**Pod 97-Boundaries in family**

Boundaries is something that really are meaningful to people. That's certainly thought-provoking. This kind of judgment is not just reserved for mothers and mothers-in-law and sisters and so on looking in.

It's actually, mums feel it from every quarter. The most important boundaries are...

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Welcome to another insightful episode of Sense by Meg Faure. I am Meg Faure. I am your host, and it is always my delight to welcome you here with me today.

And of course, I often have guests alongside me. And each week, we delve into the world of parenting and we explore the various aspects to help you navigate both the absolutely fabulously exciting parts of parenting, but also the things that are somewhat more challenging. And today, we are going to be addressing a topic that is a little bit more delicate, but something that's absolutely essential, and that is the topic of setting boundaries in relationships, especially with grandparents.

And for all of us mums, we know what it is like to be trying to set boundaries, to have people overstepping our boundaries, and to try and navigate this very new and real space. And I was very lucky last year to be invited to speak at the Baby Zaras Baby Mama Cub events, and they were just amazing throughout South Africa. And one of the other speakers who spoke at the events with me was Des Meyer.

And she is a clinic sister from Durban. She's a qualified nurse and midwife, what she calls a perinatal educator, which basically means that she comes alongside parents who are pregnant and then also through into the first few months and years of life to assist them with education, support and guidance as they go along. She is also a mum to three, and she is now most recently has a new role, and that is of grandmother to a one-year-old grandson and a new little one on the way.

So she is very familiar with this space in terms of both advising parents, but actually also being on the receiving end of it and being a grandparent as well. So Des, welcome to you today. Thank you so much, Meg.

I really appreciate the invitation. Looking forward to chatting this whole afternoon. Excellent.

Yeah, we're going to have a great time chatting about this. So we're going to talk about healthy boundaries, why they matter, why they're important and how to implement them gracefully without putting strain on family ties. And it's a crucial conversation for new parents who are navigating the balancing act of raising their children while maintaining a respectful and really loving relationship with extended family members.

So we're going to jump straight in. And Des, let's start with the basics. Can you explain to us what you mean by boundaries when it comes to family relationships?

And where is it that we start to see kind of the thorny issues arise? Yeah, basically, a boundary is a safe space. I like to see if we have electric fencing or walls around our property.

So once we've driven onto our property, we feel safer. We feel at home. We relax.

We let our guard down. And that's where we feel psychologically quite safe and relaxed. But as soon as somebody comes onto the boundary, we start feeling anxious and alert and sort of backed into a corner.

And this can actually happen when we have now moved into a completely new environment, becoming parents for the first time. We are exhausted, we're tired. And now all of a sudden we have this adjustment within the family.

And parents have now become grandparents. It's a role they've never necessarily had before. We used to be children, but now we're actually parents.

And so there's a lot of that sort of thought, emotion and sensitivities need to actually sort of be considered as to how you are feeling within that space where you feel in control and you're feeling you know, sort of that this is a space that you feel that you can really let your head down. But if you're getting somebody coming into that, crossing that boundary and coming into that space, it's going to start making you feel uncomfortable to make you feel less than or in a situation where you're actually feeling like you've been picked on or a little bit criticised. You start losing your confidence.

And that has a big impact in relationships within a family. And especially if at some time your parents, which you have possibly maybe always had a little bit of issues with or possibly maybe your partner's parents. And now they've also come in and are trying to help you to parent your little one.

And then suddenly you start feeling that this is actually not. There's a boundary, there's a line that we just don't want to have, that we need to create to make us feel that we can step back behind and feel safe and secure and nurtured and seen. Yeah.

You know, I think about the mums who often reach out to me. And one of the most common ones that they often ask me about is food. So and this is often, it's sometimes cultural stroke, historical, like our mums might have had a very different way of feeding us as children.

And the science has moved on. And so we want to do something different. Very often it's around sugar.

You know, parents who are trying to maintain boundaries around not having their little ones eat sugar and grandparents or aunts or uncles prying their children with sugar. So that's a fairly common one kind of around diet. Where else do we see kind of the boundaries being overstepped?

What are the other topics that will often come up for parents? Sleep. About sleep training or not.

Things like that. Gentle parenting. You know, sometimes possibly maybe we were brought up in a more authoritarian style of parenting.

