**FULL TRANSCRIPT: EPISODE 181**

**[0:00 - 1:00]**
**Meg Faure (Intro):** Before we begin, if these real and raw parenting conversations resonate with you, please take a moment to follow or subscribe to the podcast. It's a free service and the best way to make sure that you never miss a story that could really shift your perspective or soften your load is by subscribing. And if you know a fellow parent who might need this today, send it their way because it could be the comfort that they need that they maybe didn't know they needed. This week on Sense by Meg Faure, we have a vital and urgent conversation about the state of childhood today. I am joined by psychotherapist and author, Nicole Runyon, for a deep dive into why so many children are being labeled with diagnoses like ADHD and autism. Are these issues truly on the rise, or are we pathologizing normal childhood behaviors? Nicole argues that our modern environment—from ultra-processed foods and excessive screen time to permissive parenting styles—is fracturing our children's development. This episode is a powerful wake-up call for parents to reclaim their instincts, establish loving boundaries, and reconnect with their children on a deeper level. We discuss practical strategies for every age, from infancy to adolescence, on how to foster resilience, independence, and true connection in a disconnected world. This is not about blame; it's about empowerment. Tune in for a conversation that could change the way you parent.

**[1:00 - 1:45]**
**Announcer:** 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.

**[1:45 - 4:18]**
**Meg Faure:** Welcome back mums and dads. It is as always wonderful to have you join us here today on Sense by Meg Faure. And this episode is one I am particularly excited about. I was on LinkedIn just a couple of weeks ago, and I came across a post by Nicole Runyon that really, really caught me and kind of took my breath away. And the reason is that, as most of you know, for many years, I've worked as an occupational therapist, and I've worked a lot with neurodivergent populations, everything from ADD through to autism. And increasingly, over the last kind of 10 years, we've had more and more diagnoses come through, and more and more requests for diagnoses, and particularly in the early intervention space, where children are getting picked up a lot younger with these neurodivergencies. And a lot of mums have asked me, "Do I think that there is a higher prevalence? And do I think that there's a real increase in these numbers and in the cases we're seeing?" And other people have said, "Or is it just that we're getting better at diagnosing it?" And so it's a question I've often sat with. Are we moving into an epidemic, or are we just diagnosing it better? And are we better able to actually manage these little ones? More recently, as all of you know, I've worked a lot in preventative health and making sure that mums have got the tools in order to give their little ones the best start in life. And part of that has to do with their children's mental health. So when I read Nicole's post, it really, really got me, because she asked questions on this LinkedIn post around, "Are we over diagnosing our children? What is the relationship of mental health with these type of issues? And what about permissive parenting? And how is this shaping our generation?" And then, of course, the massive question around screen time. And these are all things that I think that we can work with preventatively. And so once I had read her post, I immediately reached out to Nicole and asked her to please join us today to share some of her wisdom. So I'm going to introduce you to Nicole now. And she is a powerhouse psychotherapist. She's a parenting coach and a keynote speaker and the author of a book with over two decades of experience in child and adolescent mental health. She is known for her uncanny ability to really help adults to understand their children. And I think that's really what this episode is going to be about. She brings deep insight into how technology, parenting styles, and generational shifts are impacting our children. She is an interactive speaker, and I am just absolutely delighted to have her here with us today and to share her wisdom. So welcome, Nicole.

**[4:19 - 4:21]**
**Nicole Runyon:** Thank you. I'm happy to be here.

**[4:21 - 4:41]**
**Meg Faure:** Yeah. And when I reached out to you on LinkedIn, I think my response to you also resonated with you, that you're also seeing having these questions being asked, "Is there a high incidence of these neurodivergent diagnoses or are we over diagnosing?" And it was that kind of common point that we found between ourselves, didn't we?

**[4:42 - 5:22]**
**Nicole Runyon:** Yes, absolutely. And, you know, in my experience, what I've seen with the diagnostic manual that we use for diagnosing mental health issues, it's changed in the sense that it's broadened the criteria for what is considered pathological and what is considered disordered. And so that question really isn't the right question to be asking. Are we getting better at diagnosing or are these issues increasing? Because what's really happening is that we're pathologising things that shouldn't be pathologised in our children.

