

Single Parenting Challenges | SE Episode 86 by Sense by Meg Faure

Meg 0:48

Welcome back moms and dads. I am Meg Faure I'm your host on Sense by Meg Faure. And it is always such a pleasure for me to welcome you to join me as we do each week and I have a guest on with me most weeks sometimes it's a new mum or new dad who are talking about the challenges of parenting and the joys of course and we talk go through all the questions. And then sometimes I have fellow parenting experts on with me and they come from an array of backgrounds. We've had lactation consultant recently we've had pediatricians fertility specialist and this week we have got a psychologist and actually she has been on with us before her name is Nadine Kuyper, and I'm absolutely delighted to welcome you here again today, Nadine.

Nadine 1:28

Thank you so much, Meg. I'm really excited to be here.

Meg 1:32

So Nadine was originally an educational psychologist, and then ended up working more and more in the field of kind of perinatal health. I think, Nadine, was that triggered by the birth of your little one? Or did you start to work in perinatal and, and parenting health early on?

Nadine 1:45

I think both me I really have always been so interested in working with moms and with children. And I think you can't have a child and not be completely changed by the experience. So if anything, I mean, having my own son really ignited the passion even more, and I think also illuminated how important it is to have these conversations.

Meg 2:07

Absolutely, and so today's conversation is going to be touching certain of our parents lives. And that is the topic of single parenting. So if you are a single parent, or if you have a friend who's a single parent, this is an episode that you do not want to miss, you want to listen to what Nadine has to share today, she has an incredible understanding of parenting issues along with psychological well being. And that's why I felt that she would be the perfect guest to explore the unique challenges, and also the strength and the joys that come alongside single parenting. So without further ado, I think we should jump straight in Nadine. And my first question for you is, you know, obviously, new parenting comes with a whole lot of psychological challenges, you know, our entire psyche has to change and adjust to a new role. But it would be slightly different. I think if you were a single parent, how would the psychological challenges differ between a single parent and those in two parent households?

Nadine 2:59

That's a good question. Megan, I think you said it earlier when you mentioned adjusting to a role. So we all know, parenting is difficult, Parenting is hard. We have no illusions, the most wonderful and the most difficult thing you will ever do. And I think what's really important and what I share with a lot of my clients is when you're a single parents be it that you're a mom or a dad. And in some cases, it can be a grandparent or even a sibling, it's important that you completely change the script. In fact, through the scripts are a lot of our expectations have formed around the traditional nuclear mom and dad family. And that just doesn't apply here. For whatever reason, rhyme or reason whether it is an absent parent, where there's never been a parent, those expectations can't even feature for you as a single parent. So I do have a lot of clients who are single parents will say, Well, now I have two roles, I'm mom, and dad. I've always urged them to be to challenge that I challenge that quite a lot to say, Look, you aren't just one person. So in saying that you are mum and dad, it means it sounds like there's a lot more hands on deck. But actually, you're just one person. And you have to acknowledge that you are one person doing so much more. And I mean, whatever the role of the other parent was, in some cases, it might have been more financial, I mean, we can go into a lot of other roles of other parents to one person covering this broad spectrum of responsibilities. And for that reason, as I say, I do challenge my clients and say you're one person doing this. And remember that and that means that the expectations that you have of yourself, as well as sometimes the expectations that others have of you. It's not really a lot of space for that but you have to be aware of that and you have to be realistic about that. Those rules don't apply to you. You don't if you've got two children you don't get to hand off the one and look after that as take me a few seconds. While I couldn't do this, we have to feed this one the juggling is just you. And I had a very insightful mum once say , your right, I'm not an octopus. And I laughed, because I'm like, That's so true. Yeah, you're not you're one person, that of having beforehand, you've got the two. So own that role, really step into it and say, this is hard. It's just me.

