How to play for parents

**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: Welcome back to Sense by Meg Faure. I am so delighted that you have joined me today and is always my pleasure to be alongside you on your journey as you parent your little ones. And sometimes on our podcast we are joined by real life mums like Cassidy, who ask us questions and hopefully help me to answer your questions through that. And sometimes we are joined by professionals, usually medical professionals or people who've worked extensively with little ones and whose impact in life is all around kind of making your journey a little easier. And today is one of those mornings. I cannot tell you how excited I am to welcome Lara Schoenfeld with me. Laura is my partner in Crime and Play Sense, which is the playgroup program that her and I founded a few years ago, but she's also the founder of Nanny and Me.

And Nanny and Me, is an incredible program, which I'm sure Laura and I will get into a little bit that empowers nannies to really care for little ones, but also enhance their own skills as well. Very critically, Lara is also a really seasoned mom. She is the mom to three boys now. I think anybody who is a mom to twins or three boys has a super power because I only had singletons and I only had one boy and that was hectic enough. So Lara you are a super mom and it's always, always fabulous to chat to you and I'm really excited about today's session.

Lara: Thanks Meg, thanks for having me. I'm really excited as well.

Meg: That's super exciting. Now, the topic we're going to be talking about today is very close to every mother's heart because at some point in all of our parenting journeys, we need to find childcare, whether it is that we're going back to work and so we need a more full-time childcare solution. Or it is that we just need a couple of extra hours in the week in order to do distance working. But everybody reaches a point at which they need to find childcare, and there's always a million questions about it because we know that childcare in crèches can be absolutely fabulously delivered and it can be through well-trained carers. But we also equally know that having our little ones at home is a fabulous place for them and a secure place. And so one of the things that I'm often asked about is why parents should consider nanny care versus crèche care when they're going back to work. So I guess that's where we should kick off talking about it today.

Lara: Great question. Thanks Meg. I always say to parents, birds and bees are born in the wild, helpless and blind and they stayed with their mummies for about two and a half years. And this is very similar to what psychologists turned the attachment period for our babies. So there's a first phase of zero to two and that is known as child’s Trust versus Mistrust**.** And basically all our babies, everything they're experiencing through the movements, through their sensors, which is actually happening largely through their caregiving travels at that spinal column hits the base of the brain and then it's actually wired through the limbic system brain. That's where we feel. So first we need to feel safe and then we need to feel that we belong. And that is actually what develops the frontal lobe, which so many parents want to give a baby. So I always say that intelligence is developed in the arms of all loving people.

So firstly, from an attachment point of view, having consistent care in their own environment, one-on-one is one really amazing way to develop your baby's brain off a teacher. And you know, mummies feel so much guilt leaving home. And the research shows that babies can safely attached to more than one caregiver as long as that person is one-on-one and consistent, so that's a great relief to know for parents. Now unfortunately that's not going to happen crèche day, you know, if you're lucky, you'll have six babies potential to one caregiver. The international standard is one to three, but in South Africa that doesn't always happen. And so if mums are having to look at a crèche, I would say definitely, look at the child to carer ratio and how consistent are those caregivers?

The second thing to consider is immunity and pediatricians have a term for us, it's known as Creche Syndrome. And babies can be sick every three weeks when exposed to a group environment. Now, some exposure to germs is good and actually builds our babies immune systems; that's the common cold that they get from family and friends who visit. But, repeated infections leads to secondary infection, so things like tonsillitis, bronchitis. And that actually means firstly, baby is sick, often parents aren't getting sleep, sick babies can't go to creche, so now mom’s got a meeting and now she's stressed up because she can't get there. And all these repeat visits to the pediatrician and also in terms of cost. So really an important factor to consider is immunity. So again, if mums and dads are looking for creche, see what are their protocols, how do they make sure that it's a sanitized environment?

And then the last factor is around socialization. So, lots of parents think that they want to have a happy social baby and that sending their baby up to creche will mean that the baby's learning to socialize. Now, it actually goes back to the first point I made around attachment that our ability to socialize is honed on the basis of our healthy caregiving and the ability to safely attach to our caregivers. So when I know I'm safe and I know that I’m insecure, I'm able then to trust others and trust that the world is an okay place, people are going to treat me well.

Meg: Lara, I'm actually going to pause you there. And the reason is that you've mentioned two things that I think are so critically important. So before you go on, and I know that you've got more to tell us about the reasons for looking at a nanny. So the first piece, which was just so critically important, is this neurological piece where, you know, we wanting our little ones in those formative years, those first two years to really form those bonds. What was that Erickson stage called again, that first stage? Just remind us.

