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Hello, moms and dads. I am Meg. I am your host on. And I am absolutely delighted to have you join me here each week. And as those of you seasoned listeners know, each week we are joined by either a mom who is presenting with a lot of challenges and of course, the joys of early motherhood, and she brings me some questions, or we are joined by an expert, a parenting expert, usually, or somebody who really has got a passion.

For something around the perinatal stage. And that's the stage between pregnancy and early childhood. It's a massive period of transition and I've had some of the most wonderful experts come and join me and come alongside me to share their wisdom. And today is just such a day today. I am going to be welcoming Lindy, Lindy Lawrenson to my podcast.

Lindy is a very old friend. Lindy and I, in fact, we're at UCT together going back in the [00:02:00] day. Where we studied occupational therapy together Lindy then went on to go further in her studies and followed a new career path where she became trained as an integrative psychotherapist and she has then gone on further to really focus very narrowly on.

Couple therapy, and she's absolutely passionate about coming alongside parents and at any stage of their lives and couples to be able to work through those, those little niggles that kind of come along for most of us on our journeys. And there's never a period of more stress and strain in a marriage than of course, when they have a new baby.

So Lindy's got a lot of experience. She's been supporting parents for the last 12 years and it is with great delight that I do welcome you here today, Lindy, welcome. Thank you, Meg. Thank you so much. It's so good to have you here. Now you are a wife and mother to two boys and a wife to Dave, who is a pediatrician.

And he's a handful, I think like all of our husbands are. So like most, like [00:03:00] most women, we are navigating kind of the new stages of life as we go along. And one of those new stages as we go along is the stage of, of new parenthood. What, in your opinion, are couple, are some of the challenges that couples face when they go from becoming a couple to becoming parents?

Yeah, there are so many and I wish I had some of the knowledge I had now that could have helped me in those early days. And I think things are quite different now. I think couples do get a lot more support in their, their antenatal courses and things like that. And there's just a lot more support out there.

But, yeah, I think there's so many losses, changes and adaptations a couple need to make, and it's really different for each couple and each individual they will experience it with a different degree of intensity, but I think it might be helpful just to start with what are the challenges that an individual faces.

Because then we can see kind of what is the impact that has on the couple the, the stresses and strains and, and changes for the individual. So [00:04:00] the, probably the most common ones, certainly in the early weeks is sleep deprivation. That can last from weeks to years, but we know about sleep deprivation have been severely affecting mental health, physical health, emotional health.

I remember, I had quite bad sleep deprivation. I don't know if you did, but I was so moody and grumpy and just lethargic. I didn't have energy for anything and I certainly didn't have energy for, for my relationship. So that really took a toll. Yeah, no, it really does. It's a massive impact. I mean, it affects our mood and we've just got nothing left to give anybody.

And there's this human child who's sapping us of all the extra energy we do have. And by the time it gets to the evening, we've got nothing left for our partners. Yeah, and I noticed with my couples and also with myself that you end up being very competitive with one another about getting sleep. And it's a great source of conflict, really, between couples.

And you can end up feeling on [00:05:00] opposite sides, like your partner is the enemy, you know. Another big one made is roles, just these new roles and responsibilities, you know, an individual is facing a whole new routine. And I think the biggest thing that, that people talk about is the lack of time. There's suddenly just this limited time for yourself and for the couple.

You know, baby is all consuming and you experience this, just this loss of independence. You know, what you used to know and do is just like. Blown up into something you don't recognize. Yeah. And you almost, I mean you, you mentioned competing over who's had less sleep you know, or you know who, who gets to sleep in or whatever.

Yeah. But you're actually often also comparing notes on, you know, even if it's just mentally on who's carrying the most load, you know, I'm sure I must have done more nappies today than you've done today. You know, that type of thing as well. Exactly. So you've got limited resources because you, [00:06:00] they are limited resources.

There's limited time. So that's a great source of conflict for a couple. Then, you know, just thinking of the individual again and how that impacts the couple is you grappling with a change in identity, you know, how you see yourself. So before baby comes along, your identity is shaped by your hobbies, your friendships, your career.

And then suddenly you've got this new role as a caretaker and a protector. And for lots of people that can become quite central to your sort of their sense of self. It's interesting because my youngest child has recently left home and I hadn't quite actually realized just how central to my identity being a mother was until he left home a few weeks ago.

You know, that it, it was, was all of me. It felt like so much of me. Now, it's not a problem if that doesn't happen. I, I just want to point out because I think that that can often be, you know, such a difficulty for a couple is [00:07:00] when individuals experience things differently. Do you think this, I mean, do you think this absolute obsession with our babies and this complete role shift?