Meg 5:20

Yeah, Okay. So I mean, I hear you. So. So the first challenge would be capacity, because you can't fulfill the role of two parents when you are only one parent. So what would naturally come from? That would be a question from moms to say, okay, so if I can't naturally fulfill both roles, because there's a capacity issue, then that means some pieces of the role that the other parent might be fulfilling would then not be fulfilled? And is that going to leave a void, and I think back to a reel that I actually did a few months ago, and it was quite a viral reel, it was one of our more viral reels where I did a little reel on the role that dads play in children's lives. And the dads actually do play differently with children as an example. So if you were speaking, and he lots of benefits for that, that could be a real cognitive, emotional, psychological benefits to the way in which a male role model or father actually plays with children. So let's talk to us single mums. Now let's, I mean, because I think a majority of my listeners are actually female, they're going Okay, so I've got a capacity issue here, I can't fulfill both roles, because there's a capacity issue, which means that there is a void left behind where there isn't a father. So how does that mum tick that box? Because she's one person, she can't physically take on every single role, but she has this natural concern?

Nadine 6:37

That's such a great point, Megan, in this answer, like you said, we're talking to the single moms out there. The first thing and I know you and I have discussed this before, is to leave the guilts at the door, as you said, there is a void. And naturally, as a parent, our biological instincts are to fill those voids or kind of protect our children and create any situation where they are not harmed. And it's a difficult reality. But like you said, there is a void. And that kind of ties into what I said in the beginning, you're one person you can't do both dads do pay differently completely, like you said, it's kind of rough and tumble play different input. And that's, that is okay, that void is there. And that's okay, don't feel guilty about it, you haven't done something to your child or irreversibly damage them for life, there are lots of different scenarios, a lot of which we're not in control of. And our role as the parent is to buffer those things. So in this scenario, your mom, we're not asking you to be a dad, we're asking you to be a mum, you can acknowledge that there's also a fine line because sometimes with the guilt comes that inclination to want to overcompensate. And the fact of the matter is, you can't play that role. Like I said, you can't be mom and dad, I some really interesting research that I do share with a lot of my single moms, is that there's a lot of guilt around this father figure or this parental figure that's missing. And actually quite a while ago, they did a lot of research in psychoanalysis. And it's not necessarily just a paternal or a masculine or a male figure that the child necessarily needs. It's actually a function of someone else. So let me explain that. So this paternal function is actually just having someone else apart from the child and from the mom. Because if you think about moms were pregnant, that child is part of us, whether you like it or not, through the good and bad and the difficult and all of the roller coaster of pregnancy. So that almost feels like one and then you give birth to your child. And as you know, for the first couple of months, your child has no concept of actually being an either. So that relationship is such an intense relationship. But actually, the paternal function is what we call the other the opportunity for the child to spend time with someone else and not be completely enmeshed with the mom, which is healthy, that helps with emotional regulation. Like you said, it helps with different types of plan exposing the child to different functions. And that does not have to be done primarily by a dad. And that's, I mean, I don't know if we'll get backlash for that. But the thing is, it has to be another person, our children have to learn to play with someone else or be with someone else. And I know as a mom, you want to be everything and do everything. And that just like I said, is biologically ingrained. But this doesn't have to be just the dad and I hear that on a daily basis Meg, you know, like I almost you know, I've my child is losing this experience. They're not getting this experience. That function can be one of your friends that can be a teacher, it can be a coach, that otherness is what your child needs. It doesn't have to be this masculine. father figure ,it's a theory.

Meg 9:50

Yeah, Which I love. So I think you're splitting it into well, I mean, a couple of concepts here. The first is there must be somebody else that you can draw on. And so that pieces are Almost a non negotiable and most, I would say 90% of single parents will have somebody else that they can draw on whether it is their own mom or dad, and uncle, a best friend, or maybe a nanny, which, you know, domestic worker who looks after the little one as well and support. So first kind of point of departure is there must be somebody else. And then an extension of that is that potentially at some

point, there will be not a father figure, but a person of an opposite gender. So and I want to ask that question whether you know, if you've got a single dad, because I know quite a few single dads as well, or you've got a single mum, do you need for that other person at any point? Whether or not it's, you know, early in childhood? Or in toddler years, does it ever need to be? Is it important that it's somebody of a different gender? Or is it absolutely fine, that it's just that you know, a kind of a third party that's involved.

