**Parenting Realities: Sleep, Solids, and Success with a Six-Month-Old S6|3**

In today's episode, we sit down with our regular guest, Julia, an inspiring mom to six-month-old Aurelia. In this episode, we're diving into the good, the bad, and the ugly of parenting. Get ready to unravel the mysteries of baby sleep with insights on how to get your little one to sleep through the night and discover the true meaning of sleeping through.

We'll equip you with the building blocks for success in sleep, guiding you as to when to respond to those nighttime cries and to decipher what they mean. But that's not all. Teething troubles and fevers are on the agenda too, so learn to recognize the signs of teething, understand pre-borrel convulsions and tackle any fears you have of fevers with our tips on how to manage them effectively.

Today, we also dive into the world of baby-led weaning versus spoon feeding, offering ways to ensure that your baby gets all the nutrients they need while still developing independence. And we're also going to talk about weaving weaning into family mealtimes seamlessly. And for all our incredible working moms out there, Julia shares her insights on balancing the challenges of motherhood with work, the role of primary caregivers, and also how to share the load with your partner.

We'll also kind of give you a peek into the juggling act of dropping those parenting and work balls and what that means for us on an emotional level. So tune into today's episode for some really practical tips on how to make your parenting journey just a little bit easier. Welcome to Sense by Meg Fora, the podcast that's brought to you by ParentSense, the app that takes guesswork out of parenting.

If you're a new parent, then you are in good company. Your host Meg Fora is a well-known OT, infant specialist and the author of eight parenting books. Each week, we're going to spend time with new moms and dads just like you to chat about the week's wins, the challenges, and the questions of the moment.

Subscribe to the podcast, download the ParentSense app, and catch Meg here every week to make the most of that first year of your little one's life. And now, meet your host. Welcome back, moms and dads.

This is Sense by Meg Fora, and I am delighted that you have joined us again this week as we get a little update, as we often do, from Julia De Silva. She's talking about her little one, Aurelia. Aurelia is her second baby, and Santi was her firstborn who's now a toddler.

And so, she has a very busy home as a mother of two and actually a working mom as well. So, it's always wonderful to chat to Julia because a lot of what moms go through at specific ages are really, really common. Like a lot of things will resonate with you, especially if you have a six-month-old.

So, we are talking, I cannot believe that the time has passed like this, but Julia, we are talking about a six-month-old today, aren't we? Yeah, you're even saying it out loud. I think you must be talking about a different baby. Yeah, I know.

Well, I mean, it feels like yesterday that I reached out to you to say, let's track her journey. And we've seen her all the way through from early hospitalizations just after birth, which is a terrible thing for a parent to go through, and then through each of the steps and stages through to six months of age. So, happy half year.

Thanks. Yeah, it's wild. And you unpack the clothing as she grows, and suddenly the clothes start saying six to 12 months, and I'm like, no, that can't be right.

I know. No, it goes so quickly. So, let's do a session today on the good, the bad, the ugly.

Let's start with the good, then we'll have a look at some of the challenges, and then at the end, we'll wrap up with some questions that you might have for the moment. So, what's going on? What are the goods? What are the delights that you have seen in the life of a six-month-old? Well, I'm very fortunate, I think, in the sense that she, I would say that largely it is good. She is an easy baby.

That's the truth. I think I remember hearing people talk about their young kids, their babies when I had Santi, which I found incredibly difficult. I actually can't overstate how hard I found the first six months of his life for various reasons.

And I remember hearing other people talking about how much they loved their babies, and they loved being a mom, and how fulfilling it was, and really not liking them, and being really frustrated by other people's journeys seeming so much easier than mine. Now, of course, I think part of that is that people talk about the highlights, and certainly that's what they share on social media, and you can get sucked into this idea that everything is easy. And that's not to say that everything is easy with Aurelia, but in comparison, I must say that our journey so far has been really joyful and really healing for me, which is wonderful.

And I also have a lot of compassion for myself for that journey I went through with Santi, which actually was just very, very challenging. So I have had both, but if we'd been having this conversation when he was little, I think it would have gone very differently. But here we are, and she is easy.

And I think the highlight for me, certainly, since the last time that we spoke is that she slept through the night for the first time, which is wild. That's incredible. So let's talk about that.

