[Meg Faure]

Today we welcome a new guest. Clarise is a rugby wife and a mum to 19-month-old twin boys, and they're living in the picturesque landscapes of France. Are you curious about how parenting twins abroad can be both a challenge and a joy?

Well, today you're going to learn about how to keep twins on the same schedule, which is a lifesaver for parents and for little ones alike. You'll also get a peek into how French child care and parenting practices provide a refreshing contrast for South African mums. Clarise shares her adventure from a spontaneous twin pregnancy through tandem breastfeeding, and also how to create a safe and exploratory environment with minimal screen time, and how this has really nurtured independence in her little one.

It really is fascinating. We have uncovered practical parenting tips like how to sync feeds and sleep schedules, how to do tandem nursing, and also how to foster independence all while maintaining that very important self-care for yourself and also engagement with your partner as well. There's so much.

We talk a little bit about the fascinating differences between French and South African parenting practices. I mean, you cannot believe what these little ones are eating at creche, and it didn't surprise me because having been to France, I know the way that French people do eat, and so this is how they nurture it in their little ones. Clarise's story is not just about parenting twins.

It's a journey of embracing cultural differences, nurturing twin development, and also discovering the joys of raising confident and independent children. So it really has so many fabulous little gems. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did.

[Bailey - Podcast Intro]

Welcome to Sense by Meg Faure, 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 Faure, is a well-known OT, infant specialist, and the author of eight parenting books.

Each week, we're going to spend time with new mums 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.

[Meg Faure]

Welcome back, mums and dads. This is Sense by Meg Faure, and I'm delighted that you've joined us today. And today, we've got a special guest who we haven't had before.

Her name is Clarise Haasbroek, and she is a mum to twins. And every now and then, I put out feelers to find a mum who wants to join me on the podcast because we know that mums sharing their own lessons just brings so much value for other mums. And Clarise reached back to me and said, you know what?

I don't think you have ever done a twin episode. And she was 100% right that in 150 or so episodes, we have never actually done a twin episode. So it just felt right that we should do that and to really explore it to the eyes of a mum of twins.

So a big welcome to you today, Clarise. Thank you, Meg. So Clarise, you do not live in South Africa at the moment, even though we can hear you've got a South African accent.

Where are you based, and what was your journey in that country with your little ones?

[Clarise Haasbroek]

Meg, we're currently living in France, and it's a good question you're asking because it's always a funny story to tell. I'm not fluent in French. I do understand a little.

So when we went to the doctor for our first scan with the pregnancy, she was obviously speaking French. And I could understand when she said, look, here's one. And she paused for a while, and she said, here's another.

And so our exciting journey began with the twins.

[Meg Faure]

That's amazing. And so was it a spontaneous pregnancy, or was it a fertility journey? It was a spontaneous pregnancy, so we were quite surprised.

You know, that must have been an absolute shock because you kind of see this one little heartbeat, and then you're told that you're having twins. That is a big, big shock for any new mum.

[Clarise Haasbroek]

It is. So after the initial shock, we were really excited. But I have to tell you, Meg, that after the excitement, I did start feeling a little bit anxious.

And this isn't really in line with my personality. And I realized it was because I was worried about having a twin pregnancy, but also the idea of raising twins while living abroad. And my husband just told me that I shouldn't be worried.

We are taking this just day by day. And he was right. There is enough grace for each day.

[Meg Faure]

Yeah, absolutely. And I mean, you're right. It's just such a different journey.

So I mean, I guess kicking off in terms of a South African twin pregnancy, you would automatically be told that you're having a cesarean section. Is that the same in France, or was that different?

[Clarise Haasbroek]

Actually, Meg, obviously, we compare the two styles. So the gynecologist told me she is so sorry to inform me, but I would have to have a C-section because the one baby was breached. So in France, they are really pro-natural births.

And she also told me about a lot of other twin pregnancies where the moms were able to deliver naturally. So I think the experience is quite different.

[Meg Faure]

But the fact that one of yours was breached meant that you did have a planned cesarean section.