Nadine 10:44

And that's a really good point. And I think it ties into a lot of gender roles. And where we find ourselves currently in 2023, doesn't have to be someone with a specific gender, because even in genders, if you think about the concept of masculinity or femininity, there's so many variables within that. I mean, we're both female, and we have different aspects of femininity. So I might play a little bit more rough with my son, it's not black and white. So it doesn't have to be this one person. And I think a lot of people feel that pressure also to find a partner, you know, to fill that void, as we discussed. And sometimes it can be counterintuitive. It's not entirely necessary, but just having the other I mean, we're social beings. And as it that will sometimes be, if you're lucky, you mean a support system in terms of a family member, but some people don't have the luxury of that. And it's quite, it's quite scary. And it's difficult. And that I mean, speak to that support system that you need, in terms of who are the others? What are the opportunities that my child gets, that relating and socializing with other people is so important.

Meg 11:51

Yeah, and I suppose that's where their age old quote it takes a village to raise a child comes from is that we're not supposed to do this in isolation, it's supposed to be done in the context of other relationships that have other norms and rules and boundaries as well. You know, I often think back to my sister, actually, who was very involved in my children's lives when they were little she at the time was single. So she was a such an incredible super auntie who would come at sweeping in with lots of gifts, but she was always really irreverent and naughty with my kids, you know, that that was her role. So you know, and it was just fabulous, you know, so that she was always helping them to push the boundaries. And she was a confidant and laughing hysterically with them, and lying on the beds with them and just talking for hours, even when they were teenagers, you know, so, you know, that's a totally different draw from the one I hold, and completely different from the one that my husband holds as well. So I think it is having that variety and that and those different dimensions that are important. Now, one of the things that kind of comes up in my mind when we talk about these about single mums. And by the way, I just think there are superheroes or single dads, because I don't know, I know that in my own capacity, I don't know how I ever would have managed, I probably would have been able to dig deep, but I have an enormous amount of respect for somebody who solo parents. But in that process, I am positive that you find yourself completely depleted, and that there are moments where you can't do another day and nights where you can't see yourself through to getting up again. So self care is important for all parents. But in my head, I'm thinking that self care for the single parents is actually almost more important, and maybe almost more impossible, because how do you juggle it? How do you fit it in? So can we talk a little bit about kind of practical ways to incorporate self care if you are a single parent? And how do you balance that

Nadine 14:14

And it's such a good point because it's almost got to be non negotiable and self care into Word and the term gets thrown around so much and it's kind of been equated with bubble bars and chocolate but it is so much more than that. And as as a mum and particularly I'm not saying one is more important, but it's a non negotiable you have to you have to feature as a person you still are a person and for this reason you have to make and plan this self care proactively. And this is something that a lot of moms are guilty of that I'll get to it. I'll do it when I have time. You will never have time you will never have this beautiful moment where the sun is breaking through the clouds and you have time and everyone is accountable and you don't have to cook, go work or do anything that does not exist. So in the same way that you plan your dentist appointment, or you plan your Gynie appointment, you plan yourself care. And please, not every six months, but increments of time in your diary written down so that you also have to do it, it's got to be a non negotiable. And it's got to be something that feeds your soul. So I know that time is a big issue. So sometimes you can manage an hour, sometimes you can manage a couple of hours, sometimes, you know, it's half an hour, but you need to actually plan those things. And even if it means planning, a phone call with a friend, I mean, especially internationally, youty know, actually planning in diary so that you have to show up because it's more difficult to cancel it as opposed to being like, I'll get to it, I'll get to it, because the fact is, you'll never get to it. So being proactive about it is so important, and also holding yourself accountable. And for some reason, we feel guilty about making that time for us. But our kids need us to do it, like you said, you get to the point where you are absolutely depleted and you just can't, and you need something to fill your cup, and that needs to land proactively, whether it is a show or a dinner planet, book it in the diary, do it in advance, because I know that moms are great planners in advance. So it's there. And that's only if it's a huge sickness, is it a cancelable thing