**[5:23 - 6:09]**
**Meg Faure:** Absolutely. And, you know, I think that that is, a lot of parents and particularly grandparents will say to me, you know, "Back in the day, we would just call this naughtiness," you know, when somebody comes up with a diagnosis. And of course, that isn't necessarily what it's all about, because one of the things that you said, which is absolutely true, is that children are the messengers. And so the so-called naughtiness that an older generation would have called it, which we are now maybe putting a label on, is actually a message about what's going on in society and in our parenting. And you said in your post, that many children aren't broken. They are, in fact, messengers. So what is this message that these children are trying to deliver to us? What are they trying to tell us, especially in the early years before school begins?

**[6:11 - 9:36]**
**Nicole Runyon:** They're trying to tell us that the environment that they're in is not set up to optimise their development. And what that means is they're being exposed early and often to technology. And they're also being exposed to ultra-processed, highly addictive, sugary foods that inflame the body, which then inflame the brain, which is why we're seeing so much of these neurodivergent type issues, learning disabilities, you know, issues with attention focus and executive functioning deficits. And so really what's happening is, is they're not in nature as much as they need to be to optimise their bodies to grow and develop, because just movement alone scaffolds the brain for growth. And once then the brain can grow the way that it needs to, then our social emotional development can happen. And then what I would consider like a connection to self or spiritual development can metamorphosize. And so we should be absolutely concerned about the content that they're consuming when and if they're on technology, but we should be equally concerned about what they're not doing in the real world because they're on technology, right? And what they're not doing early on is running, jumping, climbing, you know, playing, using their imaginations, being allowed to be bored, developing that sense of creativity and imaginative play. And that is foundational for development later on. Child development works like the rungs of a ladder. Each stage builds on the one before it. And so the earlier we intervene in terms of giving our kids what they need, then the more foundational their growth is going to be in each stage of development. And so what the older generation called naughty and what we call pathological is actually just kids telling us, "Hey, I'm not getting what I need." And they don't know that they're not getting what they need. So not only are they not aware of it, but they have no idea how to communicate that. The only way they can communicate that is in their behaviour. And we're getting it wrong. Like the older generation got it wrong because they thought the kids were naughty. We're getting it wrong because we think they're pathological. And there's somewhere that exists that we really have to be listening and paying attention to that behaviour and again, what it's telling us. So I would say if your child is experiencing ADD symptoms or ADHD symptoms and you want to have them tested before you do that, you really ought to look at what are they eating? What is their lifestyle like? Are they sleeping? Are they allowed to have a smart device in their room all night? Because frankly, I can't focus and pay attention if I haven't taken a break from my screen and gotten outside and put my feet barefoot in the grass. And so if they're not getting those opportunities, then we're going to see it in their symptoms.

**[9:36 - 10:33]**
**Meg Faure:** Yeah, absolutely. And you know, many years ago, people spoke a lot about how important genes were and genetics would kind of code for everything. And often with our neurodivergent populations, we are looking at genetic or congenital disorders. But what you're talking about is something that is not nature, it's nurture. And I have increasingly over the last few years said to parents, it's a lot more about what happens in terms of how they're nurtured in their environment than we previously actually gave credit for. And you've spoken to a couple of things that I'd really like to just mine down on because I know that it'll be useful for my moms. So you've spoken a little bit about the gut and maybe we should just start there because what goes in in terms of highly processed foods is going to impact on our little ones. And so are there any kind of tips? And if we think about the audience who's probably got little ones under three years of age, what should they be conscious of as they approach their children's diet just as a starting point?