[Clarise Haasbroek]

Yeah, we did have a planned cesarean section at 37 weeks. So Meg, with a twin pregnancy, you get to learn a lot of things that you didn't previously know, such as that there's a twin A and a twin B, and that you get many types of different twin pregnancies. We have fraternal twins, which meant that they have two placentas and two sacks.

And then obviously, we had the planned C-section at 37 weeks. Looking back, I realized that I was really fortunate to have an easy pregnancy with no nausea or pain. However, I did really swell during those last week or two, two weeks before the C-section.

But overall, we had a really good experience. Twin pregnancies are automatically regarded as high-risk pregnancies. Which meant that we had more follow-ups.

And the doctor just always wanted to make sure that both babies are growing proportionally.

[Meg Faure]

Just to go back to a second, you said just now that they were fraternal twins. And fraternal twins were what other moms may not know are actually as genetically identical as brothers and sisters, or brothers in this case. Exactly.

They're not identical. They're quite different. And it's almost like carrying two different pregnancies, but they obviously are born on the same day.

And so you go into your cesarean section delivery, and how was that delivery in France?

[Clarise Haasbroek]

I had a wonderful experience in hospital. With the cesarean itself, I lost a lot of blood. So unfortunately, they had to keep me in the theater and then in the recovery room for quite some time.

So I was quite sad to miss out on those first hours of our babies' lives. But other than that, I had a wonderful experience in hospital as well. One of our boys did end up needing some oxygen, and they were held in the NICU for about a week.

And after that, we stayed another week in the hospital. But overall, Meg, I can really just tell you, I had such a wonderful experience adjusting to life with these two little babies as well. So just having the support in the hospital, and when we came home after two weeks, we had babies in a routine.

So we really had a positive experience.

[Meg Faure]

Yeah, that's really awesome. I mean, I'm interested to know, did they put them into the same incubator, onto the same bassinets while they were very little, or did they separate them immediately?

[Clarise Haasbroek]

Meg, that's another very interesting thing. And I realized comparing countries would be another topic on its own. But I did a lot of reading before we had the babies, and I saw different standards all over the world.

And it mostly seemed like people preferred having babies in two different bassinets. So in the hospital during the first perhaps three days, the babies were kept separately. And then one morning when we came to the NICU, we saw that the doctor put them into the same bassinet.

And she explained to us that they're still very small, they're not moving or rolling yet, and she actually thinks that they prefer to be together. And I thought that was just the cutest thing I've ever seen.

[Meg Faure]

Yeah, that's amazing. And is that fairly standard practice for twins in France?

[Clarise Haasbroek]

Well, over here, yes. But as I've told you, I've read a lot and I've seen other countries, it's quite different.

[Meg Faure]

Yeah, absolutely. So I mean, for all of our South African mummies, we know that even having one baby is a massive journey, and it's a huge load. And we lean very significantly on our care system here of nannies.

We know we have help in the home, we're very fortunate with that for almost all South Africans at any different level. Did you have a nanny in France? Or is that not something that happens there?

[Clarise Haasbroek]

No. So the system doesn't allow it in the same way as in South Africa. We were very fortunate to have our parents come and visit us during the first year of the baby's lives.

So that really helped. The system does allow for my husband to stay at home after the babies were born. So that was great having him here for everything.

We literally did everything together. If I changed the nappy, he was changing a nappy. So that was an amazing part of the system.

But other than that, we are here. And we are our own support system. And we are fortunate to have families, family members and friends that we can always call.

And we have daily contact with them. But we are here on our own.

[Meg Faure]

Yeah, and it is it really is very hectic to be on your own. I'm sure there were days where you felt like just climbing on a plane and getting back to your mum.

[Clarise Haasbroek]

Yeah, well, I talk to my mum daily, and it helps a lot.

[Meg Faure]

Yeah, yeah, really interesting. And I mean, you said your husband was involved in rugby. What sort of paternity leave did he get at the time?

How many weeks?