Meg 16:25

salutely I think that sounds very sensible. And that can go from anything from just going shopping on your own to having a bubble bath, if that is what it is for you, or going on a cooking course or an art class, you know, actually really doing something that feeds your soul. I love that. Of course, in my head, I'm thinking a lot of those things will cost money because very often, you know, I mean, like a run on the beach or run in the park doesn't cost money, but going and having your hair done or going for a lovely massage or going on a shopping spree does cost money. And very often one of the real strengths that comes with single parenting is a financial burden as well, because suddenly, you are the breadwinner, and the parent. So what recommendations do you have for single parents who are trying to manage finances as well as provide for their children as a single parent,

Nadine 17:09

I think that is such an incredibly difficult thing to do. Apart from having an emotional load, like you said, actually having a financial load. And that financial stress can cause so much extra, it's always in the back of your mind, you're always conscious of it. And even if your children do something or waste, it's always there. So you might have financial planners. So I wish I could give more concrete tips. But definitely a tip that I would suggest is it ties in with the first point of you know, your one

parent, it is also okay to say no. So our kids want a lot of things. And you know, they think that they need anything's that they want. And I think sometimes we feel so guilty, because we're like, oh, but everyone, no one of their friends have this or now you know, I'm not sure if it was apparent because we haven't gone on holiday or we haven't done that. That's okay, you have to look at what your partner is. And that means financially as well. As much as we look at our emotional capacity, we have to look at our financial capacity. Because the last thing you want us to overextend yourself, and give your children something and then you find yourself in debt, and it's actually more stressful. Absolutely. What's difficult with single parenting is that it's lonely. As you mentioned, it's really lonely, because sometimes it's nice to have an adult in the room and just have an adult conversation. And there's a very fine and tricky line between your your children not being co parents, I mean, they're not another adults, they're still allowed to be children, but then also taking on a little bit more responsibility. So the children of single parent families have got different responsibilities, and it's not going to kill your children to do some chores. And you know, it's not punishment, it's, we're working as a team here, putting your laundry in the laundry basket is a very age appropriate chore from a very young age. So you're working as a team. And I think having that more of a positive mindset around it, as opposed to well, these are your chores, you have to do X, Y and Z because you know, you get a lot of resistance, when it's something that you must like in this house, we are a team, which means I clean the kitchen, and you make your bed or whatever it is. So obviously, within what is financially feasible, try analysis what you can, but if you can't, there are things that you can do within the household and expectations. And like I said, You're not making your children into many adults, you are giving them a sense of responsibility. And that is something that they do with having a single parent. Absolutely.

Meg 19:39

And I think something you mentioned there's that right at the beginning was that there's often a lot of guilt associated with Well, I mean, there's probably more with single parenting but there's a lot of guilt associated with you know how much time I spent with my child how much of my day for them, and particularly if you're working mom and so there's often this kind of almost like this thing we need to spend more money on toys we need to spoil them. Need to make things special for them. And actually, for little babies and little children, toys are the apps, the one thing that really they don't need. And so that's one place where I just, I mean, if there is a financial pinch that you can certainly kind of cut the corners, don't buy those extra toys because actually the very best toys for children, I was talking about the BS, you know, blocks, books, Bubbles, boxes, that, you know, they those things are all the cheapest things that you can have, and they often the very best for little ones. So I would definitely do that. Another thing would be that I would recommend for moms would be to actually share child care. And what's quite nice about that is that it brings the socialization aspect in as well. So you either can look after your friend's child for, you know, a few hours a week, and she does the same for you so that the kiddies get to kind of have socialization time together, and you actually get to have time on your own if your friend's child's looking after them. Or you actually share the cost of childcare. So you have an au pair that you share between the two. And we actually did that with our kitties. When we first started piercings back in the day for my son, we got no pain, we shared her between four people in the mornings. So these are ways to cut the costs and keep the quality high, and then also add in socialization. So there are lots of little things that you can do, you know, making meals in advance on a Sunday is a really good idea, again, cuts costs incredibly, and also absolutely fabulous for your child, you know, so there are a lot of little

things that you can do to cut costs. Without your check your child actually skimping on anything really.

