Get Confident with Choking with Sammy Davies

**Intro**
Moving forward to when I had my own children, of course, I'm thinking, why am I chopping up these grapes? You know, why do I need a stair gate on these stairs? And that kind of led me down this path of becoming a first aid trainer, a teacher, giving parents these lifesaving skills. So, that's kind of where it all started happening.—**Sammy**

Meg

This is Sammy Davies, a first aid trainer who is passionate about helping parents to be prepared for any emergency. Sammy's a registered nurse, and it was when she became a mom of three that she understood the need to help parents to know what to do in emergencies. Now, Sammy and I have been working together to get this content into the hands of parents. She presents the **Get Confident With Choking** course that's available on the Parent Senses App. And today we get together to chat about the difference between choking and gagging, the common choking hazards around the house and what to expect from her amazing online course. So stay with us as we chat Sammy Davies with some sensible advice about choking.

Welcome to sense by Meg Faure, the podcast that's brought to you by Parent Sense, the app that takes guesswork out of parenting. If you are a new parent, then you are in good company. Your host Meg Faure is a well-known OT infant specialist and the author of eight parenting books. Each week, we are going to spend time with new moms and dads, just like you to chat about the week's wins, the challenges and the questions of the moment. Subscribe to the podcast, download the Parents Sense App and catch Meg here every week to make the most of that first year of your little one's life. And now meet your host.

**Meg:** Hi mums and dads, it is wonderful as always to be here with you. I love the fact that you join me weekly. If this is the first time that you've joined us, I am Meg Faure, I'm an occupational therapist with a special interest in babies, fussy babies, babies with sleep problems, feeding challenges. I'm a mom of three, and I really do know what it is like at the rock face of early motherhood. And each week I join you and you join me. And we are usually joined by an expert or a new mom, one of the two; and we go through what the journey of being a new mum is, or when we invite experts to join us, we go through their topic of interest and that's what we are doing tonight. We have actually got Sammy Davies with us and she is a qualified nurse in Australia, currently living in the UK. And she is one of our course contributors on the Parent Sense App. Her area is Choking, her specific course, I think she also does CPR. And I'm going to ask her to just give us a whole lot of information about who she is and how she came to be working with new mums.

**Sammy:** Hi Meg, thank you so much for having me here today, tonight. It's lovely to be invited and I love getting these messages, you know, and all this information out to parents. So, it's a real honor to be here. But yeah, my name is Sammy and I have been teaching first aid to parents for the last five years. Before that I worked in Melbourne in Australia as a registered nurse. And nursing's just so ingrained in everything I do, but I remember after three or four years at university starting to work within the cold files I suppose, looking after patients. And I remember kind of that feeling of, oh my goodness, this is a big deal here. So that's why, you know, as nurses and as healthcare professionals, we believe in evidence based practice, you know, and that is not doing anything unless, you know a hundred percent, the reasons as to why you're doing it, you know, whether it be from giving a medication or putting in an IV line.

But that really, that kind of evidence based way of thinking really ingrained in me and almost became part of my DNA. So anything, you know, from there on looking forward into my time as a parent and as a first aider, I always think, why am I doing this? What's the evidence behind it? So that's kind of, you know, really did change my DNA and become such a part of me. So moving forward to when I have my own children, of course, I'm thinking, why am I chopping up these grapes? You know, why do I need a stair gate on these stairs? And that kind of led me down this path of becoming a first aid trainer, a teacher, giving parents these lifesaving skills. So, that's kind of where it all started happening and then goes without saying that I'm a big research nerd, you know, if there's any new studies that come out, any evidence, I'm there reading it because I really do think that's the only way to practice.

**Meg:** Yeah.

**Sammy:** So, I kind of combine all of these things of that love of being a nerd, I suppose, and all my practical experience and my love of teaching into teaching parents, these life-saving skills,

**Meg:** And most importantly, being a mum, are you a mum to two or three?

**Sammy:** Three. Yes.

**Meg:** Okay, three little ones. And you know, I think when you become a new parent, I think you are absolutely terrified and I can remember reading a wonderful article on it and it called, it had a term for this, which is ‘the weight of responsibility’; that sense that, you know, my gosh, this is the most precious thing in the world, and I'm given the responsibility of seeing it through to adulthood and I'm absolutely terrified. And it was actually, you know, Sammy, it's an interesting thing; I'm also mum to three and I had a real challenge in my life with the fear of losing one of my children to the point that I actually saw a psychologist, because for me it was like, I just felt like, you know, that something could happen to one of them.