[Clarise Haasbroek]

Meg, this is very difficult to answer right now, because I'm not quite sure. At that time, he was also finishing of the rugby season. So automatically, it meant having a quieter life at that stage.

So but it is it is quite a lot. I'm not sure a month, two months.

[Meg Faure]

Oh, that's amazing. Our South African mummies would be very jealous because we you know, we're lucky if our dads get a week off. So that really is amazing.

And paternity leave is important. It was great. Yeah, no, obviously, you've never had a single baby.

So your life experience has just been around twins. I'm sure we've got some twin mummies listening to this today who are anticipating the birth of their little ones. So let's let's take them through step by step.

You know, when you look back on your journey from the birth all the way through to now, what are some of the really the things that you put in place maybe that you read about, or that the French system put in place that you actually think people should really think about? I mean, one of them, you've already mentioned the you know, putting babies into the same bassinet as soon as possible after they're born. What other things do you wish that you knew before they were born?

[Bailey - Advertorial]

This episode is brought to us by Parent Sense, the all in one baby and parenting app that helps 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?

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[Meg Faure]

What other things do you wish that you knew before they were born?

[Clarise Haasbroek]

Meg, there are so many things that you can consider. And actually, I want to start off by thanking you, because you've provided a platform where I could learn so much about the baby's world. So we could actually just apply it in our lives.

That really helped. If I think about our journey of having twins, I think I want to mention four categories, being yourself, your partner, your babies, and your community. So starting with yourself, I think it's so important to be aware of yourself so that you can accommodate yourself into your parenting.

If you like quiet moments, put the twins into the pram and go for a walk. Or if you like having company, meet up with a friend. And you need to do these little things for your health.

There are moments where having twins can be overwhelming, like when they're both crying at the same time, and you wonder if your two arms are enough. My favorite thing to do is to just be on the floor with them. When I'm on the floor, it is easy to hold them both against my chest or to have them both on my lap.

And this makes me feel like what I'm doing is good enough. I had to learn to manage my own expectations. I spent so much time looking for the perfect answer, how to deal with sleep regression, how to have twins sleep longer.

And I wish I realized that no stage lasts forever. So do what you can, create a good sleeping environment, create a good routine. And when they are ready, they, for example, will start to sleep longer.

And when it comes to the daily things like changing another nappy or doing so many little pieces of laundry and cleaning up spills, the chores may seem tedious. And while these activities seem never ending, in these moments, I'm reminded that I'm busy with eternal work. And then when it comes to your partner, just like you're getting to know your babies, you're getting to know yourself as a twin parent, and your partner is a twin parent as well.

So I think it's important to be brave enough to be fragile with your partner. Communicate honestly about your needs and expectations because everything changes. I realize that I'm very fortunate to have Tienz as a husband and a co-parent.

He's a very involved dad. And we have accepted the fact that most of the times our house is in complete chaos and that this is only a season. So we are very gentle with each other, but we are very gentle with ourselves as well.

Life with twins gets easier. I remember our first outing and how we struggled getting everyone ready and just taking so much time assembling the car seats and taking out the double stroller. And I thought to myself, it is way easier to just stay at home.

But I want to encourage you to do it anyway. Go have a coffee in town, go on that trip because this too will soon be normal. And then when it gets to babies, I realize that everyone's lives or lifestyles look different.

So take the time to think about what will be practical in your lives. From our perspective, it was and it still is keeping them on the same routine, keeping them on the same schedule. So practically, this meant waking the other baby up when one woke up for a feeding.

And in this way, we could all get a little bit more sleep. As I told you, I read a lot about twin sleeping. And the interesting thing is, if you want to keep your twins in the same room, you can do that.

It's possible. So they get used to each other's noises and they can actually sleep through it. So that's also very interesting.

[Meg Faure]

So were they in the same room all the way from the beginning and they still are in the same room? They're still in the same room. And then on your topic of waking babies to keep them in the same routine, what did you do if a baby woke up to two hours and the feed was only three hours?