I mean, so first of all, I mean, easy babies do tend to sleep through earlier. But she did that, I think, at five months, you told me that she slept through. Five months, literally on her five month calendar birthday, she slept through the night.

And what do you consider sleeping through the night? What did that mean for you? So, okay, so it's happened four times since then. It's not, it's totally erratic. And I can't sort of find a nice pattern to pin to.

But those first two examples, the first two nights she slept through, she woke up after six o'clock, and also not howling. Now, this is the thing I find bizarre, that she just wakes up singing and talking to herself. She's not starving, hungry and screaming for me to bring her a bottle.

She's just chilling in her cot, talking to herself. And I, when I turned to my husband, I was like, what is what is happening? I don't understand. There's some kind of magic going on here.

And then, so the first few times were after six o'clock. And then the most recent two, these are not consecutive days, it's four days scattered over. She woke up at five to five and quarter past five, which I consider sleeping through because, you know, then you're having a wake window.

And you know, it is effectively a daytime feed. So yeah. So what time are you putting her down? So she normally goes down between half past six and seven.

And I'm pretty religious about it. I mean, it's as far as I'm concerned, her bedtime is set in stone. Yeah, absolutely.

So she's actually sleeping from effectively half past six, seven to between five and six in the morning, which is definitely sleeping through. So, you know, it's always kind of interesting because people consider different things as sleeping through. And in my mind, sleeping through is a 10 hour stretch in which a little one resettles themselves.

So that means that they might actually wake up, you might even hear them and then they go back to sleep on their own. And that is for me sleeping through as long as and you know, that is, that's the reality. Lots of little ones will wake up kind of two in the morning, you know, you'll hear them, especially if they're in your room with you, or if you've got a baby monitor close to them, you'll hear them and they'll just resettle.

So that's sleeping through, being able to sleep for a good 10 hour stretch through the night. So she's certainly doing that. I mean, if she goes from seven until five, that's 10 hours.

So she is definitely getting that right. So that's really amazing. And I think, you know, I was reflecting on it when you sent me the message and I feel like, you know, you've put a lot of the right building blocks in place, which potentially you didn't do as well with Santi.

And you know, I think it's a combination of yes, easy baby and temperament. So what comes from the baby? And a little bit of yes, a more experienced mom this time. And also a little bit of putting the right things in place as you go along.

And so I really do think that you've done a fabulous job with that. And like you said, it's not 100% consistent. And that's nothing to be distressed about because some days she will wake up at probably about two in the morning for that one feed.

Is that what she's doing on the other days? Yeah, exactly. In fact, last night it was two o'clock on the dot. But you know, it can also can vary wildly.

I mean, she can go from, sometimes she wakes up at, like she's had a couple of nights where she's been, I think in a bit of pain. I think we've got some teething going on or the starting of teething. And so she's woken up at 11 or 12, but largely it's between one and about four.

And that's usually the window. Which is very typical. And what do you do with her when she wakes before 12? Do you feed her then and then she goes through to the morning or do you try and resettle her and feed her then if she wakes again? I try and resettle her.

But, you know, 99% of the time I can tell by the way that she's crying. And after that first kind of going and checking on her and putting the dummy in and her response to that, she's normally wide awake. And it's not just a sort of a grumble.

I also don't have a baby monitor on in my room. She's in the room next door. So she is, you're normally kind of making a fair amount of noise by the time that I wake up and get in there.

I'm not waking her at the tiniest squawk. So, yeah, I do try and settle her. But at the moment, it seems to be things that wake her up at that time, like, you know, tend to be maybe pain or something like that or a bit of discomfort.

But, you know, luckily, once she is settled, once she has had a bottle, she doesn't wake again until we wake her up in the morning, which, I mean, again, I know that sounds probably very irritating, but that's the baby we have. Yeah, no, but that's amazing. So teething.

Yes, definitely something that could be going on at the moment. Has she got any teeth showing or not yet? Not that I've seen. She has a very specific pain cry.

It literally sounds like what my cat sounds like when he comes across another cat in the garden at night. She yowls. Literally, it sounds like she's about to have a cat fight.

And that's the clue for me always that she's disturbed. And, you know, it's easy for me to identify because it's so rare. She doesn't really grumble and cry.