**[10:36 - 13:17]**
**Nicole Runyon:** You know, the child has to try something 12 times 12 different ways to get their palate used to enjoying the food. And what I notice happening with little ones is their palates are being fed "kid food" or what's considered kid food. And the marketers, Big Food is smart. They know how to get parents to buy these products. And they even will try to placate parents' concern about health by putting things on their labels like "gluten-free" or "healthy," "all natural." And these are just greenwashing terms that make parents think that it's okay to feed their kids something that is highly processed. Because even if it's, I mean, I'm on board with the fact that gluten is toxic because of how it's processed. And well, at least in America. I mean, I know you're in a place in the world where they don't do that to the food. But when it's labelled gluten-free, it also tends to have a lot of sugar. And they did this to us back in the 90s when they called everything fat-free. And they told us it was healthy when really actually they just added a lot of sugar to make it taste good and didn't have to label it that way. So the idea is that kids shouldn't be given kid food. Kids should be given food that we're eating as adults. And they should be given to it often. And little tastes. If they don't like it, that's okay, as long as they're tasting it. Because that opens up the palate to eat a variety of foods. And that's what our microbiome needs. So eating the same thing all the time. And of course, having it be ultra processed and highly sugared is toxic to the gut. And there's a major connection, now we understand, between the gut and the brain. And so what's happening to our kids is that their brains are reacting to essentially kid food. And I always think of it too, like if you think of a typical kid plate, it's not very pretty. It's not colourful. It's brown, chicken nuggets...
**Meg Faure:** Beige food.
**Nicole Runyon:** Beige food. Yeah, exactly. And eating the rainbow is really ideal because it's giving them that variety that their gut needs.

**[13:18 - 14:08]**
**Meg Faure:** Absolutely. And then the second thing that you touched on was technology. And you said something that was so profound that I just want to repeat for people because I don't know that people really understand the impact of this. Technology in and of itself is problematic for little brains, for developing brains. We know that. But the problem isn't just in the fact that they're blue screens and that they're fast moving images and that it feeds into addiction pathways. That's not what it is all about. There's a big piece, which is what it is taking away from. So what is your child not doing when they are on technology? And in some respects, that's actually one of the biggest losses for this age group, for this kind of under three age group. Can you talk a little bit more about that? You mentioned nature, you mentioned movement. Can you just unpack that a little further for us?

**[14:09 - 18:38]**
**Nicole Runyon:** Yes. Yes. So when I talk about child development, I talk about it in the sense of a wheel. And it starts with movement that then scaffolds the brain for growth. And the brain grows every year and majorly every seven years. So once they have movement and their brain is growing, then they can move into what's considered social emotional development. And under three, what they need to be doing is tolerating discomfort, working through their big feelings and learning how to regulate them. So from a social emotional standpoint, from zero to 18 months, babies and toddlers are in the attachment phase of development. So what that means is they cry because that's their form of communication and a parent responds. And the parent needs to respond because that builds trust in the connection and in the relationship. The other thing that it does is it prevents from babies being in fight or flight. If they're distressed, if they're under that kind of duress where they're crying and their cries aren't being met, then their nervous system reacts to that as a threat and they develop in a fight or flight kind of anxious, highly stimulated way. And then they go sort of through the rest of their childhood with that fight or flight and not being able to have rest and digest, which is that other part of the autonomic nervous system that helps balance out our survival mechanisms. And so if a caregiver responds to a baby, then that builds that sense of calm. It releases oxytocin. It builds calm. It keeps babies more balanced in the nervous system. And then they could go into the next phase of development, which is 18 months to three. And this is all about will and authority and boundaries. So this is where traditionally people would say, "Oh, it's the terrible twos." And this is when, you know, toddlers dig their heels in. "No, I will not, I'll do it by myself." So what parents need to be doing in this time is honouring and respecting that this is the first phase of development where kids are separating from them. There's three times in childhood where this happens. Two, nine, and 16. And what parents tend to do is because they're so young, they do the tasks of development for them when our two-year-olds are saying, "No, I want to get myself dressed." And of course, they're going to do it wrong. And their shirts are going to be backwards. And they're not going to be able to pick the right outfit out or dress for the weather. But parents can guide them through that, starting with allowing them and respecting the boundary that, "Hey, I'm a little bit more ready to separate from you." Now, the other piece in this phase of development is the two-year-olds have to respect the parents' boundaries because the parents' boundaries are in place to keep them safe. And this is where I see a lot of parents going off the path here because they're sort of afraid of their two-year-olds. And they're afraid of that big meltdown reaction. And so I've heard a lot of parents say, "Well, it's not the terrible twos. Two was easy. It's actually the terrible threes." Well, the reason for that is because two isn't going very well. Parents aren't allowing their kids to have that independence. And they're not stepping into their parental authority. And so now that we have tablets to be able to keep our kids comfortable, happy, and, in a sense, safe because they're not running in the street and we're not chasing after them to make sure that they don't die, then parents think that that's all good. But then they're moving into the next phase of development, which is between three and five. And that's a time for autonomy and independence. This is when kids tend to leave their parents and go to preschool and start to be expected to listen to other adults and interact with other kids. But again, if they didn't have that phase of development where they felt like they could be independent and they could respect adult authority, then they're going to struggle in this time.