Did you wake the other one at two hours or did you push the other little one through to three hours? How did you handle getting their feed synced?

[Clarise Haasbroek]

So Meg, I relied a lot on your app with all the wake windows and I knew more or less how long they were supposed to last actually between feeds. So if they woke up, I learned to listen to the type of sounds they were making. Sometimes they made some sounds and they just went back to sleep.

Other times I noticed, okay, this one might be hungry and then I would decide to wake the other one as well.

[Meg Faure]

Okay. All right. So you really made sure that they were both feeding at the same time.

And then what about wake windows? Because if the one had woken after a short nap and the other one was napping beautifully and neither of them were due for a feed, would you let the other one sleep through to the end of their sleep? And then how did you sync those wake windows then?

[Clarise Haasbroek]

Yeah. So if it wasn't a waking for a feed, then I'd let the other one sleep. But Meg, mostly we try to keep them on the same schedule.

And thankfully it's also kind of always worked that way, worked out that way. I can think about maybe five times where it didn't work out that way. So thankfully it's been like that.

And what also helped is the fact that I was able to tandem nurse. So I realized not everyone is in a position to do this, but if you are, if it's doable for you, I really recommend this. It saves so much time and it's easier than you think it is.

[Meg Faure]

So until what age did you breastfeed them and were you topping them up from quite early on?

[Clarise Haasbroek]

So we did tandem feeding until almost 18 months and then they decided that they're done with this. So I was quite sad about it, but then we stopped the breastfeeding. Yes, there were times that we had to top up.

If I remember correctly at their three month doctor's visit, the doctor suggested that we top up for a month and we did that. And then after that month she said, it's okay, we can continue. They were quite small at birth.

So they weighed 2.4 and 2.1 kilograms. So they've been tiny babies. And when they needed the support, we gave that to them.

[Meg Faure]

And when you're tandem feeding twins, is it easier to tuck them under your arms in that kind of rugby ball hold or did you, you did them both under one under each arm? Yes. So heads towards each other.

[Clarise Haasbroek]

Heads towards each other. And your app also helps with that because in your app, you can actually record left breast, right breast. So I swapped them every time.

So if Albert had the left breast, now Adrian had the right breast and the next feeding, we'd stop them. Adrian would have the left breast.

[Meg Faure]

And that's really important because you don't want them to kind of develop asymmetrically. And if you're always feeding only on one side, they can do. So that's really super advice.

And then at what age did you start to wean them?

[Clarise Haasbroek]

Meg, we started weaning at five months. So that was also with reading Kath McGaw's book and with the doctor's advice. So we started weaning them at five months and it's been a great journey.

[Meg Faure]

And French diet is so different. I mean, I'm like you. I live actually very close to France.

I live just off the Normandy coast, although now I'm in Cape Town at the moment for a while. And I mean, I just love it. And so we go across to France very often.

We go to St. Malo, which is up in the top kind of northwest of France. Whereabouts are you in France?

[Clarise Haasbroek]

Meg, we're actually close to Lyon. I don't know if you've been to Lyon.

[Meg Faure]

I have been to Lyon a couple of times. Yes. So you're down further south.

I mean, I just love the French way of eating and the food is just fabulous. Do they wean babies differently in France?

[Clarise Haasbroek]

Meg, I have to tell you, I followed the guidance from Kath McGaw's book, right? So that's what I followed and that's my framework. But what I can tell you at this moment, our baby started going to crèche about four or five months ago.

And at crèche, they eat lunch at 11.30. So we drop them off at eight o'clock and we get them around 12 o'clock, which means that they eat lunch at the crèche. And every week they put up the menu at the front door so I can see what they're eating. And it's just amazing, Meg.

They've eaten things that I haven't eaten. They've eaten Brussels sprouts and artichokes and just they eat amazing, a great variety of food. It is just wonderful.

[Meg Faure]

Yeah, I mean, it is like that. And you know, the French way of eating is so fabulous because I mean, it's a lot of farm to table. I mean, when we go across to France, we go into the markets and go and buy the food on the markets.