And actually, I mean, in an interesting story, actually, we did have a situation where we almost lost, in fact, all three of my children and my husband, all at once. It was a hugely unique situation where we were on a hiking on a mountain, and I had stayed down—a little bit further down the mountain—and they had kind of gone up a little bit higher and they had stumbled upon a bees nest, but it was an African killer bee nest, and we didn't know that. And obviously they got stung. I mean, my son and my husband was stung 700 times and it was really terrifying. All of them were in ICU, and I mean, it was a real like hit and miss, like we didn't know if they were going to survive. And in fact it was a catalyst for me to then start to actually, yeah just be a little bit more relaxed with them because I realized that we'd face the worst.

The one thing that you can't actually control for in life at all is a bee injury. It's like, it's the one, I mean, everything else, you, you can wear water wings and avoid drowning, you can avoid anything, but a bee stings are the most unpredictable event. And when the most unpredictable event in the world happens and they still actually did survive, which was a miracle. You realize actually, you know, I started to feel okay, you know, that there certainly there was that God's hand was in it because there's no other way that they would've survived it. But, having said that; I do think that through the rest of my life, prior to that, I had tried to prepare myself very, very carefully for everything that I could control. And I think that's, what's amazing about what you do because yes, we couldn't control the bee incident as we've come to call it, but there's a lot you can control in the household. And I think that's really why when you and I met in London last year, I was so very excited because I knew that the things that you share with parents are the things that help them to mitigate risk. And that's really what I want to chat about tonight.

**Sammy:** Absolutely. I mean, I'm sorry to hear about the bee story. That's terrific, I wonder if you've been hiking since, as a family? Oh, wow.

**Meg:** Yeah, no, it was crazy. And we have been hiking and I genuinely can say that my anxiety decreased after that, just I think, look, we saw a very, very good psychologist and she helped us all through it because it was a massive of trauma and it could have generalized into other types of, of phobias and fears, which it didn't because we really, we debriefed well, we were managed well. But yeah, they have been those incidents where….

**Sammy:** Yeah, I think, you know, you've kind of hit the nail on the head and it's about controlling those controllables. I mean, there is so much as parents that we can't control, but there is so much that we can control. So, you know, knowing what to do in case anything ever went bad, you know, that's an important bit that when we put our head on the pillow, finally at the end of the night, you know, we can actually relax and think, do you know what? I've got this. If something happened, I know exactly what to do.

**Meg:** Exactly.

**Sammy:** And that's and what a gift, you know, that we can give parents by having that reassurance and that confidence as well, that if something went bad, that their child is in really good hands.

**Meg:** Well, I can really hear how you are articulating your, why I can see how passionate you are about it. So what led you to setting up your business—teaching parents first aid right in the beginning?

**Sammy:** So I moved over from Australia, you know, I didn't have, at the time we had a three month old baby, I didn't know anyone; I'd lost my identity as it was by having children let alone I'm moving to a new country. But it was when we started feeding our boy that I realized that my husband had no idea what to do, if something was to go bad. So, you know, I really enjoyed sitting him down, teaching him through it, you know, getting a little doll that we had at the time and showing him what to do. And he kept on saying, well, why would I do this? Why would I do that? And I just realized how much I'd missed that teaching and you know, what a perfect fit it was for me. So by the time I kind of taught him and then moved on our extended family and friends, I thought, well, hang on a minute, I think there really is a market for this; because there, as we said, they’re such important skills to know.

So that got me started just teaching this on the weekends and the evenings when my husband was around looking after the young children. And I remember I was still teaching first aid to parents when I was kind of, you know, 38 weeks pregnant. And then I went back when my daughter, she was three weeks old, so it's been something that's kept me really sane throughout having three young kids and, you know, not a great deal of kind of support for me in terms of my family. So it's really kept me sane and given me such strive, I suppose.