Nadine 21:28

I love what you said about the sharing, and especially with other single moms. And that's such a good point is that if you are creating your village, a village doesn't just happen. I know we've spoken about before. And that's often an assumption is that I've had this baby, and you're expecting this village to disappear through your door and help you you've got to choose your village, and you choose the level of intervention at that village. So there's so many support groups, even if I mean you have friends that might not necessarily be single parents as well. And sometimes it's important for that shared experience, because it'll be frustrating for a single parent to listen to me complaining about how my husband came home late and I had to make my son suffer. So sharing that experience and like you said, even sharing the resources, and they are great groups. I mean, I know they're a couple on Facebook, you also get to be discerning. So if it's not, if it's not your kind of group, you can leave. But having that shared experience also makes you feel less alone. And like you said, even sharing resources, what a wonderful idea. So that, you know, your kids are taken care of someone who knows and is going through the same experiences where you are. And you get that time. Just that just that very necessary breather.

Meg 22:38

Excellent. Well, moms, I mean, if you haven't heard, the first episode was Nadine, a couple of months ago, where we spoke about maternal guilt, I would definitely shift across there and go and listen to that podcast as well. Because I think that was super useful and even more useful with single parents, because I think that the guilt a parent feels anyway, when they're in a partnership must be exacerbated when you're single parent, because you can't give as much and you will drop more balls. That's just the way it's gonna be, you know, and it's coming to that realization and acceptance that is so important. Nadine, I think maybe as we kind of come to the close of this, it might be worth you just reiterating a little bit around that and how to cope with the parental guilt or the maternal guilt that comes along with being a single parent on issues.

Nadine 23:20

So I think that's also, as you said, kind of exacerbated when you by yourself because then you also think that you are not giving your child the optimal experience or the experience they should have. And there's a wonderful clinical psychologist by the name of Dr. Becky. So she has also a good podcast called good inside. And she spoke about when guilt is actually out. So Am I guilty? Is this my expectation? Is this my value? As an isolate? I would spend time with my son and then I didn't? Or is this a societal thing? Is this guilt coming from a societal expectation saying moms should you know moms should be this mom should be that a child should be raised by a mom and a dad, that society that's not your voice. So I think learning to weed that out because I think we sit in the beginning having that traditional nuclear very stuck idea of what your child needs, or what should all of the shoulds which must weigh words, that doesn't apply here. So there's so many different types of

families in the world now as well that having one standard script, it doesn't apply. So looking at know, where's this guilt coming from? Because unfortunately, Megan, we know it can. A lot of it does come externally. There's some of the judgments that do come externally, you're like, oh, goodness, you work quite late. And you know, what about the children? Is that my guilt is it mine to carry. So especially as a single parent, you don't have to carry everything that gets thrown at you. You can put things down.

Meg 24:51

And I suppose part of that is having a little bit of a thick skin because unfortunately there's going to be those judges out there and you've actually got to like bet them off and just go well You know, this is my journey, this is my choice. This is or even if it isn't your choice, this is my life, and I'm not going to take it on. And then second of all be conscious of that the guilt doesn't come internally, you mentioned there, you know, this kind of ideal picture of these of this nuclear family, which, you know, you know, it's kind of portrayed in the media. And of course, there's no such thing as this ideal family, we many, many, many of us and increasingly more and more are living in very different alternative and blended family units. You know, one of the things that does come to mind around single parenting is obviously with the divorce rate is that you might have ended up a single parent, because you've separated from your partner, that might be how you would make could have been a choice to actually have your baby on your own. But it could have been that you become separated after the birth of your child. And that brings a completely different complexity, because that brings the co parenting, parenting complexity where how do you actually navigate, you know, kind of effective co parenting relationships that best ensure that the interests of the children are met and are central and I mean, I have lived through many, many divorces, or friends, many separations. And they, they really do largely fall into two camps. I've got some friends who've had the most incredible co parenting journey. I mean, my one friend, unbelievably, her husband bought her house three houses away from him, they lived on the same road. And those children move between the two houses, as if it was a commune from the time they were like five or six years old, so extraordinary, you know, kind of co parenting context. And then I've had others who are so acrimonious, and so much mudslinging and so much awfulness around the other parent. And I just wondered, you know, is there any advice that you have for parents, as they kind of navigate these, these co parenting relationships, then, like you