And so our parents see us as being or the young people are taking on allowing their children too much freedom. Just to sort of run amok in bedtimes. Children should be seen and not heard.

You know, we're having a dinner party. Your kids are still up at 8 o'clock, 8 at night. And there's this sort of tacit disapproval.

Back in our day, you know, you guys were in bed by such and such a time or we never allowed the baby to sleep in the bed with us. And all these things which are kind of undermining the way you want to parent your child and can create quite a bit of strong feelings on both sides. So I would say definitely food and things like sugar.

Definitely a thing. And sleep training. You know, so that kind of discipline thing, you know, of children not being allowed to rule the roost in some instances, that way people might feel, you know, that the children have too much say, that they should be, you know, sort of kept as children and parents.

So nowadays don't feel that way. They sometimes feel the sleep training is the stronger method of sleep training are maybe unacceptable to them. They struggle with babies crying.

Yeah. And a lot of the wanting their babies to be in the bed with them and maybe grandparents or any family member, it's not necessarily always just the parents. You know, sometimes your siblings can be saying, well, you know what, in our day, you know, the babies were in their own room by the second week and sleeping on the bed.

They were sleeping through by the time they were like six weeks old. And, you know, they're lying. They've just forgotten what it was like, you know.

And yeah. And then you just feel like, oh, they don't approve of the way I'm parenting. And it can be quite hurtful for mums and dads as well, but especially mums to sometimes stand up to family members or the elders, people that are older than them.

They feel that it's hard to create a boundary and say, well, I'm sorry, that's the way we're doing it, you know. Yeah. It's interesting that you say that because that was exactly what was going through my mind, is that this kind of judgment, which is, I suppose, what it kind of is of the way that you are bringing up your children or what you're doing with your children, is not in it's not just reserved for mothers and mothers and laws and sisters and so on looking.

And it's actually mums feel it from every quarter. They feel it on social media. They feel it from their friends and their mum's group.

They go to a mum's and tot's class and they feel it from the girls sitting next to them. So, you know, I think that partly speaks to the fact that we are as mums when we have our little ones, we're a little bit more sensitive. And it partly speaks to the fact that actually other people seem to think that they can have an opinion about the way that we're bringing up our children.

I suppose in the case of social media or when you're in a group, you have to get a thick skin or you can just turn off the social media. But what's a little bit more difficult is when it's a person who you really love and you want them to be invested in your child's life, then setting up boundaries around that becomes quite difficult and actually something that you can't just say, I'm just going to ignore them. It becomes something that you have to be quite conscious about.

So with that in mind, you know, now we need to actually physically go and set up a boundary and approach this quite consciously. How do we, first of all, identify what are the what are the boundaries that need to be set up? And then second of all, we'll go on and we'll talk about how do we actually do it?

Sure, I think the most important boundaries are ones that are going to trigger you. You know, if you find that there are some things that, you know, let's just use a mother-in-law, for example, you know, if you have a good relationship with your mom-in-law and you are able to communicate with her and you feel comfortable to do that, that isn't necessarily something that's going to trigger you. If she says, oh, no, man, you know, we didn't do that in our day.

So why do you think this is going to work now? And you can have a bit of a laugh about it, but it's the way it comes across sometimes that makes you feel, oh, that's triggering me. That's really making me feel anxious.

It makes me feel defensive. And as you rightly say, you want to protect that relationship because they love your baby just as much as what you do. And you want that relationship.

You want them to have a grandie, you know, and be involved in their lives. But at the same instance, if it's always going to be a situation that you're with that person and they're triggering you, that is going to be an area I would suggest you consider a boundary. And it could be something that's easy, just communicating it and just saying, like, you know, that's how you're making me feel and they can speak about it.

Or it might be something that has to come from, if it's your mother-in-law, that needs to come from your hubby or your partner, because it's his mom. And if it's making you feel triggered and it's making you feel like you're disrespecting her, if you put down the boundary, then it's easier for him to say, mom, this is the way we are feeling. This is how we would like to actually get going forward with the little one.

Can you maybe just step back a little bit? You know, we're feeling that this is encroaching on our privacy and the way we've decided to bring up the kids. And then she knows that he's on your side, you know, you're not taking sides or being forced to take sides between him and his mom.

If it comes from him, she knows that he's serious about it, is prepared to enforce those boundaries and that you're a team together. You know, and I think that's one of the first sort of things to consider is what is it exactly triggering you? And it could be something very, very simple.