**[18:39 - 20:50]**
**Meg Faure:** Yeah, absolutely. And it really speaks to permissive parenting versus gentle parenting versus attachment parenting. It's all so caught up. And I've kind of watched the trends. I've been in the parenting industry for the last 20 years, and I've watched the trends. And we're all very aware of attachment and bonding. And so there's this real focus on really making sure that your child's emotional world is protected. And that's, I think, being slightly confused with what has become known as gentle parenting, which is actually a great term, except it's been taken maybe and maybe kind of commercialised or kind of socialised in a way that has brought some misunderstandings in which a child must have no discomfort. A child must never be out of their comfort zone. They must always have everything they need because then they will feel autonomous and they'll develop their sense of self. And in amongst all of that, we've ended up in potentially a space of permissive parenting where the mom's and dad's boundaries and the boundaries that are there for the child's safety are not being instilled because we fear our children's anger. And I think there'll be a lot of parents, and I know I've had on many times, I've been asked about it on podcasts and had to comment on it as well. And I'd love to hear your comment is where do you think good parenting sits in that continuum of kind of permissiveness, gentle parenting, and what should we be looking out for as new parents?
**Announcer:** This episode is brought to us by ParentSense, 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? ParentSense app is like having a baby expert on your phone guiding you to parent with confidence. Get a flexible routine, daily tips, and advice personalised for you and your little one. Download ParentSense app now from your app store and take the guesswork out of parenting.
**Meg Faure:** And what should we be looking out for as new parents?

**[20:50 - 22:49]**
**Nicole Runyon:** Yeah, there's a form of parenting called authoritative parenting. So this is adopted by Baumrind, and she had four types of parenting styles. There was permissive, there was neglectful, the authoritarian parent, which is the, you know, strict "my way is the highway," and then there's authoritative. And authoritative parenting is a mix of high expectations, high boundaries, firm rules, and high love. So that, you know, that nurturing, that care and consideration about feelings. But it's a delicate balance that we're not striking in our culture because we're following parenting trends. And so it's one thing to, you know, say, "Okay, we used to wear skinny jeans, now it's baggy jeans." That's a fashion trend, right? And we all know the fashion trends, they come and go. I mean, I should have kept my jeans from the 90s because now they're back in style.
**Meg Faure:** Exactly.
**Nicole Runyon:** Right? But there's only one form of parenting. We can't be up and down with the trends in terms of our parenting because the stakes are way higher than being fashionably out of style, right? And it's very much affecting our kids. That not only are we trending with parenting, but we're also in competition. Like, "What type of parent are you? And what's best? And what's better?" And, you know, then there's the social media posts of "look at me, look how great I am," you know. What it reminds me of, there was a cover of, there was something on the cover of Time magazine, I think it was in the early 2000s. It was a mom breastfeeding her older child. I think he was like seven or eight. And he literally was like on her breast in the picture. And the headline was, "Are You Mom Enough?"
**Meg Faure:** Wow. I don't know, do you remember that?
**Meg Faure:** I do. I do. Yeah.
**Nicole Runyon:** Yeah. And it really was so, I wasn't a parent yet. But it really made me think about how far away we are of what kids actually need. Because this isn't a competition. This isn't a, "I'm this type of parent and you're not." This is what's best for our kids. And what is best for our kids? And this doesn't change. It just doesn't change no matter how much the culture changes, is high expectations, firm boundaries, consequences, you know, making sure that we have these, this container around them to keep them safe from themselves, essentially. And again, high love, like we need to be concerned about their feelings. Absolutely. But we can't just be concerned about their feelings and nothing else. Because then we lack the ability to have our parental authority and that's what they need from us.