**Meg:** Absolutely. And I guess in the beginning it was all live courses and then probably COVID hit.

**Sammy:** Yeah, that's exactly right. So, yeah, so it was always face to face to start off with, and then during COVID, I started to notice a big difference as, as I'm sure we all did, but the parents that I’m meeting, they were just so much more anxious, you know. And again, understandably, we’re aware it’s such a hard time. But as a first time parent during COVID lockdown, I mean, you can't imagine that you can't write that story. Can you? It's horrible that, you know, they went without those supports and those face to face meetings. So, but one topic that always comes up in first aid is the fear of choking. You know that's, with all the parents I speak to that's normally the number one thing that always comes up is how worried people are about choking. So that made me think, oh, how can I support, kind of in lockdown, support these parents? And that's when I started running live on zoom courses just about choking, just so I could help these parents. And then soon enough as we started to come out of lockdown, kind of moms and dads, they didn't want to give up their evenings anymore to be sitting down on zoom. So that's when I turned into an online course that people can work through at their own time.

**Interlude**
If you enjoy my podcast, I would like to share one of my favorite podcasts with you. The Honest Hour, Christina Masureik is mom to two boys and a third little boy on the way. She's an American expat living in Cape towns of Africa since 2008, and decided to start sharing her experiences in parenting since 2017. Having grown up in a dysfunctional family environment in her own childhood, which led to her adoption at the age of 10, Christina is passionate about finding purpose and presence in parenting as well as exploring our own opportunity for healing and personal growth. As we navigate the world of parenting our own children. Christina believes in ending the trauma cycle and that in parenting our own children, we can learn how to re-parent ourselves. So, pop on over to Christina's podcast—The Honest Hour.

**Meg:** And I've been through the course, obviously with it going into the app, I very carefully curate all of the courses that go into the app. Every course that goes onto the app will only ever be delivered by a medical professional or a registered psychologist. And so I went through your course and it was really, really, really incredible. It's very, very sensible, basic information, but, and yet I was just totally enlightened. So I mean, it's an essential course, and I'm really excited about it. One of the things that comes up very often with parents is you’re seeing your baby, you're feeding them and your baby starts to choke, also, you think they are. And often I've said to parents, don't worry about it because it actually probably isn't choking. It's probably gagging. And so I guess the very first question we do have to ask is, is gagging the same as choking, or does gagging always lead to choking?

**Sammy:** And I'm so glad you asked because again, it's such a common misconception and you know, what parents do, they type into a search engine you know, YouTube, baby gagging, and what they're going to get up in those search results isn't always necessarily gagging or it's not necessarily choking. So there's so much misunderstanding out there, but really it is quite simple because gagging is just so much different to choking. It's completely different. Gagging as we know, as you've alluded to it's so common; nurse babies start to learn how to eat that gag reflex is so far forward in their mouth. So they gag really easily. And that gagging sounds, and that sounds horrible, and the baby kind of looks quite distressed in the face, but when they're gagging, when they're making that horrible retching sound, it's better than anything we can do.

So, you know, by gagging they're moving that tongue further forward in their mouth so they can push that lump of food, you know, further forward and then munch on a little bit more. And they're also decreasing the size of their throat as well, so it's less likely that they will actually choke. So it sounds really bad and that's really important that we encourage them, that we stay with them, make sure it doesn't progress to anything worse, but we, you know, take a big deep breath ourselves, just give them that time to kind of overcome that and move forward.

**Meg:** Yeah.

**Sammy:** And then when they're exposed to different textures and they get better at eating, that gag re reflects will move back, you know, and they'll gag less and less, but that's very, very different to choking. And of course, gagging won't always lead to choking as well.