It doesn't even have to be the biggies like the sugar and the sleep training and things like that. It could just be little things, you know, that make you feel insecure. So for argument's sake, you're struggling with breastfeeding and, you know, your pediatrician or your clinic sister suggested tuck ups or something like that or to pump and give extra feeds.

And she'll come along and say, like, that was an issue in my day, I breastfed, you know, and so the kids were, you know, 18. And, you know, and then it was like, oh, it just crushes your heart, you know. And sometimes they are, can just be little things that people say that just make you feel that that's, oh, OK, that makes me feel triggered and I feel uncomfortable with that.

So that's really interesting. I mean, there's just so many nuggets of wisdom there. One of the things that I'd like to pick up on is that you when you spoke about in the kind of first person about what you would say, you used I feel messages.

And I think that's a really important tip for moms to take up is that this is how you're making me feel or this is how I feel or I feel like what or what I mean, is that is that where you'd start off? Definitely, the I feel messages are always a way of actually broaching something without making that person feel defensive and that when you say I feel, they can't say, well, it's not true because it is. Yeah, I'm feeling, you know, like I said, are you being silly or no, that's the way I feel and you make me feel like that.

And yeah, I could go I could go way back into your childhood and childhood things that, you know, they trigger that in a child and you know, if someone is criticising you or putting you down, they might they probably definitely don't mean it that way. They think that they're being helpful and giving you helpful information. But, you know, when we're being triggered, it's never something that's actually consciously thought through.

It's something in your heart that just that you feel, you know, so being able to say to people, I feel or this makes me feel, then they have to acknowledge that that is the way you feel and that they can't take that away from you. Yeah. Then the other thing that I picked up on what you said is you said you need to pick the boundaries that you are going to enforce.

Now, this is a really interesting one, because I recently had a mum and dad who was saying that the parents that they leave their children overnight, you know, when they're going out on the weekend and the children don't have a bedtime because the parents just have no routine and they let the children stay up really, really late and then they're unplayable the next day. And this is a particular mum who has quite good routines and rhythms in her household. And we got into this conversation because I think what was possibly happening is that the granny wasn't really wanting to be the authoritarian parent or to be, you know, and wanted to be loved and just wanted to be kind of more laissez faire, because that maybe was her style of parenting anyway.

And we got into quite an interesting debate that there potentially are some things that you should actually let go, that even though it's a boundary in your home, there should be a double standard and the boundary should be different in your mum-in-law's home or in your mum's home or your sister's home. What do you think of that? As you say, that's actually quite an interesting way of thinking of it, because, you know, it's an age old saying that what happens at granny's house stays at granny's house, you know, and grannies are not the child's parents.

You know, they're another adult that loves them unconditionally and they are not there for the disciplinary role. That's what makes being a granny so cool, because you actually love your child as much as you would love your own, but you don't have all the responsibilities, you know, that, you know, if that kid ends up in jail when they're 18, that was not on you, you know, that's what they're doing. And so it's a case of like, this is our time to have fun with our grandchildren and to sit up and make pots in the lounge and eat ice cream for breakfast and do all those little kiddy things that, you know, OK, maybe not ice cream because it's a sugar thing, but I mean, yeah, it's kind of like you want as a grandparent, you kind of want to, you aren't your children's friends or your grandchildren's friends, there is still that adult's disciplinary thing to a certain degree that you can uphold with your parents, with their parents.

But at the same time, yeah, don't sweat the small stuff, you know, if it's not a major, major thing and they happen to stay up late a couple of times. I mean, there's where communication comes into it, you know, where you can say, the parents can say, listen, the kids are staying over, it's not, don't let them go up too late because we've got a big thing on tomorrow, they're playing soccer, they've got something on. We really want them refreshed.

And yeah, and then that's when the grandparents should respect that boundary and say, OK, fine, and say to the kids, OK, we can't go too late, you've got this on tomorrow. Mum and dad have asked us, let's back them up on that. So, yeah, so there are some things I think that we can actually say, like, no, we need to stick to those.

And then if the kids can sleep in the next day, well, then, yeah, it's make pots until nine o'clock at night in the lounge, you know. Yeah, so it really is a case of maybe navigating the boundaries that you are going to put in place with the other person. What happens if something's very important to you and they won't accept that boundary?