**[22:49 - 25:12]**
**Meg Faure:** Yeah, absolutely. I'm often asked, I have worked as a sleep coach over many years as well. And boundaries comes into sleep a lot, especially as little ones get into the toddler years, but even a little bit earlier as well. But certainly in the toddler years boundaries come in. And sometimes when little ones are really pushing the boundaries, there's some tears around bedtime. And so, and it's a very polarised space that I have occupied, you know, that I've had to sit with it. And it can sometimes be quite uncomfortable where, you know, people are saying "children must never be left to cry." And maybe that is true, but children must never cry. They must never have frustration. They must, you know, you must let them sleep where they want, sleep when they want. But sleep isn't like that because there's a lot of hygiene structures that you do need to put in place for healthy sleep. And obviously healthy sleep is incredibly important. But as moms, when they start to listen to all these different voices in the marketplace, everything from "let your baby cry it out" all the way through to "never let your baby cry at all, because you're going to damage them." I think the overwhelming emotion that comes through, and it was actually something you said just now around the weight of responsibility of this period of life. It's not as, trends can come and go in fashion, but trends can't come and go in parenting because at the end of the day, you know, you're growing a human brain. Parents know that. And what it brings is a lot of fear about doing the wrong thing and a lot of guilt when maybe they have done the wrong thing. And, you know, I've always been of the belief that guilt is a really negative emotion for parents because, you know, when people are putting guilt onto another mom, for whatever reason, "you didn't breastfeed for long enough," "you had a caesarean section," "you let your baby cry for 15 minutes," whatever it is that, that feeling really doesn't work well for parents. So can we talk a little bit about that, about the guilt and how do we take on the responsibility of parenting and then also kind of deal with the shaming and the guilt and so on that is just so part and parcel of being a parent?
**Nicole Runyon:** Yeah. I think the guilt is because we've lost our instincts. So instinctually we know what's best for our kids. And if we connected to that and we weren't looking to so-called experts or our friends or social media trends or comments on a post, then we would be 99.9% of the time doing what's best for our kids. And that's different for every parent and every family with every kid because every kid is different.
**Meg Faure:** And culturally as well. I mean, yeah. Cultural norms will also play into that.
**Nicole Runyon:** Absolutely. And so we're really living against nature and our culture all around. You know, I just learned that we're not supposed to be wearing shoes at all. Like, you know, that's why we're all having a hard time with our bodies and aches and pains and back pain and issues. Right. So just right down to how we're living our lives outside of nature and outside of what we're supposed to be doing that goes for parenting as well. And that's why we've lost our way. That's why we feel like we don't know what to do. And then when we make these choices and we learn it didn't work, then we feel the guilt. So what I really always advocate for is parents reflecting inward and tapping into that inner knowing of what they know best for their kids. And I will tell them, you know, "Look, I was a child therapist for over 20 years and you know your kid better than I do and you're better to be with them than I am. And I can help you as the parent, but no one is better than you at connecting to your child, knowing what your child needs and helping them through a struggle."