And when she does fuss, I know exactly what it is. She has a very specific tired fussing cry and she has a very specific pain cry. So that's why I'm thinking teething.

Teething. Yeah. So, look, I mean, moms ask me about teething all the time.

And a lot of moms start thinking that their babies are teething at around about kind of 10, 12 weeks. And the reason is that the little one gets their hand to their mouth. They're sucking on their hands furiously.

They might also not be stretching for some of their feeds at night, especially as they approach 17 weeks. And so moms are convinced this absolutely must be teething. But the actual reality is that 90% of babies will only teeth their first tooth after six months, which is, of course, she's falling into that camp.

So 90% of babies will teeth tooth number one between six and 12 months. And, you know, I'm often asked, well, how do I know? Because, you know, I think teething gets a lot of credit for night wakings. Like, you know, my baby's not waking.

It must be teething. My baby's woken up last night. Normally they don't.

It must be teething. And I actually think poor old teething gets blamed a lot more than it needs to be. So how do we know if it's teething? Well, I don't subscribe to the belief that teething happens over a period of months and months and months with the teeth coming up and down in the jaw.

I mean, that to me, I don't see any evidence in the science for that. I think teething is something that happens over the course of a couple of nights that causes irritability. So it might be kind of between three and 10 nights of discomfort that, right.

And that is teething. And I always say to moms, you've got to look out for very specific signals that it's actually happening. So the one is that the little one might be a little bit more irritable, that they're drooling a lot and that their hands are in their mouth.

So that's why moms confuse that kind of 12 week old period with that. So that we definitely do see. Often they go off their food if they've been on solids just for a couple of days.

They don't, you know, they're slightly irritable. They don't want to eat at that time. And they very often have a very acid, acrid, horrible smelling poo that accompanies it.

And that teething poo, like once you've been, once you've had child number one, you can never get away. You know, you just, you can even smell another mother's baby who's teething because it's just this terribly stinky acid smell. And of course it often comes along with a little bit of a nappy rash because it burns their bum as well.

So you've got to change them as soon as you know, it's there. And aside from the fact that the smell is so bad, you want to change it as soon as it's there. So all of those things together, I would label as teething.

And then with one other thing, and that is that you can actually feel a little tooth coming through. So, you know, kind of as you run that, you know, you know, they've got those gums with the little ridges on when they're little, and then those ridges eventually disappear. And then they get almost like a little bit of a puffy gum.

And then when you feel on top of it with your finger and rub down on it, you can kind of feel a little tooth coming through. And when all of that is there, then you're potentially looking at teething. And it normally is within a 10 day period that that all comes together.

And then we have teething. So I don't think that we should be blaming, you know, all those nightwakings for teething. I think potentially, you know, sometimes it might be a little bit of a night terror that they almost have this like sensory dream that wakes them, you But yeah, that's kind of where I see it.

And I mean, maybe that's what you can look out for over the course of the next month and fill us in. Yeah, it also, I think it's worth saying that last week, she also had a little bit of a cold. And so it's absolutely that I think it may have been a little bit of both and largely last week, probably just a little bit of a snotty nose and kind of a little bit unhappy and a very, very mild temperature.

So she was definitely dealing with that as well. I'm sure that that was definitely something to do with with a little bit of a, you know, nightwakings, but also it shortened her naps in the day, which are already a little bit up and down. Yeah, very interesting.

And you mentioned a fever. And I'd just like to pick up on that because I actually had a fever for the first time in a very long time. Last week, I had COVID, which was really fun.

And when I run, when I have COVID, I've had it three times, the course is always exactly the same. I start with this massive temperature and then, you know, kind of have a week of feeling miserable. But temperatures is something very important that I think we need to address.

And, you know, I think there's this massive fear around temperature, mainly because of febrile convulsions, which are seizures that can accompany fever. And febrile convulsions are very unusual. They usually come with a little one who's got some sort of tendency towards them.

And it's not so much how high the temperature goes, but how quickly it escalates that actually, you know, brings on the febrile convulsion. So they're very, very, very rare. But of course, as a mom, you freak out and you think, oh, I've got to get this temperature down.