Like, you know, do you just need to then decide that your child doesn't see them? Or, you know, I think there you can get into some really tricky family feuds.

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You know, I think there you can get into some really tricky family feuds. So essentially, if it is something that's that important to you as a family and the grandparents are not willing to actually abide by those rules that you've set, because it has so much gravitas that it is so important to you guys. The communication is the next step backwards.

So if they're not listening, then hopefully, possibly maybe getting other family members to take the discussion wider. So for argument's sake, if it's something your mother-in-law is doing, go to your father-in-law and then say, look, dad, this is the situation. We need you to speak to mom.

If she still doesn't listen, stubborn lady, get your siblings involved, let them, you know, as a family, have a family discussion. We all get together. Maybe all sorts of things will come up.

Maybe your siblings will say, well, you know, you were actually a bit of a pain. You wish you hadn't done it either. But we just never got to ask.

If that still doesn't, you know, sort of resonate and it doesn't get anywhere, then get professional help, you know, before you cut it completely. But if it's going to have to take that to be that, you know, that severe, that you have to cut them out of seeing the kids completely, then they have to acknowledge that they are or she or that person or the situation, they have to acknowledge that they do have some responsibility in that decision being created, that all the other steps that were taken to communicate and to try and alleviate, save the situation, they were being stubborn.

And we have to remember that sometimes these situations in some families go very, very deep. I mean, if you've got a narcissistic parent, you have lots of triggers, lots of issues there. And sometimes that person is only going to be wrapped up in themselves.

They're not going to see your point whatsoever. And that's completely unhealthy. So unhealthy, you know, sort of an unhealthy situation is not going to be of benefit for your family or your child, you know, your children at all.

And so I think sometimes there are drastic steps need to be taken if boundaries are just not respected at all. Yeah, I really like what you're saying there, you know, and I feel like we're actually dealing with a little bit of a continuum here. So on the one end of the continuum and the default point should be at all costs, preserve the relationship because you're going to need the relationship and the support because the support system is important.

So go in with the attitude that you need to make this work, number one. Then at the next point, go in and decide. So that's you as a mom, that's your kind of attitude.

And by the way, that goes to the grandparent as well, because they want that relationship with the child. So they must go in with, I need to bend over backwards because I want to make sure that I've got this relationship. If there are any kind of grandparents listening, then from there, you're going to identify what are the boundaries that are the non-negotiables.

And there will be some things that are the non-negotiables and other things that you're going to say, you know what, we are going to let the grandparents actually run amok or the aunt run amok whenever she sees my child, because it's going to have that's going to be a special relationship for my child and them that I'm going to allow them to, you know, I'm just going to turn and look the other way. But then these are the boundaries that I'm going to really draw in quite firmly.

And then on to the next point, which is communication, which you've spoken to so effectively, the I feel messages, getting your husband involved so that they can see that you guys are a team, not that they can split you. And then only on the other far end of the continuum would it be that you've tried everything else and that you've then said, right, this relationship is toxic enough that it's upsetting my relationship with my partner, it's upsetting my relationship with my child and we can't continue. And then you would have a look at creating distance.

Would that summarise kind of how you have what you've spoken about? I would say so, yeah, I think that's definitely a good point away of putting it. Let us sit on a continuum so that it's basically the further away you get from that, the further away you have your relationship has to end up, you know, to the point of actually obviously breaking up completely with them, you know, which is obviously never ideal, never ideal.

Dez, are there any other kind of little tidbits of wisdom that you'd like to leave us with on this boundaries issue? Do you think we have covered it all off? Well, I think, yeah, thank you for that.

I think one of the things that I really enjoy and have noticed, you know, when we do the Babies R Us Roadshow and the Mama Clubs, you know, this boundaries talk does come up and then it's so interesting how often sometimes the mums will come and take me aside and then ask about some ideas and some advice. So boundaries is something that really are meaningful to people and certainly thought provoking. Very often, you know, you talk about the mother in laws, you see all the mums' heads going, going, going, so you realise this is like real out there.

And and then also to remember, you know, I mean, I've been going on and on about the grandparents because it's kind of like what we initially started speaking about. But the other issues that like you were saying, like the social media boundaries and in the workplace as well, you know, your bosses can be overstepping boundaries, phoning you after hours, expecting you, even though you're on maternity leave, to just come in and try and help the person because they're not coping. And the next thing you see, you know, that you actually end up being at work a lot sooner than you had to get stuff dropped off.