**[25:12 - 26:17]**
**Meg Faure:** Yeah, absolutely. And this kind of brings you around to a theme that's kind of been playing through a couple of things you've said, which is around the messiness of good parenting and of healthy development. So one of the things you said very early on is that children need to be outside in nature. And when I think about being outside in nature, I'm thinking about feet squishing through mud, climbing branches that you might fall from and taking risks, you know, being in nature. And then there's another piece of messiness that you also alluded to, and that is that children need to be able to tolerate frustrations, which is also messy. It doesn't feel comfortable when you're having to tolerate frustrations and you're wanting to push up against something and there's a fight, you know, and that's the messiness. But in all of that messiness, whether it's physical of the outside world or whether it is boundaries and frustrations that come up, that children have to push up against and then actually learn to self-regulate with. All of that actually teaches life lessons and actually supports our development for bouncing later on and for resilience and for grit and for actually dealing with the world. And I think that sometimes in our hyper-sterile, absolutely picture-perfect world, you know, social media does us no favours in this space, we end up in a space where children don't have the opportunity to be frustrated, to learn, to grow and to actually develop that self-resilience and that self-regulation that will one day give them resilience in life. And I think that maybe is a message that parents need to hear, that actually the messiness is exactly what your little one needs.
**Nicole Runyon:** Absolutely, yes. And what kids need from their parents early on, so we're talking about under three, they need parents to co-regulate with them. And what that means is that they're going to have the big reaction to something very small, something simple, the "no" or the...

**[26:17 - 27:31]**
**Nicole Runyon:** ...it's bedtime, like you said, and they don't know how to self-regulate. So, the expectation for them later on is that they self-regulate out there in the world. To your point, we need them to be resilient and have grit and deal with life. But if we don't teach them early on, then that's a skill that they don't develop. And what co-regulation is, is we are the container for their feelings. So, we have to meet their big feelings with calm. And oh, boy, is that the hardest thing in the world to do.
**Meg Faure:** Because we're sometimes in our red brain.
**Nicole Runyon:** That's right. That's right. So, it's up to us to do that work on ourselves, to know how to calm ourselves in times of stress and in moments where they need us to sometimes literally just stand there and be with them while they're having a meltdown. And I notice a lot of parents will say, you know, the culture is around, you know, "go to your room or go somewhere else and come back when you feel better, when you're happy." Well, that's easier said than done, because they need that energy from you first to be able to say to them, like non-verbally, just in your presence and in your energy, "Hey, like, I got you. This is okay." And then they're going to come out of it feeling like they can solve the problem. So, you know, they can communicate what they need. They can communicate what their frustration is early on. If they don't have the words for it, you can give them the words. You know, "I understand that you're frustrated and you're not ready for bed, but it's time for bed." And not moving the boundary just because they have this reaction.
**Meg Faure:** Yeah. And not being scared of their anger.
**Nicole Runyon:** That's right. Not being scared of their anger, because that's the authoritarian parent model, which is "I love you. I'm here for you. I'm not leaving. Your feelings are okay with me, but I'm also not going to change the boundary because the boundary is what's good for you. And I'm doing this for you out of love."
**[27:31 - 27:32]**
**Meg Faure:** Oh, I really, really love that.

**[27:32 - 28:04]**
**Meg Faure:** One of the things that we haven't touched on today is, of course, and it was where we started the whole conversation is, is there ever a time that neurodiversity is something that is, it's neurologically driven, it is organic. And if there are parents are listening to this and thinking, "oh my gosh, this is all on me that I now have a child with an autistic spectrum diagnosis or with a conduct disorder." Maybe we could just say something, you know, directly to those parents who have questions around, you know, "is this all my fault? Is this something that I didn't do right from the beginning? And is it all too late?"
**[28:05 - 29:35]**
**Nicole Runyon:** Yes. I mean, I love that you're bringing that up because I think that really plays into the parent guilt, right? That we all, we all do. I do it myself as well in my own parenting. And I don't ever think that any of this is parent's fault. Right? Because most of this stuff is environmental and unless you live under a rock, it's going to affect your children. And so it's not our fault, but it is our responsibility. And so if you're asking, yeah, are there kids whose brains are just this way and it's neurological and it's organic? Yeah, absolutely. And that's why we have, you know, diagnoses in place. That's why we have treatment modalities in place for kids who genuinely are, you know, just set up this way. Right. But two things about that. One, that's very rare. So that's not really the majority. That's more of the exception and not the rule. Because what's really true is that most of these kids with these issues are reacting to something environmental that can be changed. And I will say that that's really hard to determine, to research, to find the right practitioners that actually understand that to work with you. But we're learning more and more about, you know, just like I said earlier about the gut-brain connection and how we can change so much when we heal the gut microbiome from dysbiosis and inflammation. And so I think what parents with kids with these issues need to do is step out of this idea that they've done something wrong, that it's their fault, that they're bad parents, that, you know, society just is casting them aside and casting their children aside and acknowledging that, "Hey, yeah, this is something that we deal with. This is something we have to deal with and let's figure it out and finding those right practitioners to help with it."