Lara: Trust versus Mistrust.

Meg: And you know, I think that's so important that Trust versus Mistrust, that laying down the foundation for the way in which, and the expectations that we'll have from other human beings for the rest of our lives. So that's the first piece around having a really, really connected deep attachment with a primary caregiver. And as you've said, primary doesn't necessarily mean one, it can be primary meaning a couple of different caregivers to which to whom we have really bonded, and the second obviously being immunity. Now, I am sure that in a crèche situation, as you say, with a very small ratio, you potentially could have great attachment but you just can't get away from that Crèche Syndrome at all. So, two fabulous reasons to consider nanny care. Was there a third reason that you were thinking about with regards to nanny care?

Lara: Yes, it's one of the most frequently asked questions at Fields, you know, sending my child's to crèche will develop these social skills. Now, what's really interesting is that it's actually that foundation with the adults in our lives, our primary caregivers, that forms that foundation for being able to trust others, to be able to know the world is a good place, that people genuinely are good, and I can trust them. Even in terms of play phases, children really only start to play together from about three years of age. Before then, they engaged in parallel play next each to other and with an in tune teacher, caregiver, they can learn to socialize, but there's still a lot of fighting and pulling here and crowd control. Okay, control. So really what is important is just trusting the fact that it's this foundation that they will create that ability to just naturally form friendships to lack other children and expect the best from those around us.

Meg: Yeah. So it really is that this primary relationship forms the foundation on which socialization would be developed. And you know, in Place Sense one of the things that we do say is that social skills are important and I certainly as a mom knew that my little ones by 18 months needed to have some connection with other little ones. And of course that can happen when you have a nanny at her because you can be joining up with other nannies and little ones in groups. And then of course we have, have Play Sense, which is the playgroup program that you and I started that starts from around about two years old where little ones can go and be in small groups.

So, Lara, I mean you've put forward a very strong case for parents having nannies rather than immediately crèches. And of course we'll probably have some moms who are concerned about the fact that they've chosen crèches. And I think it's important to say that when you are choosing a crèche, it is possible to choose good crèches. Make sure that ratio is something you've really attended to carefully, make sure that the crèche carers or the day mom is really, or the child minder is really, really well-trained and loves little ones, you know, that this is their passion. You know, those type of things can bode well for a crèche situation.

But having said that, I like you, and according to your arguments today did go for a nanny and I did feel quite strongly…I mean we are obviously speaking to an international marketer and the price of nannies is sometimes really prohibitive, but certainly in South Africa, which is where your Nanny and Me program exists and where much of our audience is nanny care is actually affordable. So, if we are saying that if it's affordable, and if we're saying that it's a really good choice, which I'm in absolutely in agreement with, there can be situations where it's not a good choice. And that happens usually when there's an undertrained nanny, or stressed nanny. So, if I'm choosing nanny care, what should I be looking for? What are the key things that as a mom I need to be looking out for as I choose my nanny for my little one?

Lara: Yeah Meg, we actually surveyed our parents recently and asked for anyone who has an amazing nanny to basically tell us what makes her amazing. And it was so interesting because obviously it just confirmed what I’ve reading, but to read a hundred accounts work makes someone and amazing nurse and it just gave a lot of testament to the fact that is incredible. So, firstly it was that this passion for children and that is strongly related to the research; to responsive caregiving and responsive caregiving is the ability to interpret a baby's cues, respond appropriately, have a lot of positive ethics. And actually what else is going to research is help babies more to concentrate or pay attention. That I find so fascinating as well because of that one-on-one care, she is able to do that and again, compare that to a noisy over stimulating crèche environment potentially for a little one; no one's directing their attention.

So, there's this idea around this passion that, but this is what she was born to do that's came up very clearly that she didn't see it as just a job. And secondly is around her character traits. So before that came up, top word trustworthy is reliability, willingness to learn and taking responsibility. And just to touch on those, many mums will tells me that I have an amazing domestic worker who’s been working for ages now should they literally be the nanny? And I'll often say absolutely, because they already know those four and then they actually show passion for your baby, you know, and so many of them are moms already. So you don't need to worry about the childcare part and then rather it needs that willingness to learn that points to the next thing was around skills.