And it is always from the farmer and you know that they've pulled that food off the ground so recently, you know, and it's a very wholesome way of eating. So it doesn't surprise me that they are offering kind of two-year-olds, you know, Brussels sprouts. It's really wonderful.

It is wonderful.

[Clarise Haasbroek]

And I mean, sorry, I mean, I have realized now that we haven't told moms how old they are now. How old are they? They are now 19 months old.

Meg, we were talking about being prepared for twins. And you know, I really tried to prepare well for this journey, but there's one thing that I haven't been prepared for and it's getting to witness their bond. It is the most special thing when you see that first interaction between them.

Right now they're at a stage where if I open the toy box for them, Adrian will take out one car and then he'll take a second car and take it to Albert. Or if I give Albert two snacks, he'll take one snack and give it to Adrian. And it's just amazing.

We haven't taught them these things. They're just created in such a perfect and amazing manner. Right now we all have a little bit of a cold and the one brother got it first.

So after one day of wiping his nose, the next day, his little brother jumped up and ran to get a tissue when he sneezed. So it's just the cutest little relationship that we get to witness. So I really feel blessed every day to just see how they're interacting with each other.

[Meg Faure]

Yeah, and I have loved watching your Instagram, Clarice, because you have the most amazing little activities that you do with them. What is your Instagram handle? Just so that mums can go and have a look for it.

[Clarise Haasbroek]

Meg, it is underscore CLA underscore RISE.

[Meg Faure]

Okay, mums, you must go and have a look because they do some such fabulous ideas for fun and games. So, I mean, can you give us an idea of a game that they're currently absolutely loving? You know, kind of this 18 to 19 month old stage.

What are the games that they're loving?

[Clarise Haasbroek]

Meg, I have to tell you, I think in our household, we're more towards letting them take the lead. So they absolutely love everything in the house. They love their toys as well.

In one of your webinars, you mentioned the five B's, being blocks and balls, books, bubbles, and I'm missing one now. Boxes. So yes, they absolutely love those, but they also just love household items.

They are so entertained by the doggy door. They would just push things through the doggy door and they love to pull over the dining room chairs and crawl under and over the chairs. And they're so entertained by everything around them.

And this is something my dad mentioned. He said in their world, everything is a toy. So we just let them guide us through the house.

And I always talk about them because they're always moving together. So that's also something that's quite interesting. If one of them is walking towards the kitchen to unpack the plastics, the other one follows and they're both unpacking the plastics.

So they're always just following each other and we let them take the guidance. But also we have decided that we want to create a space where we don't say no all the time. So we wanted to create a safe space where they know this cupboard is okay to unpack.

That cupboard, we're going to leave that one alone. So we're also learning no at the moment. I'm also involving them into household chores, if I can put it that way.

So I would have them pack the spoons into the dishwasher or I would have them pull the laundry from the line and they just have so much fun and giggles. So these are the things that we keep them busy with. An interesting thing is that when they are well rested and when they're fed, they also grasp the concept of taking turns.

So they have this little spiral where you throw a ball down and they understand taking turns. So they'll give each other a turn to throw down the ball. So that's also quite interesting to see.

[Meg Faure]

It's amazing. I love the way that you talk about just all the normal things around the house and also letting them kind of guide their play and lead their play quite a bit. How much screen time do they have?

[Clarise Haasbroek]

Yeah. So we have some sort of screen time because we video call our grandparents every day. So that is some screen time we do have.

But other than that, we don't do screen time.

[Meg Faure]

That's really incredible. Wow. Just quite inspirational parenting standards.

And I know there'll be moms sitting here thinking, oh, how did you get it right? But I suppose if they never had TV or screens, they don't expect it.

[Clarise Haasbroek]

No, Meg, I have to tell you, because we've been brave enough to travel with them as well to South Africa. And as you know, it's quite a long flight. And so we were really getting ourselves prepared for this.