And, you know, I think it's important to recognize that temperatures are a very, very important part of building immunity. It's actually just a reflection that our bodies have noticed that there's an irritant or, you know, a pathogen or, you know, a germ in the environment within our body. And it quickly mounts a response to say, hold on, I'm going to just quickly just attack this.

And so the temperature increases. And it's not something to worry about. So by and large, I don't freak out about temperatures.

However, temperatures make you feel terrible and they definitely will make you wake up at night and they definitely will mean that you won't want to eat and you'll definitely be grizzly and irritable. And so the main reason why parents are told to decrease their little one's temperature is, and this is for light fevers, you know, kind of not too high, so kind of 38 degrees and below. The main reason is just because you don't want your little one to be uncomfortable.

So that's why we, and the medication we recommend for that is paracetamol. So there's no other medication that should be used with little ones. And a year of age, paracetamol does the job really well.

And that comes in medications like Panadol or Culpol in South Africa. And you can give it according to the dosage on the leaflet. So that's light fevers, obviously high fevers, the minute you're over 38, that your baby needs to be seen for sure by a pediatrician or a GP, because you don't want little ones running fevers.

And particularly if they're accompanied by any other symptoms like vomiting or diarrhea or rashes, those things need to be seen immediately. So yeah, so she probably just was just fighting something off. Sounds like it was under 38 degrees.

She was irritable and she fought it off. Yeah, luckily it was very mild. And you know, one of those things that got brought home and got passed around the family, which has been the story of my life for the last six months.

Yes, because we have a toddler in the home. So therefore we have a germ machine. Exactly.

Yeah. So the good has been sleeping through, which is really wonderful. Have there been any other delightful moments? I mean, that's such a cute age.

I think it really is one of my favorite ages. I said it to you in the last podcast that actually this kind of 12 weeks to nine months is just, I just think it's the best stage. And of course, six months is about when they start to sit.

So it gets even easier. Yeah, no, no, she is absolutely delicious. Gosh, it's been such a busy few weeks.

She started weaning. I mean, we started solids, which is a whole other situation. And again, so different from my journey with Santi.

So I think I mentioned on the previous episode that with him, I'd started him on purees, but very quickly put him onto finger foods, kind of whole foods. I'm sure you're aware of solid starts. I discovered that platform fairly when he was fairly young.

And I found that very useful in terms of guiding the preparation of whole foods, because it's a very different thing, kind of baby led weaning from... For other people who don't know about solid starts and baby led weaning, I'm going to just introduce baby led weaning and then I'd like you to talk about solid starts. So for all other mums, baby led weaning up until probably the early 2000s, it was very much spoon feed your baby. And that was the way that everybody, all babies were weaned in modern times in the last 50 years.

And in the early 2000s, a group of, well, this kind of theory came about, about baby led weaning, which was not weaning onto a spoon at all, but giving your baby whole steamed food only once they were ready, which is after six months of age. And that is really very rigid, typical baby led weaning. It doesn't happen before six months.

It's always whole foods and it's always your baby leads it completely. But there've been a lot of modified ways of doing it, including the way that we've put into the latest version of weaning sense. But would you share with us a little bit about your journey and how you chose how to wean and also what solid starts are? This episode is brought to us by ParentSense, the all in one baby and parenting app that help you make the most of your baby's first year.

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But would you share with us a little bit about your journey and how you chose how to wean and also what solid starts are? So I had, obviously I had read weaning sense when Santi was little and it was actually I was quite freaked out about it. I must say I was quite nervous about solids. It felt like a very, I remember him feeling like such a baby when we started the journey.

It was, you know, it was five and a half, six months. He wasn't tiny. But it is a sort of intimidating thing, I think, especially for a first time mom.

And I had gone into the whole kind of beginning of weaning, doing purees and obviously making all my homemade recipes and things. And then I had come across solid starts on Instagram and I had just been watching their content. And essentially what it is is a resource for baby-led weaning, but it's very much science based.

So they themselves do a huge amount of research around the science of eating and how babies feeding themselves translates into, you know, a better development of chewing and mapping of the mouth and also is linked to a reduction in choking incidents and things like that. And it's essentially just a tool for moms around how to prepare different foods, how to introduce allergens, but especially in terms of baby-led weaning and less reliance on the kind of spoon feeding, although they're sort of open to the combination of the two. And that's effectively what I went through with Santi.