And I mean, I was exactly the same, Lynn. I ended up having definite. You know, kind of primary maternal preoccupation. I completely was obsessed with everything I was going through. I could hardly speak about anything else. And I can remember one evening at the dinner table and I have the kindest husband, as you know, but it was probably the most unkind thing he ever said to me was I was a new mom and I was sitting at the dinner table with his parents and we were talking about a week and I was speaking about, it was.

My domestic helper and my baby and Philip eventually looked at me and said, have you got nothing else to talk about? And I can remember it was like he'd slapped me in the face. And by the way, he'd never said, he never says unkind things to me, but that was, it was like a real slap in the face. And and my mother in law, in fact, I got up from the table and I went downstairs to gather myself and my mother in law came down and [00:08:00] she amazing woman.

She said to me, that wasn't acceptable. You need to go back and you need to address it with him. But actually, from Philip's perspective, potentially, he you know, in other words, sorry, my mother in law wasn't saying it was unacceptable that I left the table. She was saying it was unacceptable that he'd said that to me.

But probably that was that, that role change that this woman who at one point was super interesting and had a lot to talk about actually could talk about nothing else except her baby and her life at home. So, you know, there's this huge challenge because the individuals are going to experience things differently.

You know, there's this obvious one of. The pregnant woman going through pregnancy, her body changing, giving birth, and then the, the partner being on the periphery of that being witnessed to that is a very, very different experience. Now, one's not good or bad or better or worse. It's just different. And I think, I mean, I remember feeling like that, like feeling.

When my husband went off to work, just feeling really resentful, but [00:09:00] actually he was just having a different experience and I never realized, wow, wow, that was so stressful for him because he was anxious about becoming a new father and this role of at the time he was providing all our finance, you know, so he was just having a different experience.

So. I think we, when we look at maybe how a couple can manage this, it's really important to, for a couple to share their experiences and to name it. You know, I wish I had kind of asked Dave, what are you going through? What's it like for you to leave me and Josh at home? You know Yeah, so that we can get onto that a bit later, but yeah, I'd love to hear the strategies that you would recommend for this because certainly I'm sure that every mom who's listening has absolutely is going through this, you know, there's this change of roles, this obsession with who's doing more in the sleep deprivation, I mean, these three big things that you've spoken about so far.

Yeah, so it's managing these differences. And it boils down to communication, which is connecting and sharing. [00:10:00] But I think you know, looking at those individual changes and and the losses that an individual faces in terms of the couple, there's, there's so much more uncertainty in the relationship.

Now, we all have a need for certainty. It's one of our relationship needs. We also have needs for uncertainty. So that's like variety and spontaneity and excitement. We have needs for love and connection. We have needs for growth. And we have needs for feeling important and significant. So what happens is when a baby comes along, things get a little bit unpredictable and uncertain.

And we, we've, we've tended to turn to our partner for that certainty, that security, and suddenly it's changed. And we feel we maybe can't rely on our partner for, for that anymore. It's just that their life has changed too. Both, both partners are just grappling to, to try and manage the shock in a way.

So lots, you know, when I talk, [00:11:00] I don't want to be too generalized in terms of the, the, Where we speak here because, you know, some moms won't feel all consumed. Some people won't find it a shock and some people won't find it chaotic. But I think it's important that we do name these things so that a couple can be a little bit more prepared for when it happens.

Yeah. So dealing with the uncertainty in your partner and in the relationship is a big one and the lack of security. Yeah. And that often, I mean, for woman kind of, it manifests as vulnerability that, you know, like I'm at the most vulnerable I've ever been in my life because I've got to sustain this other human life.

And I just need somebody who I know I can bet on absolutely a hundred percent that they will be there for me. They will that financially that will be secure that I'll have a roof over my head, you know, you know, it's kind of like the mother bird nesting scenario desperate need for security. And we do, we feel like you said, generalizing, but I certainly did go through patches of feeling [00:12:00] quite vulnerable, like, you know but I think, yeah, but.

With the risk of sounding stereotypical, you know, I think a man, we don't recognize that a man is feeling vulnerable to the or the partner who's maybe supporting, not necessarily a man, but supporting the, the household and, and, and trying to be, be a protective kind of have a protective role in the family's life.

So yeah, that again, that comes to allowing again, just talking about a heterosexual relationship, allowing a man to share his feelings, you know, it's. Not all about the woman it's quite extraordinary because when you think about the number of challenges that a new couple faces when a baby's born, it's almost.

Amazing that our, that our marriages actually, our partnerships actually survived this period. You know, are there strategies and you mentioned something earlier on, which was [00:13:00] communication. I mean, are there strategies that we can employ in order to help us to be able to be, to protect our marriages over this time?