**[29:35 - 30:17]**
**Meg Faure:** Absolutely. So I think the big message today is that, first of all, there's a lot we can do preventatively if we start off on the right foot. And it is, it goes to the gut, it goes to being outdoors in nature, it goes to boundaries, it goes to attachment under 18 months and really taking care of your child's emotional world. And when you start, and not using too much technology, obviously in your toddler years and preschool years. And so we can, there's a lot we can do. And I think that for me is what I'm hoping is the message for moms today is that there is so much you can do right from the get-go. And a lot of it is about getting back to your roots and getting back to your gut as well for understanding, you know, really what feels right when you're parenting your little ones.
**[30:17 - 30:45]**
**Nicole Runyon:** That's right, absolutely. And even if your kid is one of those, you know, you've done the things, you've tried to change the environment, you've, you know, worked really hard and they still are showing signs of neurodivergence, that doesn't mean that you can't still feel supported and not go into your guilt and continue to get the right kind of help.
**Meg Faure:** Absolutely. Well, let's finish off now. And I'm going to ask you a question. And, you know, I think if there are parents who are listening right now who are feeling a little bit overwhelmed, are wondering how on earth they even start to make these enormous shifts, because for some parents this could feel like quite enormous shifts. What is the one change that a parent could make this week in order to reconnect with their little ones?

**[30:45 - 32:00]**
**Nicole Runyon:** I think part of this conversation, a huge part of it should be that parents need to be putting their screens down, just like we need to be aware of our children and their screen usage. So you might think you're doing pretty well if your under three-year-old doesn't have an iPad and is playing outside and, you know, getting what they need. But if you're in front of your screen, not looking at them in the eyes and not interacting and speaking to them and having that connection, then there's going to be something missing. So what parents can do is maintain that connection with their kids at any age by acknowledging that we all are affected by our environment, by technology, by the food we're eating, you know, by the substances that parents are consuming. Even binge watching TV is, I would consider, in the category of being addicted to something and being disconnected. So that awareness is super important because it's all around us. It's what everybody else is doing. We think it's the norm. But what's happening is the norm is incredibly disconnected. And that's why we're seeing lots of illness and lots of dysfunction. And really what we need to do is get back to that connection.

**[32:00 - 32:38]**
**Meg Faure:** Yeah. I mean, everything you've spoken about revolves around intentionality, being intentional about what you feed your children, how they play and how you use your technology. Very, very important messages. So I know, Nicole, that people are going to want to be able to get hold of you. And maybe you could just tell us how can people get hold of you? And I believe you have a book, which I think our parents would really love to know about. Can you share a little bit about that?
**Nicole Runyon:** Yeah. So the book is called "Free to Fly, The Secret to Fostering Independence in the Next Generation." And I wrote the book because after seeing kids for so many years, I realised what I had been talking about in terms of what's nature and what's nurture.