So now with Aurelia, what I have done because I have that experience with Santi and I continue to follow solid starts and they also have a very useful plan for the first, I think 100 days it is, of ideas of what foods to introduce when and again how to prepare them and also how to introduce allergens. So I essentially went through all that content and just kind of hit the ground running. I had best laid plans to start her on a millie because it's a good resistant food.

Couldn't find a millie anywhere that day. Landed up digging a carrot out of the fridge that had been there for who knows how long and steaming it and giving her that. And it was very interesting.

So in the few weeks that we've been doing it, on the one hand, because it's such a chaotic time of life, I'm not finding time to do it every single day. So in reality, it's happening maybe four times a week that I'm actually organized enough to have a nice fresh fruit or vegetable readied and prepared for her to try, which is, you know, in my mind is okay because we're talking about consumption a little bit further down the line at the time she was still five months. And funnily enough, that first time that she ate, she put her head down on the thigh chair and sort of face planted into the carrot.

And I thought, oh dear, maybe she's not quite ready because she wasn't linking the idea of having to pick up the food and put it into her mouth in the way that she does with everything else that she touches. And then I went back and watched the video of Santi's first meal, which was a homemade puree of butternut and cinnamon. And he did the exact same thing, even though I was spoon feeding him.

So I thought, okay, interesting. Let's see what happens. And then I think that helped me to adopt this idea of it being practiced certainly in these early weeks.

And in that time, in the few weeks she's been doing it, she has now gotten to the stage where she is actually picking up the food or grabbing it from me if I hold it in front of her and putting it in her mouth and gumming it and chewing it. And yesterday she actually had a whole piece of butternut for the first time. She's tried strawberries.

Steamed courgette was a very good one. I found that what she responds to well are things that are a little bit juicy, things that give her a response. So where the carrot was kind of fairly firm and maybe more of a kind of chewing stick, the courgette, because it releases a bit of water and it breaks down quite nicely, she really could kind of get to grips with it and really feel texture and chew and get some hydration out of it.

So she really enjoyed that. And that was very interesting. And yeah, we're just kind of continuing to try new things.

And I just need to be a little more organized about having a bit of a plan because I've been weaning it until now. And I think from six months on, we need to be a bit more kind of prepared. Yeah.

And I think, wow, I mean, what a great segue into let's talking about weaning. Let's talk about weaning. So first of all, you know, as you said, the priority before six months is just not consumption.

It's not the quantity that they're taking in. It is all experimentation. So whether you decide to start at four months or whether you decide to start at five and a half months, moms, it is just about experimentation.

And that's important. And I know that, you know, that means that some days that you actually won't have any solid food because they just don't seem keen. You don't have the time.

It doesn't have to be absolutely on it. Now we weaning, it's a fixed thing. So when I had my kids, I really worried if I skipped a day of weaning in those early days, but actually it doesn't matter.

So that's the first thing. It's all about exposure. The second thing is, you know, I am a fan of baby led weaning in that I do feel that in terms of the self-regulation and kind of control science, when we look at that, you want to put a lot of control in your child's hands as much as possible when it comes to the mealtime.

And we really do, which means self-feeding. And so I'm a big fan of little ones learning to self-feed as soon as they can. Very often before six months, they haven't quite got the fine motor dexterity going sufficiently for them to actually start to, you know, to control and get in enough.

So that's why we have to share the responsibility with them below six months of age. And so I am a fan of what I call modified baby led weaning. And we actually talk about it in the weaning sense book.

We have now have a whole new chapter just on baby led weaning. It's the last chapter and what the sequence is that you can go through as you add all the solids in. But in my mind, the easiest way to do it, because I mean, I'm picturing you having to think, oh my goodness, I've got to have this right food and that.

And you know, the easiest way to do it is to actually whatever you are cooking for your little one. So prepare a mush bowl. If your baby's under six months of age, prepare a bowl of mush for them, whatever it is.

But whatever's going into that bowl of mush, keep aside a third of it to give to them as whole food. So if you're going to be doing a butternut sweet potato and cream cheese mix, let's just say early puree, keep a chunk of butternut and a chunk of of sweet potato aside so they can actually hold on to those and control them. And I think, you know, they always say try and create a handle.