Yes, definitely, and I think there are probably four main things. There's doing some preparation, so some speculating. Some self care is really important and taking responsibility for yourself. And then there's communicating and utilizing and finding resources to support you as a couple. So there's quite a lot.

I love those. Lindy, could you just reiterate those slowly? So it's finding resources outside of your relationship, communication. Being prepared ahead of time. And then the fourth one was self care, self care. Love you. Oh, my goodness. I mean, each of those need an episode of on their own. Yeah. Let's dive in a little bit.

Okay. I think I would start with communication because. If you've got some good awareness of your communication style and some, [00:14:00] some resources, some techniques that that can help you to communicate better when a baby comes along, because you just got this added stress in the system. And so you needing to actually really be prepared.

So if you've got some basics of about communication, then you can apply that in your preparatory work. You can apply it for self care. How do I get my needs met with my partner? And you can apply it in finding and utilizing resources too. So, you know. I can't stress enough how good communication is, is key to a relationship because it's, it's how a couple connects.

It's that feeling of being loved, valued, important and special and supported. So, and also, I think, especially with having a baby, it's How you can get your needs met, you need to communicate about how can your partner help you fulfill those. So, and, and because there's going to be more conflict, communication is key to managing [00:15:00] that conflict.

You know, there was a study done, done by John Gottman, who studied couples for 30 years, which was the longest study ever done, is the longest study so far. And they looked at what, he looked at what kept couples together. And well, what made them happy in the end and the couples that stayed together and were happy with those that this episode is brought to us by parent sense, the all in one baby and parenting app that helped 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. ParentSense 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 ParentSense app now from your app store and take the guesswork out of parenting. And the couples [00:16:00] that stay together and we're happy with those that Had good conflict. So it's not about an avoidance of conflict. I love that. Yeah, yeah. And it's not about, yeah, not having conflict. It's having a good fight.

Well, I think, you know, I think the reason I say I love that so much is because Philip and I are super strong. I mean, anybody who knows me or my husband personally will know that we are two forces inside a house and and we have navigated a marriage that to date has been very successful and, but we fight.

Oh, my gosh, do we fight and my youngest, in fact, all three of my children are quite conflict avoidant, but my youngest becomes quite you know, thrown by it. And she'll often say, you know, you, you guys shouldn't speak to each other like this in front of me, or, you know, you, you can't do this. So, you know, she'll really have, she'll have it up with us because she's a real verbalize.

I mean, she, she communicates, communicates, communicates, and every single time Philip and I respond in the same way as saying, this is healthy. This is what we do. We, we have it out. And at the end of it, we [00:17:00] still love each other. We absolutely love each other and, you know, and we never called each other names or, you know, there's no, obviously no, no, no emotional abuse or toxicity in it, but it's a good and robust discussion.

And we both leave the conversation believing that we were right. So it's not that we ever, you know, kind of give it and it's really, it's tough at our household. But Emily knows. That our marriage is secure. And a couple of times I've said to, you know, in watching the fact that we, we can resolve this and can they love each other as much as we do afterwards, super healthy for you in your marriage, because you can see that fights don't mean divorce, you know, fights mean, you know, resolution.

And the same in our household. In fact, my, my one son would get really anxious whenever we would go into couple therapy because we do it on zoom. And I said, don't worry, this is really good. And yes, cause we talking about things, you know, talking about things, but there is a way of. Talking makes, and I mean, well, there are [00:18:00] two things that maybe we need to bring up about communication.

There's first for a couple to think about, and I really recommend this before having a baby, because as we know, with having a baby, there's just limited time, but to really try. And understand what are your patterns of communicating of relating to one another? How do you respond and react to each other?

It's really, really important to know your patterns and and it can be a resource that you use for the rest of your life. So it's it's far too complex to go into here, but it's about. Our patterns being unconscious processes, so we don't know what we're doing and why we respond and react the way we do, it just becomes an automatic way over time.

We develop this very practice way of responding to our partner and then responding back to us in a certain way. So our patterns are rooted in our childhood. So that's why it's quite complex.[00:19:00] The way we learn to respond to people in our, in our past, particularly our parents, and the way we learn to protect ourselves from pain in our relationships.

Okay. So we developed a certain kind of template for behaving in relationships. So, for example, if I was learning as a child and my parents weren't around much, I might have protected myself. By learning just to avoid people, withdraw from relationships, as that was much better for me than if they were hoping that they would pitch up and then being disappointed and feeling the pain.

