Boosting your baby's development

**Intro**

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 a 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 Parent 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:** Hello, mums and dads, and welcome back to this week’s Sense by Meg Faure, I am super excited to have you join me today. As you know, some weeks we have mums who join us and tell us their real life stories and her and I talk about the highs and the lows of parenting. And then sometimes we have experts who join me, people that I can tap into their knowledge, their incredible body of knowledge that they've gained over many years. And today is one of those days. Today, I am super excited to have two of my colleagues join me. I actually worked with Taryn and Cornelia, both in Cape Town, South Africa, when I was working in early intervention in at Success Center, which was their practice in Cape Town, and so I'm just super excited to introduce you to my two colleagues.

First of all, I am delighted to have Cornelia join me. Cornelia is an occupational therapist; a super experienced occupational therapist working with a wide range of patient caseloads in Cape town, South Africa in her practice. And she is the mom of one little boy. Welcome Cornelia.

**Cornelia:** Thanks Meg. It's so nice to be here and chat to you and just spend a little bit of time with you. It's always nice to have a conversation with you.

**Meg:** Yeah, really excited to do so. And her colleague Taryn, who has joined us today. Taryn is a play therapist also in Cape town, South Africa, mom of two little ones. Also focused very strongly on early intervention and Taryn and I have, over the years, referred to each other occasionally and Taryn is really awesome to have you come on board with us on the podcast today.

**Taryn:** Thanks so much Faure, looking forward to chatting.

**Meg:** Excellent, great. So I guess before we get started, it would be wonderful for us to just hear from each of you, how you actually got into the work that you do with parents.

**Cornelia:** Yeah, I think I can start. I have been an occupational therapist working in pediatrics for almost 20 years now. And as I've been treating in therapy, I think I've just…Initially I was very, very interested in early childhood development and development as a whole. And as occupational therapists, we typically look at more physical milestones and more developmental type of milestones and visual perceptual skills. But then I realized there's a little bit of a piece missing. There's a big emotional link to all of this. And if a child's not tapped into the development on emotional level, you can try and stimulate them, but you don't get as far as when you bring the emotional piece into the play.

And I then decided to study a little bit more and learn more about Dior Floor Time, which is a relationship based technique. And there, I really became interested in how the emotional connection between caregiver and child can really enhance development. And then, Taryn and I thought that what if; if we use all these techniques in therapy, what if we teach parents to do it? And then it's not a once a week thing when a child comes to therapy, but it can be a consistent thing that a parent can do with a child. And that's how our whole journey with Connect with Me started, and our program, DevelopME.

**Meg:** That's so incredible. And I agree with you. I mean I have always been an advocate for working through the mother. I think mums clearly have the relationship and dads have the relationship with their little one. And as a therapist, seeing a baby once a week, you just can't intervene as effectively as somebody who's on the ground every day. So, it was really exciting for me when I came across Connect with Me, which is your program. And by the way, moms and dads, this program is going into the app as a course. So, if you have a look on the bottom navigation of your app of your Parents Sense App, you will see in the courses section that Taryn and Cornelia's course Connect with Me is in there. And so, if you're wanting to connect with your little one and develop their emotional world, that's where you want to go.

So Taryn , from your perspective, what was your journey to towards developing connect with me and getting involved in working with children's emotional worlds?

**Taryn:** So I actually also started as an occupational therapist, very interested in pediatrics and also very interested in mental health and actually my community service year in Johannesburg I was able to work in a pediatric ward at a big mental health hospital. And that's where I really saw and learned about play therapy. So very early on, straight off to finishing occupational therapy, I was fortunate enough to start a Masters in Play Therapy in the UK. And from there, I noticed very quickly that obviously I was working with children, but more than the child, I was actually working with families and with parents and helping them support their child and gain access into their child's emotional world. As we've discussed, the more information a parent has, the more they can support the child on a daily basis rather than that one session a week. Yeah, and then with when I had my own child and later another child and my friends were having children, a lot of the things that they would talk about, I felt that as occupational therapists and as play therapists, we knew about and that's when Cornelia and I started chatting about how powerful it would be to equip moms and dads and grandparents with some of the tools that we use in therapy, because they can actually be used quite easily and very effectively at home with their own children.