So, first aid and safety, health and safety, I mean we mentioned as the next skills, and then last one being communication. And obviously many nannies in South Africa, English is not their first language, but just that sense of, that gut feeling a mum has when they meets them and getting along and being able to communicate. That doesn't mean written language at all. It means ability to give an instruction and know she's going be able to follow it and judge your way. I think for moms who go to work, there's a sense of wanting to know that things have been rightly done as if you were…So, nanny's ability and willingness to kind of follow along this way was very important.

**Interlude**

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 of parenting.

Meg: So a lot of it does rely on our gut. I mean I think you've alluded to that, that we get this sense, and this feel for how much somebody's passionate about looking after little ones and like you say, their willingness to learn. So those things are really, really important. And then so let's say you've managed to find this absolutely amazing nanny and she's got all the kind of, let's call it the soft skills to be this incredible nurturer and you know, I mean they're just so many wonderful nannies out there with these soft skills. But there are the hard skills, which you've alluded to actually, you've just said an example of which is first aid training. I mean, we're not born knowing that it can't be nurtured into us. It's something that we need to go through a step by step process and know how to do first aid, what to do when a child is choking, as an example. And by the way, moms, as I say that we've actually got a **Get Confident with Choking** course inside the Parent Sense App. So, if your nanny has not done a first aid course, that's where you need to go to inside the app. You'll actually find it, Get Confident with Choking. So that's one example of skills. Can you give us other examples of skills that you think nannies should be trained in in order to be kind of topnotch nannies?

Lara: Yes, Meg. So, this is really my passion and I'll never forget the day I sat down to sit with my nanny then and my 18 month son and she was a picture of Natalie had all those soft skills and every day I'd go to work and I'd say, here's some play doll, here's some puzzles, here's…You know, whatever it was that I laid out for her. Being an OT, I knew that I wanted her to play with my little one as I would.

Meg: Of course.

Lara: And it just kind of compounded the guilt. And I came home and I felt that, oh, she hasn't played. So anyway, one day we sat down and all dark finger paints and we were painting together and within a few moments she was more engaged in the painting than he was and he was really enjoying it. But she was just, I could just see she'd been transported to another world and then looked to turn, I said, “Have you ever painted before?” And she said, “No.” I said, “Do you have a book to puzzle?” And she said, “No, I've never had the chance.” And it was in that moment I decided I have to do something about this here. She might be an amazing woman who looking after our little ones. The brain is at its most critical time for learning for little ones and it's not an initiative at all for **[inaudible 15:53]** it's actually just, can you imagine being tasked for painting? You don’t know if it's toxic.

Meg: What if they put in their mouth?

Lara: What if they touch the walls? I'm supposed to keep the baby to me in the house**.** Why would you even want a baby to get near to the paint? It's actually so ludicrous if you put yourself in a nanny’s shoes, may have never had that exposure herself doing that. So, play is from the research, from the neuroscience play is how babies learn, how they see their world and nannies needs training play. And so that was where Nanny ‘n Me is for. And what I realized too is when training, we need a weekly dose effect. You know, we need to experience little victories as we go. And the Nannies Who Can Tell Training, which is a weekly program with the baby toddler, they actually see the little one coming up. They see how the little one is. And so the why of play in this is obvious and when something is obvious like that you're going to implement at home, which is what we see, you know, with 80 to 90% of our nannies, they're influencing everything that have, they feel proud and what they're doing, they're learning and having fun.

And so play is critical and the three sort of play skills I would say we have seen over time, the first is Serve and Return, that’s nannies picking up on those cues from baby and returning the serve, so parents can go look at the websitemore on that. The second one is scaffolding; so knowing where your child is at, so independent. It's different for each individual. So, being able to give that support, if the little one needs help focusing on the task at hand, just the verbal cues or physical taking a little risk at helping you do the activity. So, and then the last one is just I call it simple cycles, and that is knowing the play cycle and how to follow the child lead. So, children are naturally curious and they love exploring, and then how do we come alongside the child so we the adult doesn't take over the play, but plays alongside the child. So those are the skills of play that you can use any activity base to achieve those.

Meg: It’s so interesting. I mean, I would say, and I mean in fact research does show that player is innate in human beings. I mean, and animals, sorry, in animals, not even just in human beings. You see it in bears and kittens and I mean play is there, play is how we learn. So of course in nannies come with that, they do have the innate capacity to play and this fire within that needs to be ignited through play. So, the nannies intuitively as living beings want to play. I think something very interesting that you said just now though, and or, and I hope I'm not putting words in your mouth, is almost giving them permission to play. That play is not frivolous and a waste of time and going to make a mess and going to be something that kind of the employer would frown upon. But actually, giving play a very central and important role in the development of the child.