**Meg:** So I always have a spin on it where I look at the psychological and at the sensory, because those are the hats that I wear; that's the work that I had studied and so on. And the first part piece of it is the sensory that I'd like to mention is that some little ones are much more sensitive orally than other little ones. And for those of you who haven't done my sensory baby course, it is on the app and it is a phenomenal course because it helps you to understand what sensory personality your baby is. Now sensitive sensory babies actually have a much more activated gag reflex. And so for some little ones, they actually gag just about on their tongues or on milk, or, you know, they really do gag very, very readily, and particularly when there're new flavors.
So it is something to be aware of mums, because actually they're not choking. They're just gagging and that's a very sensitive oral area, or, you know, mouth area can be, you know, in their case, it'll lead to little ones who do gag an enormous amount.

And the second thing that I want to mention with this is a psychological aspect, and that is that little ones reference all their emotions of their parents at this age. And so when they gag, they look to you and if they would look on your face as absolute fear and terror, and which of course is what you're feeling in your heart, your little one will learn that actually feeding is something that's unsafe or something that they shouldn't be, you know, shouldn't be enjoying or, you know, something where they could be in danger. And so it's very important that when you're watching a little one gag to remain present, as Sammy was saying, but also to remain calm and just try and, you know, kind of fake it a little bit, you know, kind of just have that gentle smile on your face while you're watching them until such time, as they've managed to get the food to the front of the mouth and continue to eat, because you don't want to be panicking and grabbing him out the high chair and, you know, and all of that type of thing, which could really disrupt the whole feeding process as well.

**Sammy:** Yeah, absolutely. That always leads this this vicious kind of cycle where they're worried that they're going to worry you. You're worried that they're going to choke.

**Meg:** Exactly.

**Sammy:** Everything, it's just setting up this thing that every meal time becomes a real worry.

**Meg:** It's really terrifying. So sometimes of course it isn't gagging and sometimes it is actually choking. And that's where the terror sets in for all of us. I mean, I actually am Sammy, interestingly, I am telling you the two worst things that ever happened in my parenting life; the bee incident was one and the other one was, I was nine months pregnant with my second child, and so my first one was about 22 months old, a little bit old, no, a little bit older than two, actually two years, two months. And we were at a birthday party, and I was very conscious as most parents are of not giving him, you know, all the hard candies. And so he took a handful of marshmallows and stuffed as many marshmallows as he possibly could into his mouth and choked on marshmallows.

And I had no idea that marshmallows are one of the greatest choking risks because they expand as they go down esophagus. And they're not hard like sweets, they can't just pop out. I had tried everything to get these marshmallows up. And he eventually was going blue, and thank goodness a friend of mine's husband had worked, when he was much younger in an ambulance actually like years before. And he grabbed James and he started to do some, you know, some what you're going to tell us first aid and James eventually brought up the marshmallow, but by the time he brought it up, he was thoroughly blue. And it was without question, the most terrifying parenting moment, probably along with the bee incident. And so I wanted to ask you, why is it so important that parents do develop skills in managing choking? And what should they be doing in circumstances like this?

**Sammy:** I think the number one thing is just know I want to do, because then it does help with that confidence. And like we said, if something was to happen, if you saw, you know, your child going blue as you've just described, you can step in knowing that absolutely you've got this. So that is such, such a big part of it. So knowing that difference between gagging and that choking, you know, and that absolutely sounds like, you know, who we should consult. And as you said, you know, we know that marshmallows are so high over the risk factors of choking foods, because of that simple thing, they get soft often squishy, and they can choke.

**Meg:** Parents don't know that. Do you know that, I mean, that's Sam, one of the best things about your course, I mean, there was so many incredible nuggets, but one of them was what are your danger foods? And you know, if I was a parent and probably a lot of the parents who listening are in shock that marshmallows have any risk, because they're soft and mushy and of course they do come up, you mention them in the course and I am firsthand experienced that, yes, they're not safe. And there are lots of other foods that parents don't think about that you do mention in your course.

**Sammy:** That's right. Yeah. And I mean, even you've got kind of thinking about older children who might be on social media and be on TikTok and things like that. Like, you know, there's one of these crazies that stuffing as many marshmallows as you can until now, oh gosh, fluffy bunnies or something like that, you know? And you just, if you knew that marshmallows was such a risk, it's just about informing that's it; it's about, you know, kind of empowering yourself with that information.