**Meg:** That's incredible. So, you know, I mean very often parents and I mean the world and media focus on developmental milestones, like walking and talking and teething and sleeping through the night. And so, you know, there's this huge focus on all the practical side of the child's development, what's sometimes neglected is the child's emotional world, which you two have alluded to again and again, and how you've been speaking that this is really where your focus is. So I guess my question would be, why do you think it is so important that we focus on the emotional world in babies?

**Cornelia:** Yeah. Well, for me, it's so interesting to see how a child develops from being completely dependent on a parent, and until when they a young, a teenager or a young adult, how they completely independent and completely separate from their parents. So how does that actually happen? And I think it's so important to think about for me from as a sensory integration therapist, it's so important for me to think about babies and their different personalities and how the sensory makeup plays such a big role in who they are initially as babies, and then how we as parents respond to them. So if you think about a baby that's….If you feel you have an easy baby and they sleep well and they, they not too sensitive, so you can take them places and they don't get over stimulated easily, you might feel, oh, this is a really easy baby to connect with.

But if you have a sensitive baby who gets overstimulated easily, doesn't like to be touched, it's sometimes a little bit harder to get that soothing going. And it's a lot of hard work as a mom or as a parent to get that baby to calm down and regulate and sleep. So, you know, there's a big interplay between who we are as parents and how our babies come into the world. And as a mother, you can have two children that are completely different. You can have the calm baby and you can have the fussy baby. And we have to adapt and adjust to each of those children. And as adults, we have that ability to adapt and adjust the kid, the child, the young infant doesn't really have that ability to adapt and address. So they're completely reliant on us to, to teach them how to in there with their own systems, how to start regulating in the world.

So initially that complete dependence on co-regulation to, or actually, well first just complete regulation from the mom to co-regulation where the mom and the child regulates together, to self-regulation where the child can stay calm and regulated with by themselves. So that journey of how that all develops and how that impacts on development and how it impacts on a child's confidence to explore the world and go out there and not be too fearful to go and do things or the opposite of that know when, when things are actually dangerous and when now have to be careful. So that journey of how we get from the mom and the baby, or the parent and the baby doing it together to the child becoming completely independent. It's just fascinating.

**Interlude**
This episode is brought to us by Parent 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 of parenting.

**Meg:** It is fascinating, and I think there's just so much literature now that has this massive focus on the emotional intelligence and the emotional capacities that people bring to the workspace and to marriage and to relationships and to learning. And so, you know, when you think about everything, every goal we have for our children, right at the get go, which is to have an intact relationship, a personal relationship in a marriage, for instance, or to achieve a certain level of education and a degree, for instance, those two things which look like two totally different measures of success or two totally different buckets of success are actually absolutely interlinked in emotional intelligence. And that route goes all the way back to early, early childhood. And so the things that we do daily with our little ones and, you know, it's as it's as tiny as wearing them in skin to skin on day one and as big as playing peek-a-boo with them at nine months, those things are all critical pieces as we build on little ones emotional world.

So yeah, it's really is such critical work that you do. So when we think about the development of milestones, and obviously…I mean I've just alluded to those long term goals, which is emotional success and relationship, and it's a success in being able to learn and function academically. There's a trajectory because as you alluded too, Cornelia, a baby starts off completely dependent on their mother, and I think it's like that with everything that babies do, they start off completely dependent; like you have to carry your baby for nine months in utero and then afterwards carrying them. And eventually after 12 months, they're actually walking. And of course, in the trajectory from being carried to walking, there's a whole lot of developmental milestones, which we know about the gross motor milestones are things like rolling and setting and crawling, and then walking.

Now it's the same for emotional milestones. We have these kind of little milestones that go along the way, and I'm quite interested to get your take, maybe Taryn, on what the trajectory is of our emotional developmental milestones specifically.

**Taryn:** Yeah. So it's, as you say, there often is a lot of focus on even health professionals asking you, did your child crawl on time? Did they walk on time? You know, that’s where people tend to focus, but as you say, now, these days, we really want to look more at emotionally and even socially how your child has developed. Even if you look at the first six months of a child's development, there's quite a number of little cues that you can be looking for. So obviously in those first month or two, you know, as Cornelia's mentioned, the baby's very much dependent on you. And there isn't as much kind of spontaneous emotion being shown by the baby, unless they're hungry or wet or over tired.