And that focus on play and on saying, you've got permission to play, not just permission to play. We want you to play, we want our little ones to get messy. We want…You know, we are not worried about the mess and the clothes getting some paint in it. We actually, literally want our little ones to play, and I think that…Almost that kind of value system needs to be transferred from the parent across to the nanny, which would then come through training. So, I love what you speak about there.

What it does kind of bring me onto is, you know, I often put myself in the shoes of a nanny and I think about this as somebody who's desperate for this work. You know, maybe been living below the bread line or maybe not being able to feed their own children, now they've got this job and this is a well-paid job and there's an employer who has high expectations, has a beautiful home, you know, and suddenly there's this, I'm sure, this anxiety around how do I keep this job? How do I make sure that I'm ticking enough boxes? And this kind of brings us into this employee- employer relationship, where there would be these expectations from the employer and often very high expectations. And these coupled with this anxiety, this latent anxiety or sense of discomfort or insecurity that the nanny might present. So let's talk a little around this relationship and how do we shift out of that and how do we form a relationship that is really, really positive with the child centrally in mind?

Lara: Yes, Meg. And I don't think moms, or it's one of the mistakes I see most often with this relationship is that moms don't necessarily see themselves as an employer, and so that means that the relationship starts upon the **[20:39 world foot???]** and I think it's because it happens within our homes, right. So, it's kind of out of that world or work, although it has changed a lot post-COVID. But so, I always say to moms, think about how you want to be treated at work. Think about your base working experience, your base boss, what were the things that they did which ensure job satisfaction. And again, in the research, if you are satisfied at your work, you 3.2 times more productive, say, and you say that if you have a passion for children, you'll love the child, but we don't want to see moms go through series of nannies over and over and over because that is bad for the attachment, as we said earlier.

So, the things that make job satisfaction between a worker and an employee, the first is contractual. Do you have a contract? Are you paying her in, whatever the country you live in, what are the rules set out? So ours is the Department of Labor and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, you have to comply and you know, I see it as a positive. The contract could take both parties and it makes it very clear sort of second part of that is the job description. And as you just said, that's what I always say with this part is the permission to play. That's where you can very clearly lay out, this is how much I expect you to clean. It's in for all and most of the time I want you to be engaging with play.

Then the third thing is performance appraisal. So I've had nannies come to me after doing some Nanny and Me and they just are on fire, excited. And they say they worked as a nanny for 13 years and they've never had training, never had feedback. Can you imagine working for 13 years, the same job and never been told doing a good job like falling, you know. So, I was encourage moms, take your nanny out for lunch. It means sort of a quarter, go somewhere where there's some childcare **[inaudible 22:32]** and have a conversation with the job description, say what she's doing really, really well. Ask her where she thinks she can improve and then ask her where she wants to learn and set up a goal for the next quarter. And that's how we want to be treated in our jobs, right, as in employee-employer space.

And then the last one is just show real care, knowing it's her birthday, spoil her on her birthday, knowing her children's birthday are, give her Friday afternoons off or early holiday. There’re sure little ways and take out retirement and take her a medical aid so she doesn't have to go to the clinic and spend all day in a queue. Just those little things make all the difference and at the end of the day, I'll actually investments in your own child.

Meg: Absolutely.

Lara: It’s the quality of the childcare that you're ensuring by having a great working relationship with the nanny.

Meg: Absolutely.

**Interlude**

If you enjoy my podcast, I would like to share one of my favorite podcasts with you, The honest hour. Christina Masuriek is mom to two boys and a third little boy on the way. She's an American expat living in Cape Town, 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 think most of us can think back on incredible nannies and certainly the one who brought up my three children with me, she co-parented with me and my husband was also co-parent. So there were three of us in the home and super hands on. But my children have always had a very deep love for her and a huge respect for her. And I think it's, yeah, it's critically important. It all starts in the home. The way that you treat other people is what your children learn from you. And that's one of the most important lessons you can give your child. And then, I mean when I think about having this amazing nanny, and of course you know, you've painted a picture of an amazing foundation for a good relationship.