Even your colleagues at work as well, you know, sometimes they also don't have healthy boundaries with you. And so if you're on maternity leave, you're on maternity leave and you need to communicate that with them and make it very clear to your boss that you are actually unavailable during maternity leave because this is such an important time. You only have a few months with this little baby and then it's all over.

And for them, it's only a couple of months that they have to be without you or, you know, make a plan. But for you, it's only a few months that you really have the special time of being at home and recovering and the matricence and all these things that we really focus on when we do our talks at Babies R Us is that matricence, that moving from a woman to becoming a mother. And that takes many months.

But those first few months that you're at home on maternity leave is precious and you don't need to have your colleagues phoning you and asking, how do I do this? How do I do this? Can you come and fix this?

Can you make this? And then, you know, overstepping bosses at 9 o'clock at night, like I can't find the X, Y and Z or can you book a flight for my wife tomorrow, you know? I just love that you've brought this up because I think actually it's, you're right, boundaries are not just about the in-laws and in fact, probably a very small percentage of them are about the in-laws because they love you ultimately.

But a lot of it is about, like you say, work and friendships. And navigating that. When you were speaking, it struck me that the first time that the boss or whoever it is, the colleague phones to say, where do I find this or emails or WhatsApps?

I mean, they're probably just going to WhatsApp because they'll really invade your space. The very first time is the opportunity where you get to create the expectations. And I think that is an important thing, that the first time it happens, because I think what often happens is we think, oh, it'll just be this once and then I'll just help them.

And so we'll do it at like nine o'clock at night in the middle of a breastfeed. We'll send the file location or whatever it is. And actually, that immediately then sets the precedent.

And so maybe a useful thing for moms to do there is to create a boundary immediately and say, look, I'm not able to answer you. I'm on maternity leave. If you'd like to, why don't you gather all your questions together and we'll set aside 15 minutes on Thursday afternoon at 3 p.m. when my baby's sleeping and we'll just quickly go through them because I don't want to be disturbed on maternity leave. And actually just nipping it in the bud very, very early on. Yeah, that's a brilliant idea because, you know, you don't want to sort of like break down bridges either with the people that you work and they want you to you want them to see I'm still invested in the business. But right now, you know, this is my special time.

So putting out that olive branch and saying like, OK, this time around, let's just quickly do this. But, you know, I'm going to be on maternity leave and sometimes my phone is off, you know, and and also possibly maybe before you go on maternity leave is put all of this in writing, you know, so I'm professional. Then it's not like I do me a favor, but you just, you know, it's like it's professional.

If you do things like that or you go in for the odd meeting or whatever and it's suitable, then record those times, you know, and report the time and keep it very professional because then it is is that you have that sort of you have the boundary. You know, you've got a professional body and if that person down the clock is phoning you and it's not an emergency, they're the one that's overstepped the boundary. And like you would with your in-laws or whatever, you would create that distance and say like, I'm sorry, but, you know, this has happened once too often now and I don't feel comfortable with with you guys doing that.

And it's very amazing. Desiree, thank you so much. I do want to you've mentioned something that I think a lot of parents will actually have questions about.

And that is the Mama Cub events that are coming up this year. Mums, I want to let you know about them. And Des is speaking at them every month through the course of of twenty twenty four.

They kick off on the first Friday in April and they go throughout the whole year. The first Friday of every month is going to be a Mama Cub event in a city near you. And they're doing two Cape Town events, two Johannesburg, a Boxburg, a Pretoria, Durban and a Port Elizabeth.

Eight events through the course of the year. They are just amazing. And they're going to be launching next month because this podcast is is in in March.

So they are launching in April. So we are super excited to invite you to join. You need to go on to the Babies R Us website and you'll see the Mama Cub events on there and find out more about it.

And Desiree, they can hear you talk there at that event. Yes. Yes.

Brilliant. And I will also be there at many of the events and Kath Magor. So we'd love to see you there, Mums.

So thank you all for joining us. And Des, most of all, thank you for making the time such valuable information. Great pleasure and I appreciate you inviting me on and I'm looking forward to seeing you in April whenever you manage to come.

Yes, looking forward to it. OK. Thank you, Des.

OK. Thanks again. Bye.

Bye.

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