But then that big milestone that everyone looks out for, which starts as early as two or three months is when your baby will start to actually have a social smile. So when the mom smiles at their baby, the baby will smile back. Or if someone comes to visit the baby and smiles at them, they'll smile back. Or if you're at the shops with your baby and someone comes and looks in the pram and smiles, the baby will smile back. So that can happen really early at about two or three months, and by four months, babies can even engage in, you know, a sense of humor and laughter. So, you know, you'll see a very…A four month old baby might giggle if someone drops something and it looks funny. Or if someone pulls a funny face at the baby, they may laugh at that. Yeah, and by six months old, it's very clear that your baby can have a wide range of emotions. They can express anger if they’re feeling like they're not being fed quickly enough, they can express sadness if they bump themselves or if you accidentally bump them or if a sibling hurts them. Yeah, they can be fearful if there's a sudden loud noise of a dog barking, they could even be surprised, you know, if suddenly a dad comes home early from work and surprises the baby.

So in those first six months, there's a very wide range of emotional development that takes place. I mean, I think these days parents are, are gaining more insight into their child's emotional world. They're becoming more aware of looking for these milestones. And also even pediatricians are just asking more around their social and emotional world and not being solely focused on their gross motor and fine motor development.

**Meg:** Absolutely. So, I mean, you've spoken about a couple of milestones there, the social ones, the sense of humor the wide ranges of emotions, Cornelia, what's your personal favorite milestone of the first two years and why?

**Cornelia:** Yeah, I think as an occupational therapist, I have to say crawling baby, because that's one of the milestones that I work on so much in therapy. But to me it is actually very exciting for a number of reasons. First of all, I think I love showing parents the mini micro milestones that build up to crawling. And we so often wait for these big milestones that we can say on this date and this, at this time, my baby crawled on all fours and you kind of want to take a photo and add the day to it. But there are actually so many tiny little mini micro milestones that build up from it, like the rolling, the sitting and weight shifting from one side to the other. So I love showing people just to look at the, get excited about the little, little, tiny little milestones that's different from the day to day.

And then of course, the other reason why I love crawling is because now all of a sudden the baby can show their independence so they can show what they're interested in. They can go for the toy that interests them. So all of a sudden it opens up a whole lot of other opportunities for learning and it opens up a whole lot of other opportunities for exploration. Yes, our lives become complete chaos on a physical level then after that, because then you start running after your child and your house becomes a mess and you have to make a childproof, but there's also a big excitement around that. They unpack your cupboards, your drawers, they explore texture. So all of a sudden the baby's starting to take charge from of their own development in that sort of way, where the environment now sorts of playing a bigger role.

So, they can do that because they feel safe and they feel safe to explore at home. So there's also that emotional piece to it. So the baby is becoming a little bit separate from mom. They're not so dependent anymore. So mom's there and mom's a anchor, but the baby's on elastic cord, they can go off, explore, the mom explains, or the parent explains the caregiver explains what they're feeling, what they're seeing, what they're smelling, what they're touching. Is it safe? Is it dangerous? So, you know, the whole world starts opening up, but it's so beautifully designed that the world just opens up enough for that babies to take in the immediate environment. And they sort of take it in on floor level. And then as they continue developing, they start standing and they take in a new level and slowly they start walking and they will…Becomes a little bit bigger. And then at three and four, then you can really see that emotional world exploding. And they start asking all those complicated questions of death and dying and social questions.

So, like it all leads onto each other, but every single little moment is a absolute miracle, and I always get excited about it.

**Meg:** I love the way that you have connected crawling, which is such a concrete visual kind of, we can see it, tangible is the word I'm looking for, gross motor milestone. But you've connected it with the intangible; with the emotional side as well. And it made me think, as you were saying that; that crawling happens between 8 and 10 months, approximately. And that's around about the time when we start to see separation anxiety, and you wonder whether or not there is some sort of connection there with as I've got this power within me to move away from my mother, that the insecurity comes becomes kind of connected with that with, oh my goodness, I can move away and she can move away from me and kind of connects in with that separation anxiety.

And I've always thought about separation anxiety in the context of object permanence, which is knowing that the object, which is the mother exists when I can't see her. But maybe it is also that our little ones are feeling a little bit of imposter syndrome. Like, wow, I can move away, and that means that if I can move away, that…Like you said, that elastic and stretch, and that could make them feel a little insecure. So I love the way that you frame that Cornelia really, you know, looking at that gross motor milestone and it's emotional implications.