But even when you've got these incredible nannies and they are so wonderful, and you've set the stage, and you've trained them, and then it's time to go to work and off you go. You take your little one, your nanny walks in in the morning, you've maybe been a little bit rushed and the first thing you do is you hand your baby over to your nanny and immediately like there's a complete disintegration of tears and crying in hysteria. And I think most mums have experienced that and particularly, you know not so much in Autumn, but certainly in the Western Cape where our nannies don't live-in so they often have literally got off the bus or the taxi five minutes before we have to walk out the door to go off to work, whatever it is, and there's these very short transition moments. So how do moms actually kind prepare their little ones to move through into that separation and hand over to their nanny?

Lara: So, Meg, I think practice makes perfect, right. So, I always say to parents, if this is a new nanny, a new customer, prepare at least two weeks of hand over and the first time you might just walk around the block and leave baby with nanny and come back and say, “Oh, there, we’re fine. You know, then you go, imagine having your nails done, you're here and you remember those days, Meg, where you barely leave your house out of your pajamas. So, I think the practicing and the leaving home for longer and then leaving over a feed and seeing how did they manage? Leaving over asleep, how did they manage? So, that when you leave that few step with, you actually have real confidence, right, and the first day you leave for sort of half a day, maybe you go visit your colleagues at work or to work at a coffee shop, try and get back into some things, have a friend to pop in or you know dad or granny or someone just to pop in and give you some feedback so that nanny is also given the space to develop that relationship. If you’re going to be over her shoulder all the time, that doesn't help.

And really important is communication, we have a sheet which parents can laminate and put on the fridge or whatever, print it out. So, expecting nanny to keep copious notes is not the idea here because that's going to take time away from time with baby, but just a little checklist with how many meals, how many dirty nappies, how did they sleep, tracking that. And that really helps with a handover because it's so important and the baby didn't have a great night, there's a way that mom can communicate that to nanny or Dad and if baby hasn't had the greatest day or was niggly, that has communicated. That's very important in terms of that continuum of care or the care work.

So, yeah and then asking Nanny for regular feedback, we know how little ones are; they may cry and carry on, but the minute you're gone they actually settle. Mums, I would really encourage to keep goodbye quick to have a smile on your face, if possible. And say, “I'm coming back.” As young as your baby is, talk to your baby. I’m coming back, and you’re going to where you're going to be fun, you're going to play, you're going to do this, this and this for your nanny and then you leave.

Meg: And keep separations positive and when you reunite keep it positive as well. I mean, that's all part of it. One of the things when you talk about taking notes that, and moms and nannies can do is, they can use the Parent Senses App and the Parent Sense App actually allows the nanny to see the approximate routine or the flexible routine that the mom is wanting, you know, to see for her little one, but also to be able to track those sleeps and feeds so that the mom knows what's gone on for her little one. So it's a great way to actually kind of do those transitions. Now, I've absolutely loved our chat today, I really have. Nanny and Me is an incredible program and it is just…I mean it's so impactful. It is up-skilling nannies and I mean is it imaginable that it's 10 years old already? How many nannies have you trained, Lara?

Lara: About four and half thousand.

Meg: Oh, my word. That's incredible. And it's run as a franchise system in all across South Africa at the moment. So as we finish off, and I've really appreciated your input on nannies and I know that the moms will have too, I'm sure there'll be lots of questions, which maybe next time we'll have a Q & A session with you, which I think is always one of my fun podcasts that I love to do; getting a real mum and let her ask the questions, but I think we've got a lot of tips here. Is there anything as we kind of finish off that you want to just let mums know about as they move through this journey?

Lara: I think it's, you know, parenting is a series of letting go, we've had a chat about that. This is one of those transitions and so I would say to go easy on themselves, to recognize how this really is to go back to, to give themselves grace to all the reinforcement that one needs, and yeah to really trust that you making a great call with your nanny and, leading to a great relationship with your child, so important.

Meg: Absolutely. Well moms, if you want to hear more from Lara, you can go and look up Nanny and Me. Lara, also actually has a free webinar every Thursday, I believe, in which she actually talks about this going back to work and how to do the transition. So, if you are going back to work, head on to www.goingbacktowork.co.za, so very easy, goingbacktowork.co.za, and you can register for the free webinar with Lara. But Lara, thank you so much, as always, you have so much wisdom, you have a massive amount of empathy and understanding for the people that you work with. And Lara, I think you are deeply appreciated by many people for the work that you do with nannies and their little charges. Thank you, Lara.

Lara: Oh, thanks, Meg, it's been so loving to chat.

Meg: Lovely to chat. Thank you.

Lara: Bye.

**Outro**

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