And at some stage, I told my husband, you know what, if all else fails, we'll just open the little TV and have them watch something on the screen. And at some stage, we did do this. We opened the TV, we put on some cartoon and they just weren't interested at all.

So I'm thankful. But also, we let them be curious. We let them keep themselves busy with whatever.

My husband is very good with rough play. And it's been great to see how they're developing in their little bodies. And Meg, I don't know if I can say this, but I'm curious about it.

I've noticed that when we go to the park, they're so confident on the jungle gym. And I have this suspicion that it is because I don't get to helicopter over each of them. So that's also something interesting to notice.

And I think it's because they're twins. And well, we have to share the attention.

[Meg Faure]

Yeah, wow, just absolutely fascinating. So it's so been wonderful to hear your journey. And it's a very organic parenting journey.

It really is. I mean, you've followed principles that a lot of parents find it difficult to do, of not overscheduling them, of not giving them technology, of giving them a wide exposure to lots of different flavors and food. It's a wonderful way for them to have been raised.

Before we finish off, I think it would be terrible of me if I didn't give you the opportunity to ask me one or two questions. So now the floor is yours.

[Clarise Haasbroek]

Thank you, Meg. I would love to hear your insights on sharing and not sharing and what is developmentally correct at this age, perhaps.

[Meg Faure]

So when little ones are under a year of age, they do a lot of what we call parallel play, where they actually just play alongside each other. And at that age, they really don't share because it's what they are doing. Their mind is really very occupied with what is just in front of them.

So it's not really collaborative. I think that with twins, the trajectory would be a little bit quicker for them to be able to learn to actually play with another child. So they probably started to pass toys between them earlier than a child who, for instance, was a singleton or a single baby.

But you know, the principle of sharing is caring is something that I really do believe that we can teach our little ones. And as with most positive behaviors, reward is better than punishment. So, you know, saying to them, sharing is caring, or Adrian, look how nicely you shared with your brother, that type of thing.

It's just a lot of reward, you know, and that type of thing. I do think, obviously, there'll be a time when there's that one special toy that everybody's after, and they will battle. You know, a couple of things with that, and this is particularly for children who are singletons, I would say to their moms, you know, if a friend is coming over and there's a special toy, then hide that toy away for while the friend's there, because sometimes when they're very little, they're actually unable to share.

And I suppose with twins, the principle there would be try and have two of everything that's really special. So if something's very special to Adrian, get a different, or get a similar one for your other little twin so that they can actually, you know, kind of each have their own, because they don't fully understand the concept of sharing. So I think having two things is one principle, rewarding sharing by giving positive input.

And then if there is one toy that they are both after, and they are fixated on it, then you can start to teach them that it's now, it's Adrian's turn, and now it switches over. And, you know, you can even use little egg timers or little timers that change color and lights so they know that your turn is coming now when this egg time is finished or when this whatever it is when the bell rings then it is your turn and you need to switch and and that type of teaching of of sharing really can work very well.

Thank you Meg that helps a lot.

I have to share advice from one of my friends who's also got twins so she told me just get two of

everything in the same color and that has been such a lifesaver because I think it's some sort

of rule that whenever one twin has one thing the other one would want the exact same toy that one

in the same color.

[Meg Faure] Well it's been absolutely fabulous chatting with you Clarise thank you

so much for making the time I think you've given us amazing insights into what it is to be a twin

mum and also into you know a couple of principles on a very different way of parenting. I think

it sounds to me like you've had a bit of a slower parenting journey in that it hasn't been frenetic

you're not working from home you're not you're not over that I can hear you know that you really are

able to focus in on your little ones so amazing privilege for them and and it sounds like they've

had a very enrich start to their lives. It's been a privilege. Yeah and I guess before we finish off

are you thinking of having a third one or is two enough?

[Clarise Haasbroek] Meg we would love to have more children but for now we're really occupied with these two.

[Meg Faure] Well that's a wonderful answer well thank you so much Clarise.

[Clarise Haasbroek] Thank you Meg.

[Meg Faure] 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.