And I'd love to ask you the same question Taryn , and while you think about your favorite milestone, I'm going to mention mine because it is an emotional milestone. In fact, I have two. So my one favorite milestone is smiling because quite simply it is such an important indicator of kind of the capacity for emotional engagement, where a little one actually makes a smile in response to someone's face, and there's an emotion attached to it. And you can see that; that wiring and, and there's neurons in the brain just firing up with delight. And so for me, smiling is such an important milestone. And it's a milestone that really, I mean I've always tell mum says it's such a steady milestone, almost all babies doing it around about the same age, which is six weeks. Very few babies are doing it really late. And very few babies are doing intentional smiles early than six weeks. It's such a steady milestone, and yet it's such an important milestone. So that's my one favorite milestone.

And my other one is the one when little ones start to point, and that also happens at around about 8, 9 months where they start to point at something to indicate something is that they want something. And that's an incredibly important emotional milestone because it indicates that something that's in my mind needs to be communicated with your mind, which is one of our first indicators of mindedness, which is obviously a very important emotional milestone that I know that another human being actually has emotions behind and a state behind their behavior. And so those are my two favorite ones, a smile and pointing a very important. So, Teran on your side, what is your favorite milestone of the first two years?

**Taryn:** Well, I'm actually dealing with this right now at the moment, my little girl's nine months old and also just starting to crawl and yeah, it's certainly that separation when, you know, mommy walks away to the kitchen and she isn't….She's just starting to crawl so she's not quite able to get all the way across the house yet, but she suddenly realized that people can come and go. So, yeah, I think it's so that's exactly what we’re discussing today is that, yes, it's a physical milestone, but so much more that emotional component. And that's why for me kind of one of my…it's a very, quite a early milestone, but it's actually just that basic mirroring that a baby and a mom does with each other, which obviously happens in those first six months. You'll start to notice, and I'm seeing that a lot at the moment that even babies watching the way your mouth moves when you talk or the way your mouth moves when you chew, and they're starting to copy a lot of what the mom's doing.

And so things like, you know, smiling at your baby, your baby smiles back, or those little peek-a-boo games where you hide in your face and then exposing your face. So I think that mirroring and that that's the start of engagement with the parent. And then if you think about that trajectory, that's the start of your social engagement with the world. And then it moves from the parent, maybe to siblings, to eventually little friends in playgroup and so on all the way into to adulthood. So yeah, that mirroring and that awareness of the other, and that ability to copy what an adult is doing is a very important milestone in the emotional development of a baby.

**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, South 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:** I love that; it really is, it's an amazing milestone. And that goes all the way through the first few years, so that's a very important milestone. Now, in your course, I'm sure that parents will learn about the milestone that should be emerging at the point in time that their baby is at. But in addition to that, they're going to learn in the Connect with Me Course, about the first three months and what they can actually do to bed down a foundation. So if we are thinking about little, little babies in the early days, and we are thinking about the emotional development, what can parents do in the first three months to bed down these emotional foundations?

**Taryn:** Well, I think it's, it's as simple as kind of responding to a baby's need. And that almost sounds kind of self-explanatory, but actually that is what setting up a baby's kind of emotional and social brain that, if there is a need and whether that need is I'm hungry, I'm wet, I'm cold, I'm tired, you know, the very basic kind of survival instinct or instinctual needs of a baby. If you think about a parent that doesn't respond to that how damaging that can be. Alternatively, how kind of positive and empowering it can be for that emotional world, if you call for help and that help is responded to appropriately. And I think often we feel in those first two or three months, oh, you know, the baby—because all they're doing is kind of eating and pooping and sleeping.
And you know, it's not that much fun all the time. But actually it's crucial because on an hourly, and minute by minute daily basis, you are teaching that baby that if something is wrong or if you need another human or adult support, whether that support is going to be provided or not. So it's really a very, very basic level; that's where emotional development starts. And often when there are difficulties in adulthood, people do look back at the childhood. That's very, very, you know…Those first three months, what was happening? Was that baby's needs been attended to? And if not, could that…You know, that does have a negative impact later on in terms of building relationships and social development.