**Meg:** Yeah.

**Sammy:** Popcorn as well, I've got to mention that. Because a lot of people don't realize popcorn what's happening there, you know, docs kind of mark this as kind of a, you know, a healthy alternative for toddlers. But because with popcorn, every kernel is so different to the one before, you know, and then you've got all those little bits of popcorn that aren't even popped. So, that's a real big risk as well.

So, generally we say kind of no popcorn before the age of about four or five years old. So that's really interesting to make. So, knowing, knowing what to do, having the confidence in yourself, so you can take that big breath and as you said, kind of ‘fake it until you make it’ and just step in and do something because we know if someone's choking and the real big difference with that choking is that it's silent. So not like gagging or coughing where we can hear a sound, when it's that choking incident, you know, that medical emergency, that's silent. And the reason for that is that that obstruction goes a whole way across the airway, and they can't run any air off their vocal cord.

So we we're stepping in then when it's silent, and as you said that changing color in their face, whether that's blue, deep purple, or a pale color, something different. And also they're really panicked in the face as well, because they're not breathing. So, when we see and hear, or don't hear those things, that's when we've got to step in. So I think it's really important to say, I know it does kind of, you think it will come naturally, but calling out for help, you know, someone around you can help get those emergency services on the way that's never going to be a bad thing. You know, if it was a choking incident and you've got a child choking, if you manage to clear that obstruction where you can let the ambulance service know, you know, they can still come up, come over and check out the casualty, but just to get them, you know, get the wheels in motion, so to speak and so call out the help as soon as possible.

And then so after you've identified it, have a look in the mouth, see if you can see anything to grab anything out and then into our first move which is the back blows.

**Meg:** Yeah. Well you've given us so many pieces of what comes up in your course. And I mean, it is with so much more information because correct me if I'm wrong, but the course is how many Master Classes are in your course, are they 3?

**Sammy:** There three. So, so there's five modules, yeah.

**Meg:** There’s five.

**Sammy:** Yep. So we walk through, you know, what is choking because if you can understand the fundamental kind of anatomical differences as to why choking is so much different to gagging and different, you know, to coughing and that does help, you know, make it all sinking in your head and you can remember it, you know, for use to come. So we cover that and obviously we talk about high risk choking foods. Then we talk about identifying someone who's choking, managing them. So obviously we cover everyone really from babies, toddlers, all the way through to adults, you know, we're learning, we may as well. And then we also cover CPR, which is a really, really scary confronting topic for parents. But again, for all of those reasons, exactly, that's absolutely essential, you know, and I've kind of been working on the frontline and seeing how important, you know, first aid within the community is. So, and, but I'm a parent too, so I get how scary it is. So everything is taught in a really, really friendly way, because again, that's the only way you're going to learn it.

**Meg:** Yeah. And it's got these five master classes and then do the parents get any time with you as well? Do you have any interaction with parents on your course?

**Sammy:** Yes. So there's opportunity to ask questions as we go along within the course, there's also WhatsApp group as well that's set up. And then if parents want to, they can come along to an hour long zoom session with me, live, ask any questions, go through the techniques again, sometimes it's easier to do things real time. So there's that opportunity as well. That's

**Meg:** That’s brilliant. It really is the most exceptional course. And if I was a new mum and I'm listening now, who's this aimed at, is it aimed at kind of moms of newborns? Should you be doing when you're pregnant or you know, who is it aimed at?

**Sammy:** I mean, these skills are so essential that anybody could do it at any time. They've got a lot of grandparents as well that that come along. Yes, because that they'll be looking after the baby. So, really it is aimed at absolutely everyone, but there are a small percentage of people who choking does really, really frighten them, you know. So, of course, I would absolutely urge if there's anybody like that listening, do come along because you will walk away with all of those skills you need. I've had someone who's had to, you know, have professional support for her fear of choking and, you know, coming along and learning the skills really helped with her progress. And she's now not worried now can give her baby solid, so that was, that was incredible to see that transformation as well.

This episode is brought to us by Parents Sense, the all in one baby and parenting app that help you make the most of your baby’s first year. Don't you wish someone would just tell you everything you need to know about caring for your baby; when to feed them, how to wean them, and why they won't sleep? Parent Sense App is like having a baby expert on your phone, guiding you to parent with confidence, get a flexible routine, daily tips and advice personalized for you and your little one. Download parent sense app now from your app store and take the guesswork out parenting.