So that person, the hypothetical person we're talking about would use this behavior in all their relationships, particularly their intimate ones. So we adopt our certain and conscious way of behaving in our intimate relationships. So Lindy, that's something super deep to explore because I mean, as you're speaking, I can't even think or identify.

What my pattern is, you know, so I [00:20:00] mean, that's obviously something that you would want to do prior to having a baby. You'd actually want to go and work out what your pattern is. Yeah. I'd recommend for people, you know, therapy is quite expensive for a lot of people. So it's quite difficult to do that, but it's, it's helpful to just try as a couple to identify the behaviours that you do.

So for example, if I get tearful. And my partner responds to that typically by maybe getting frustrated, and I respond to his frustration by maybe getting more tearful. He responds to my more tearfulness by leaving the room. So we can start to identify what, what happens. Maybe it happens every day.

Maybe it happens once a week, maybe only every month or so, where your partner does something and you just, you react to that. So just naming it, you're bringing something into awareness. If [00:21:00] you can explore what that's about, that's a real added bonus. Another level. Yeah. Yeah. But it's basically what makes you kick off and what makes your partner kick off.

I sort of see our patterns is like reading lines from a script. I read my lines and it's an automatic reading of my lines, my behavior, and they are triggered by that. Yeah. Thanks. So there's two things here. If we can notice our triggers and notice our patterns, we've, we've gone a long way in setting kind of a baseline of understanding more healthy way of communicating, because if I notice my partner's triggers, And I know they're connected to his childhood pain, maybe I know that his reaction and response is connected to something more unconscious that he's not doing this intentionally, then I can have more compassion for him and I can think, Oh, an empathy.

Oh, I don't want to trigger him. [00:22:00] And so if our partners can notice our triggers and we can notice our triggers, we already just creating this far more empathic. Relationship with each other, you know, I don't know, an example might be like, maybe I get all fretful when my partner leaves the home in the morning, you may be able to just have my baby and I'm all anxious about being on my own at home and maybe it's triggered like an abandonment.

Thing for me, you know, if my partner gets frustrated with that, because he's got to go to work. Yeah, he's not going to give me what I need, which is just, we'll take a second of another hug and a bit of reassurance. So if he's aware that I'm triggered when he leaves the home and that I feel abandoned and left, then he's able to respond to that.

So I really recommend if you can identify your [00:23:00] pattern, then you automatically identify your triggers. Yeah. Do you see what I mean? I do. I mean, it's super interesting. I mean, just listening to you as you speak. I mean, I've, I've become conscious over many years that just before I go on a trip overseas or away from my husband, we have a fight the night before.

Like, and I, I mean, I can almost write the script. Every, it always happens. And I could never work out why it was that, you know, that this would happen, but I wonder if it was that, you know, that fear of separation that would, that would, would, would trigger me in some way. And maybe if I could have articulated that to him, then the night before he would have been a little bit more insightful to go, okay, so this is what, this is why she's picking this fight, you know, because, you know, she, she, she's got this unconscious process that she's going through.

But he would have been triggered by you too. You see, you can't start with, Oh, it was you that was triggered first. Maybe he was triggered by you going on a trip and him being rejected and abandoned, you know? So it's about one of the [00:24:00] biggest things in a relationship is not pointing fingers at the other, not blaming them.

So, Oh, if you didn't get so tearful, I wouldn't get frustrated. Looking inward as well. It's looking inwards, turning your finger towards yourself. You know, yeah, I mean, you know, Linda's absolutely fascinating. And I think that this warrants a whole nother conversation. I think before we go on to any of the other topics that you've spoken about, let's rather just deal with communication as, as kind of the key thing today, because I think that is, I mean, I think it is.

Just so, so important. I mean, I think, you know, as we draw towards the end of a podcast, because unfortunately we just don't have time to cover everything off. Maybe you could just give moms and dads a couple of kind of practical tips on, on how to develop communication. Yes. You've given us a very good tip around, you know, have knowledge ahead of a head and so you can have insight.

Are there any things that you can recommend practically in the moment in terms of communication? Well, [00:25:00] that's sort of part of the problem because if couples try to communicate in the moment, it's not necessarily the right time. You actually need to make time and space to communicate because in the moment, you're probably going to react automatically.

So for difficult conversations, it's really important to say, you know what, we need to talk about this. We need to create space and time that's going to, we're going to appreciate each other. And it's, it's a, There's a sort of a technique. I call it a talking and listening space that a couple need to create and it sounds so basic, but it is difficult and it's vitally important.

So build in talking and listening space into your lives, especially before having a baby. Now the talking and listening space isn't really a discussion and it's not intended to resolve anything. What I find is it often resolves things automatically, because what you've done is you've [00:26:00] had a space to be heard and be valued.