Nadine 26:44

said, May can be such a minefield, because what I always say to parents in the context of divorce, is that the parents relationship is the single predictor of their children's success, post divorce, they can go to therapies, they can have a good support system, how the parents get along, is the single biggest predictor of what those children like their psychological and emotional health is going to look like. And as you said, being exposed to these acrimonious, really terrible situations, can be exceptionally damaging for them. So co parenting, that is a podcast on its mind itself. But especially, and we mentioned the guilt earlier, a lot of parents have guilt around the fact that there is a divorce, or there's a split or a separation. And again, research says that it's actually worse for you to stay in a situation in which you are miserable, and exposing your children to as opposed to that separation. So that's something that people get wrong

Meg 27:46

If the separation is healthy

Nadine 27:48

Yes, if the separation is healthy. So again, how you get along with the person. And it's such a difficult task, because what's happened is the romantic relationship has not dissolved, but what you have asked, or what you're asking these adults to do is now run a business together, and that business is their child. And I mean, you know, parents can't be can't not be emotional about their children, we're kind of wired that way. So that is the difficulty. So I think I've always mentioned to clients divorcing, that their relationship. And again, we're not asking to have a marriage relationship. In a divorce, it's wonderful if you can get along, but sometimes your own emotional pain really can ripple out and affect the children. So again, you don't was very difficult. And what not a lot of couples get right, is that the children's father, your husband is not necessarily the children's father and vice versa at the children's mother, not necessarily your experience of that wife. And remember that it takes both of us to make a child. So what happens is, if there isn't an acrimonious split, and any kind of bad mouthing or alienation is happening, you create a psychological split, because this child is made up of both of you. So now the child is going is there a part of me that's good, and a part of me that's bad. And that is one of them healthiest thing that you can do to a child. So as I said, and now we talk about and run a business, you are in the business of your child, and you would never I mean, if you're running a business to someone, you would never your bath profits, your boss sustainability, you would never sabotage that. And sometimes you need quite stringent rules. And this isn't the more acrimonious divorces. So the parenting campaigns written down what the expectations are, because you're no longer communicating, you cannot communicate. So you actually need to be like, okay, when I say for the children at seven, I have got a five minute or 10 minute gap. Because for essential notes, reasonable people, it's reasonable to phone 15 minutes after that, you actually have to stipulate that. So I sometimes call it the rules of engagement. You really have to know how to speak to other person because that romantic relationship is gone. So how are you running this business for your kids? Very

Meg 29:57

interesting, but I do think that that is a podcast entirely on its own, because those rules of engagement. I absolutely love the analogy of running a business. And, you know, always talk about the beneficiaries and the stakeholders. And so you need to kind of run your business with the stakeholders in the beneficiaries in mind. And that means that you can be quite clinical about it. And yeah, put in place the boundaries if you need to, but yeah, super interesting conversation. And yeah, you're on an emotional level reaching out to those single mums just to say you are absolutely superheroes. I mean, however you navigated to arrive at this point in your life is irrelevant. The factors that you know, you're here, you're showing up for your child, and you're doing it solo, which is just absolutely admirable. So, hang in there. And, Nadine, thank you for your invaluable insights on single parenting. I think your expertise and guidance as usual, is a real beacon of support for the parents who find themselves on this journey and mums. If you've enjoyed this, you can reach out to

Nadine, Nadine, how would people be able to get ahold of you if they wanted to contact you and your practice

Nadine: By email, they're welcome to pop me a WhatsApp.

I've got a business number.

Meg: Okay, could you, could you give us that number or the email address?

Nadine :Sure, my email address is Nadine, n a d i n e at m p a c dot co dot z a and my contact number is zero eight three five zero five double three double six. Excellent.

Meg:Well, thank you so much for joining us once again. And mums, if you could do me one favor, if you could go and subscribe to this podcast, like it and rate it, because that really helps us to let other people know about the podcast and do go and download the ParentSense app, which will help you on this journey. So thank you very much, Nadine, and we will see you again soon.

Nadine:Thank you Meg