So try and make it almost like a chip, a French fry shape so they can hold on to it. And then they kind of get it to their mouth. And a great one in that respect is actually courgette.

And one of my favorite recipes is in the Weaning Sense, in the ParentSense app uses courgette. And so you make this courgette meal, but at the same time, you're keeping aside some of the courgette. And by the way, for our American moms, which actually are almost the majority of our podcast listeners, if you can believe it, that's zucchini.

So keep aside a little bit of zucchini or courgette or baby marrow, whatever you want to call it, because it is a great weaning food. So yeah, it's a great way to go. And then, you know, from six months onwards, you know, also just keeping, I mean, I call it the two bowl approach, keeping a bowl for her to control and keeping a bowl for you to control.

So that's really fabulous. Sounds like you guys have had a good start. Yeah, I think that is exactly the right approach.

And I remember we touched on it previously in the episode before this about how I was just going to kind of see how it went. And indeed, you know, there are times when I cooked an apple for her and another time when I did banana where she was struggling to get to grips with actually holding it and bringing it to her mouth, in which case I literally just mashed them up on the, literally on the high chair tray, mashed them up with a fork and, you know, gave her the spoon and let her try that. And that was also just another kind of texture.

And, you know, also with Santi, I remember being quite obsessed with, you know, pureeing everything so it was perfectly smooth. And you realize that actually that's not as important. In fact, it's probably better for them to be exposed to more interesting textures earlier on.

It also gives you so much more flexibility. So if we have to go out to a braai or to dinner or something and take her with us, I can hand her a piece of broccoli and not feel too stressed about it instead of having to rush and say, excuse me, have you got a microwave? I need to defrost my cubes of butter puree. Exactly.

It's a much more organic approach to weaning. I love it. So we haven't got a lot of time left and we've only dealt with the good, really exciting things.

So that's wonderful. The bad and the ugly in one go. Is there anything that's been a real challenge that comes to mind as we chat? For me, the hardest thing is more about me than I think about her.

And I am finding working, being a working mom of two, infinitely harder than being a working mom of one. Especially having been a working mom of a child who was at school, you know, half days, but still, it's infinitely harder. I find it incredibly difficult to squeeze work in, around, you know, and also being the kind of primary caregiver.

I'm the one doing the lifts to school and at lunchtime. And if he needs to go to a play date, taking him there. And Aurelia's got a swimming lesson and I've got to organize that.

And I've got to make meal plans and make sure that Sandy's got a snack when he gets home and then put him down for his nap and, you know, coordinate with my nanny. And it's just, it's mayhem, quite frankly. And I'm finding that very stressful.

So that's difficult. And it's not something with a nice, easy answer, because I love my work. So I'm not prepared to walk away from it.

I'm also not in a position to walk away from my work. So it's a difficult one. And one I don't know what the solution is to get, but it's, I'm not unique, I know, by any stretch.

And it's something I'm just going to have to figure out as I go. Yeah, look, I think it's something that I am incredibly obsessed about and passionate about. And it's actually because of that, you know, algorithms work, my LinkedIn feed is just riddled with women who've had to take a career break, or have had to take a parenting sabbatical, or trying to manage the juggle and get passed over for a promotion or fall apart because they're carrying this load.

And you know, I just, it's so terribly unfair in some respects, because you're right. I think every single human life has to have a primary caregiver doesn't have to be female or gender specific, it can be a dad, but it has to be a primary caregiver. So that's somebody who's ticking the boxes throughout the day, like, oh, my gosh, what time you've been collected.

And so your mind is never 100% free, and your time is never 100% your own, because the primary caregiver, and you know, the secondary caregiver, the partner is always, I mean, my husband was absolutely amazing. But he didn't sweat it day and night. I did that.

That was that was my, you know, and then on top of that, as emancipated woman, and you know, having had the freedom to not just be educated and vote, but also now work since the 1960s and 70s, you know, and where the work world has started to be more, you know, produce more opportunity for equality on the surface. We end up actually with this incredible situation where what we wanted was this, you know, emancipation and to be able to work at the same pace and get the same jobs and you know, that there would be no glass ceiling.