**Meg:** That's brilliant. Well, you know, I'm from South Africa originally and we are very fortunate in South Africa where we have a very strong nanny culture because we have a high level of unemployment. So we have a lot, most of us actually have nannies in our homes regardless of kind of what LSM we are in. And it was always a requirement for me and for most moms in South Africa that our nannies had choking and CPR training because they're the ones at the rock face. And they certainly are ones that should be on this course because it really is just so practical and so accessible. And I think the way you teach is just incredible. So like you say, it really is indeed everybody

**Sammy:** That's right. And also along with the course, you get a downloadable kind of workbook because I'm a very visual learner. So being able to write things down as I go along and then to keep that as a reference point to always come back to, I think that's really important as well.

**Meg:** Yes, no. And your workbook is absolutely incredible. It really is something that I certainly would've printed if I was doing it for the first time for sure. Yeah. So that's incredible, I mean, we've covered off a lot about choking. I have mentioned obviously bee incident, but there are many other kind of safety risks that we have for little ones. And I guess what I'd love to do just in the last few minutes that we are together is for you to highlight the things that you think are safety tips that are very important for new parents.

**Sammy:** I think I would always recommend literally get on your hands and treat and crawl around the house and see what you can see, see what you can reach, and see what's available to you. I can guarantee that, you know, a lot of people listening to this might be storing their dishwasher tablets or their laundry tablets, you know, those little really concentrated capsules; they'll be storing those somewhere inappropriate, maybe that's under the kitchen sink and up until now, that's been absolutely fine. But when you've got a baby who's starting to crawl, you know, that's not the best spot anymore. So anything like that, make sure it's up and away. It's not worth turning your back for a moment and having that worry if nothing else just eliminate that, but even your kids are good and they know not to go in that cupboard. What about later on when they've got friends over? So it's just in my mind, it's better to just to eliminate risks. You know, buttons batteries, they've been in the media real lot recently too. You know those lithium batteries. So if you've got those in the house, I'm not saying chuck everything that has a button battery out, but just know where they are and make sure any batteries are stored really, really appropriately.

**Meg:** And are those button batteries dangerous from a choking perspective or also just toxic?

**Sammy:** Well, they, I mean, they are a perfect size for choking, but it really, when we think about those types of batteries, it needs more that release of caustic soda. So as soon as they come into contact with bodily fluids, i.e. in the mouth, that starts that caustic soda production, and then it would, if that child was to swallow, it would burn the whole way down. So most products, most toy that we buy from the shop, they have gone through all the safety regulations and they'll be absolutely fine, but it's the ones that we might be getting from the internet, from overseas, that haven't been safety checked, that becomes a worry.

**Meg:** Yeah, no, it's absolutely crazy. It's enough to make your blood run cold, all these risks for our babies. And of course it's a very small percentage that do run into any troubles, but I do think it is always, I mean, I know it's the old girl’s guide adage, but it is better to be prepared. And I think that that your course is really going to do that for parents. So thank you so, so much Sammy, because your contribution is amazing. And mums and dads, if you haven't done it, the choking course, Sammy Davies’ Choking Course, The Happy Hearts Choking Course is available on the Parent Sense App. You go and download it there. Sammy, what price is it?

**Sammy:** So it is 21 pounds, and I'm not sure what—

**Meg:** Rounds or dollars?

**Sammy:** Yeah, I’m sorry.

**Meg:** No problem, we'll do, the conversion will be available on the app for you depending on which territory you in, but 21 pounds is approximately about R400 and that'll be one of the best investments you make. And yeah, so Sammy, thank you so much for collaborating with us. And I look forward to working lots more with you. I think there are a whole lot more courses that are going to be taught by you in the future.

**Sammy:** Well, thank you, Meg. It's been a pleasure and thank you for doing what you do.

**Meg:** Thank you. I really appreciate it.

**Outro**
Thanks to everyone who joined us. We will see you the same time next week, until then download Parent Sense App and take the guesswork out of parenting.