**[32:38 - 35:28]**
**Nicole Runyon:** And so much of my practise, the majority of my practise with kids, were really parents who needed help as opposed to kids who needed a mental health diagnosis and therapy treatment. And so I decided that I wanted to serve parents. And part of that service to parents is the book. And what I do in the book is I explain child development, much like we talked about today. And I do a deep dive into certain ages, what kids need in those ages, and how to help them develop more naturally in the midst of this environment where we have so many things that are fracturing that development. And my goal of the book, my hope is, is that parents feel really empowered after reading it to give their kids what they need and not feel like they have to divert to some expert. Because again, I really help parents understand that you know more than you think. And part of that is self-reflection of yourself. Like what was missing in your childhood? What's unresolved? What might you be projecting in your parenting that is affecting your child's development? And essentially the idea that we all have to be uncomfortable. Like parents need to be uncomfortable so we can allow our kids to be uncomfortable. Because saying no to all these trends that everybody else is doing is really hard. Because one of the biggest objections I get from parents when I talk about this is, "Well, they're going to be isolated. They won't have any friends. What if I, you know, what if I'm giving them a whole another set of problems? And what's worse, to give them a smart device or to have them be isolated from their friends?" And so what I try and do is help parents understand that you're never going to go wrong with connection.
**Meg Faure:** Absolutely.
**Nicole Runyon:** Right? So I don't deny that there's going to be some social issues, you know, if you're going to go against the grain. I do it myself with my own kids and there's little to no social issues. We've navigated it pretty well. But there are some issues, certainly. And I don't question it because I know that my influence over them is stronger than the online influence. And that's really important right now. And yeah, so that's the goal of the book. And I, you know, I really feel strongly that helping parents is the way to go right now.
**Meg Faure:** That's amazing. And I mean, obviously, the earlier you read the book in your parenting journey, the better. But it sounds to me like it goes all the way through the preteen and teen years as well.
**Nicole Runyon:** Yeah. So I explain development from birth to age 25 because that's when the brain is fully developed at 25. So if you do have an older kid, I really stress to parents that it's never too late because it's harder. Sure. I won't deny that. You know, preventing these things is is just a much better way to go. But it doesn't mean you can't. You know, I often like I map out to parents and I often talk to them about how there are steps you can take to, you know, to undo Pandora's box. Right. It's not completely open and you can't close it again. And the first thing that I recommend parents do is actually apologise to their kids, apologise to them for bringing something into the family that you didn't understand. And now you understand it. And when we know better, we do better. And so we're going to make these changes, whatever changes that needs to be for your family. But that's foundationally what parents need to do. And there's the connection. "I'm telling you, hey, I made a mistake because I didn't know. And now I know. And this is what parents do." And that helps deepen the level of understanding.

**[35:28 - 36:50]**
**Meg Faure:** Absolutely. So moms, if you missed the name of that book, it's called "Free to Fly" and it is available on Amazon. Nicole, I'm quite sure globally. So do get hold of it, moms. It will be an amazing resource for you on your journey. So as we wrap up today's conversation, I want to acknowledge the tension that we all live in as parents and as professionals. There are some non-negotiable truths around our baby's brain and development. And sometimes speaking these truths means opening ourselves up to criticism. For the mom who says no to sugar at a birthday party, the dad who holds firm during a tantrum in the checkout line but doesn't give in, and the parenting expert who champions structure and boundaries in an age that glorifies ease and freedom. These choices are not always popular and they're not always comfortable, but they are intentional. And if we don't choose intentionality in the short run, I really do believe, and I think we've heard from Nicole today, that we may be faced with far more complex and painful challenges in the long run. So that's really what today's podcast was all about. It's not about guilt and not about blame, but about being conscious as parents. Our children do not need perfection, but they do need boundaries, presence, and are encouraged to do what's hard now because it'll help them to thrive later on. So Nicole, as we wrap up, I want to say a huge thank you to you because I think you've highlighted just some of those real basic truths. And while they might sometimes be hard to hear and may certainly come up for criticism in some circles, they are the truths that parents really do need to hear today.
**[36:51 - 36:54]**
**Nicole Runyon:** Thank you. Thank you for having me. It was great to talk to you.
**[36:55 - 37:05]**
**Announcer:** Thanks to everyone who joined us. We will see you the same time next week. Until then, download ParentSense app and take the guesswork out of parenting.