**Meg:** Yeah. I love that. I mean, that is just so important and it's so simple because it's not high tech, it doesn't involve toys, it just involves human interaction engagement, and actually just loving your baby. So doing what instinctively comes naturally to you is exactly what your baby needs in order to kind of get that first foundation for emotional development. And if we look, turn our attention to the second half of the first year, and so we now got an older baby, a 6 month old, to 9 to 12 month old. What is an example of a great activity that would develop emotional engagement at that age?

**Cornelia:** I think we've all said peek-a-boo and yeah, for me, peek-a-boo is the beginning obviously of that practice of separation anxiety and practice at mommy, even if I can't see mommy, she's still there. So and it's so fun when the baby laughs, when they pull the cloth off your face or you hide yourself and they see you again, and that's like an enjoyment of, oh, you are still there all the time, and I see you. But then you can actually use that same peek-a-boo game with toys, the toys that your baby really enjoys playing with and start hiding the toys a little bit. And even if you don't cover them all the way, just cover them a little bit and halfway and pull the cloth away or let the baby pull the cloth away and show them that it's still there. And there you're practicing two things; you're practicing that object permanence of things don't disappear when we can't see them, but you are also practicing that joint attention with your baby.

So checking and seeing which toy your baby is interested in and using that toy that they interested in, their favorite toy and start hiding it, pieces of it. So you are really practicing another very important skill for emotional development when you step it up a little bit, the pick-a-boo.

**Meg:** I love that. So, I mean, that's literally the simplest activity. I mean, and similar to Taryn 's also being the most simple activity, just being there for your baby, but this is also a super simple activity of peek-a-boo and yet has all these incredible repercussions in terms of emotional development. So, I mean, all of these things are going to be what parents are going to learn in your course, which is going to be amazing. Maybe before we finish off, could you tell us a little bit more about what the course entails? How many weeks is it? And, and just really…What if parents do join the course, what they're going to get for it?

**Taryn:** Yeah, so the Connect with Me course, it covers 12 modules. The first two are more of an overview, but the rest of the course is going to be looking at specific principles. So kind of breaking down what we've been talking about today, but really enabling and teaching parents how to use our therapeutic principles, but on a kind of at a home basis. Every principal we discuss is also going to have activities that parents can do at home. And we've really focused on simple activities that don't require fancy toys or expensive equipment, just like we've been discussing today; Peek-a-boo and mirroring and you know, nice, easy sensory games and activities to do with your little one. So if you looking to really build that emotional connection with your baby, you’re looking to build a little one that's not only developmentally on track, but also emotionally on track, then Connect with Me is going to provide you with all those tools.

**Meg:** That's amazing. And what ages is it for?

**Cornelia:** It's really from infancy. So when the baby's really, really young until they're about three years old, so it takes us through the different stages up to toddler.

**Meg:** Cornelia just correct me if I'm wrong, but when a mama enrolls, if she's got a three month old, or if she's got a two-year, three-month-old, she goes onto the same course, but the activities will be specific to her baby's age. So she'll have the same content, which is the topic for this week is whatever it is. And then she'll have an activity specific to her baby's age. Is that the way you've structured it? Or are you going to have two separate courses, one for toddlers and one for babies?

**Cornelia:** So it's the same course for toddlers and babies because the principles still apply, but the activities are age appropriate and graded, according to the baby's age,

**Meg:** That's amazing. Well, I'm really super excited. Moms, I think this is one of the best investments you can make in your baby, because it is developing what is the most critical of all, which is their emotional world. So I do encourage you to go onto the Parent Senses App to have a look in the courses section. And by the way, you don't have to subscribe to the app in order to access the courses. The courses are in the freemium version, so you just pop on, you download the app Parent Sense. You have a look at the courses, you'll find the Connect with Me course there, and there you will purchase the course and have access to it. And the activities will be specific to your baby's edge and stage. So I'm really super excited about this particular course, and I just know just like all the other courses, we've got two of, really South Africa's top experts on little ones emotional worlds. And Cornelia and Taryn , I think this conversation needs to continue there's so many more questions I'd love to ask you about development, about typical development and also about when things go wrong and what to look out for. So let's pick it up in another podcast at later stage, but at this stage, thank you both very much for joining me.

**Cornelia:** Thank you, Meg.

**Taryn:** Thanks for having us.

**Meg:** Excellent, thank you.

**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.