yours by birth, but you've been grafted into his life; and you want to make a difference in his life.

But it's also true that kids grow up, Bob—that they may gravitate to a same-sex parent as they get older—guys want to be with their dad; girls want to be with their mom. The other parent can be in competition.

Well, it doesn't work in a blended family; and it won't work in a nuclear family either. Don't be in competition: give grace; pursue the children. Give your spouse room to be the parent your child needs them to be. Form a tag team and figure out how you get this done, because it takes two. It takes two to raise a child today.

I'm thinking of single parents here, Bob, who are listening to our broadcast—they know this more than the rest of us—

**Bob:** Yes.

**Dennis:** —it is a challenging job.

**Bob:** And for the blended families, who have been listening this week, Ron Deal has provided help for stepmoms and stepdads—a couple of books: *The Smart Stepmom / The Smart Stepdad*. These books offer guidance and counsel that I think is really helpful for moms and dads, who are in a challenging situation. We've got copies of Ron's books in our *FamilyLife Today* Resource Center. You can go online at FamilyLifeToday.com to request your copy, or call 1-800-FL-TODAY. Again, our website is FamilyLifeToday.com, and the number to call is 1-800-358-6329—that's 1-800-"F" as in family, "L" as in life, and then the word, "TODAY."

You know, our goal, here, at FamilyLife is to do all we can do to help provide you with solid, practical biblical help and hope as you raise your kids and as you seek to have a strong, committed, godly marriage. *FamilyLife Today* is all about effectively developing godly marriages and families. We're grateful there are some of you who, not only listen to this program, but you make the ministry of *FamilyLife Today* possible. You're helping us reach more people, more regularly, all around the world. You do that by supporting this ministry, either as a monthly Legacy Partner or when you make an occasional one-time contribution. In either case, we are grateful for your support of this ministry. It's easy to make a donation right now. You can go to FamilyLifeToday.com and donate online, or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY to donate.

Let me also mention that, online, we have a downloadable devotional guide for families—it's the *Growing Together* devotional series / four devotions that you can do—maybe, you want to do this over the holiday week if you're travelling or something—something just to have some spiritual conversation and dialogue, as a family. It's free, and it's easy to download. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com and look for the *Growing Together* devotion series. Again, thank you for your support of this ministry as you are able to help us financially.

And we hope you have a great weekend. I hope you and your family are able to worship together in your local church this weekend, and I hope you can join us back on Monday. We're going to talk to Caleb Kaltenbach. Caleb grew up in a home with a mom and dad who eventually divorced. Mom moved in with her lesbian lover; Dad came out as gay. Caleb came to faith when he was in high school. We'll talk about how all of that happened and what that meant for Caleb on Monday. I hope you can tune in for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, we will see you back Monday for another edition of *FamilyLife Today*.

*FamilyLife Today* is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas; a Cru® Ministry. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

---

We are so happy to provide these transcripts to you. However, there is a cost to produce them for our website. If you've benefited from the broadcast transcripts, would you consider [donating today](#) to help defray the costs?

Copyright © 2018 FamilyLife. All rights reserved.

[www.FamilyLife.com](http://www.FamilyLife.com)