Actually, often empathy can come from that. So the job of the talker, so you decide who's going to talk and who's going to listen. The job of the talker is to be clear and concise and to talk for about two minutes or so, because a listener can't listen for much longer than that. It's too much of a job.

And the talker must not use any attacking words. So, I recommend that the talker doesn't use the word you. So, you make me feel, or you don't understand this, or you didn't empty the bin. Talk about I, so use I statements. So, I felt ignored when you didn't empty the bin. So, Just express yourself using I statements and then the listener needs to be an active listener.

So they need to put themselves aside. [00:27:00] They need to just be there and really hear what the person is saying without developing a defense. They don't have to fix anything. They don't have to defend themselves. This is not an argument. This is not a discussion. It's. And a task of listening and hearing. So when the listener, when the talk is finished talking, the listener goes the listener needs to reflect back what they heard.

So they say, what I heard you say is such and such. And then they really just can paraphrase. They don't have to go into any deep analysis or anything. And I have found in my work with couples to this exercise to be absolutely transformative. And then obviously the couple swap roles, talk and listener Lindy, this is absolutely magical.

It's probably the most powerful thing. Philip and I actually went through this type of therapy many years ago and it changed our marriage, but nobody ever told us about this, you know, kind of in these words when we were before we had kids. So to summarize what it is, you're going to. [00:28:00] We have talking space.

You're going to create a bubble of space that needs to. And, and I think what's really important there is that you really do set aside time that it's not just done on the fly around the table while the kids are there. It's, it can be a date night, maybe, or a, you know, you know, a walk in the park or a conscious walk on the beach where you're saying, right, this is our time.

Each take on your own role. The one is the talker and the one is the listener. Yeah. The talker, from what I heard you say, speaks for no longer than two minutes, because that's how long people can contain the thoughts and, and, and, and they don't use you words. They don't use accusational tones or you words.

Yeah. And then the listener afterwards, then after the two minutes reflects back what the talker has said to them and that in and of itself doesn't fix it. Nobody's trying to fix anything. You're just listening. Yeah, exactly. It's about being heard. And having a voice and then letting that settle, it is such a [00:29:00] gift to people.

You don't realize what a gift is and, you know, to hear it having transformed your relationship is amazing. And it's been huge in our relationship. Also just. Having that. Yeah. Well, we, we, we got to a point where, I mean, my husband always jokes that we were having passage sex, you know, if you, if you, it wasn't quite that bad, but there were moments where it was really quite, quite hardcore where we just were not seeing eye to eye.

I'm running the baby sense business. I was, you know, I was, I had a two year old, actually, I think she was younger than that, you know, we just weren't communicating and we actually went for a Margot therapy, which is what this does, although they didn't limit him to two minutes of speaking. And the first time we went, he spoke for a full 40 minutes without taking breath and when, and then I had to reflect back to him, what I'd heard him say, which I managed to do in only five minutes, cause he'd spent a lot of time saying the same thing.

And the very next day, he sent me the biggest bunch of flowers that I've received in my life. Oh. And I know that it was just, we didn't solve a thing. It was [00:30:00] just that he felt heard. And I think it's just a critical piece of advice. You know, in the communication journey, we, you know, there's, it's not a, it's not brain science, it's not rocket science.

It, this is the most basic thing you can do, and it is magical for sure. It is because we're so used to building up our defense and having an argument and then no one is heard. So you might as well create the space and take it in turns and see what happens. So it can be magical. Well, Lindy, I think that we have only just scratched the surface.

I wanted to get into self care. I wanted to get into a lot of the other things that you mentioned there. And so we're going to have to have another session together. But for now, this is what we have time for moms and dads. I know that this is. It's been a treasure chest of information for you Lindy, if people do want to get hold of you, do you do Zoom consultations?

Yeah, yeah. And how would they get hold of you? Do you have an email address or a website? Relationshipexplored. com, yeah. And is it relationships or relationship? Relationship. Relationship [00:31:00] explored. Yeah. Explored. It's a relationship explored. com. Yeah. Lovely. Okay. So moms and dads, if you do want to get hold of Lindy, probably one of the best investments you could make in your marriage is to learn some good strategies around communication.

And also to understand the underlying patterning and what's going on behind your behavior, which Lindy would help you to explore. So certainly a worthwhile investment in your marriage. Lindy, thank you so much for joining us today. It has been amazing to touch base with you. It just really strikes me how common so many of our journeys are, how we all go through the same stuff early on in our marriage and in our, in our relationship when we have little kids.

So thank you for shedding light on it. Thanks for having me, Megs. Lovely. Thanks, Lynn. 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.