

Fourth Trimester Podcast

Episode 2: Preparing to Enjoy the Fourth Trimester

sarah trott: [00:00:05] My name is Sarah Trott. I'm a new mama to a baby girl and this podcast is all about postpartum care for the few months following birth, the time period also known as the Fourth Trimester. My postpartum doula, Esther Gallagher, is my co-host. She's a mother, grandmother, perinatal educator, birth and postpartum care provider. I've benefitted hugely from her support. All parents can benefit from the wisdom and support that a postpartum Doula provides. Fourth trimester care is about the practical, emotional and social support parents and baby require, and importantly, helps set the tone for the lifelong journey of parenting.

sarah trott: [00:00:46] There is so much to think about when you're starting a new family. Especially, the first time. Your classes at the hospital, nursery to fill, health and fitness, your baby shower, your family and friends, parent leave and newborn care and for yourself when your baby arrives. This podcast is going to be focused on one major question which is, "What would you advise new parents-to-be to think about before they give birth so that they can make the most of their fourth trimester?"

esther gallagher: [00:01:16] Sarah and I talked about a little different structure for this podcast so I have developed a class for parents to prepare for the fourth trimester and we thought we'd sort of use my outline and offer this as a little podcast workshop for you. So if you have the opportunity to grab pen and paper and you might find that valuable. So the introduction to my course is a series of queries for parents to consider and write about and I'm going to just work our way through these queries and I will offer some insight where I think it's helpful. The first question is "What do you imagine the first week, then the second week, The first month, etc. etc. will feel like?" And when I say feel, I'm asking you to consider what having a brand new baby will be like for you physically emotionally and socially. That's a big question. It's hard to imagine if you've never been through it before and just as a little tip, each one of your friends or family members who may have children will no doubt be quite willing to tell you their experiences. However, speaking professionally now, I'm here to tell you that those will not be your experiences specifically. So I want you to consider moving away from the idea that you have to go out and do research about this and just use your imagination.

It's probably the case that you've already heard from friends and family members and heard some of their stories. But I want you to just back up and imagine. Move into your body. Imagine what it's going to be like for, if you're the pregnant person, a baby to come out of your body. Imagine what it's going to be like to first meet your adopted child. Imagine what it's going to be like to be in this setting for the first few days that you plan to be in whether it's at home or the hospital. Try to imagine what you might be encountering in those settings. If you're in a hospital setting you're going to be visited by nurses and doctors around the clock. If you're at home you may or may not be visited by anybody around the clock and you'll be with your baby alone together if you're at home. So those are just some of the things that you can start to feel into.

sarah trott: [00:03:54] When you ask that question when you say, "What will it feel like?" are you talking about emotional state, or your physical surroundings? What are the specifics. What do you feel.

esther gallagher: [00:04:05] Yeah. All of those things. So there's a physical feeling that you could imagine; like we have bodies and we imagine things in them all the time. So imagine what your bottom might feel like if an eight pound baby came out of it or what it might be like if you had to have a c section for instance. And what it might be like to have to cope with those physical sensations of your body being in that state while it's healing and recovering. So this isn't to scare anybody. This is just to help people think about the things that often nobody's said, "Gosh you know, after you have your baby you're going to feel stuff. And it's going to change every day a little bit or a lot. And if you could imagine it a little bit you might make good decisions about what you're going to put on your plate later. So that's part of the reason for this exercise is we're moving towards a greater understanding, hopefully, of what the fourth trimester feels like, especially in the first six weeks, which are six weeks of every day profound change. I think you'd agree. .

sarah trott: [00:05:20] Definitely.

esther gallagher: [00:05:22] So this is just an exercise to start to feel your way in. And by the way it's not just for pregnant women this is an exercise for anybody who might be closely relating with bringing a new baby home. OK. So in the class setting I want

parents, all the parents and any auxiliary people who come along to the class, to be considering these questions.

sarah trott: [00:05:53] And for the other side of it the emotional side of the feelings is it about how the parent feels themselves and their personal development? Is it how they're relating to their partner differently or their family?.

esther gallagher: [00:06:06] All of the above. And that's why I also pointed towards social. Right because the emotional and the social are very very intertwined. I want people to begin by imagining just the kinds of emotional responses and upwellings they're likely to have just on their own in the unlikely event that nothing else is happening. Just the sort of the internal, personal, emotional possibilities. And then to also think in terms of the fact that often where we're at the emotionally has something to do with what's happening socially right as well as physically and if we're really really hurting, really sore and tired, and now it's time to breastfeed a baby again when we just thought, "I could really use a nap", we're going to have feelings about that. Right. That's an example. Might be feeling like these upwellings of joy. Now those upwellings of joy might feel really energetic and positive. And we might think, "Wow! I just want to like dance and shout to the whole world what this great thing is that's happening in my life!" And of course it's unlikely you'll do that but it's still a feeling and it's still an energy and it's still something that parents contend with. If we've never had a new baby we might imagine it all on one side of that continuum or on the other. Right. Some people are inclined towards, "This is just going to be a best thing that ever happened and I'm going to feel great and everyone's going to be in love and it's going to be awesome period". And of course, there are other people who are likely to be going, "Ooh noooo, I'm not ready. This is going to be a real drag and what am I going to do?" Right. So there's really a continuum. It's probably true you are going to have all of that right and everything in between. At some point. So I just think it's important for people to connect up with what they imagine. Right. Just start there. And then we can kind of massage that a little bit and see what's up in that and move that around and get a little more interested in all the possibilities from that place. Also the reason for this is that I don't think otherwise, we're encouraged to make room for really imagining such a thing as Postpartum. You know, after we have a new baby, and I really want to encourage that. I really encourage the imaginal in this process.

sarah trott: [00:08:48] I really like the idea of challenging the stereotypes that a lot of people carry into their first experience with a new baby. And I know for sure some of the stereotypes that I heard were things like "you never sleep, you're always tired, you fall in love all over again." And while some of these may or may not be true for people I think that it might be easy to not question the stereotypes and assume that's the way it is for everyone and that's the way it is for me. Where, in actuality, if we stop to really reflect on who we are how we're feeling physically, emotionally, our situation, that your postpartum experience can be shaped into something different. It can be shaped into something more of what you want. It's more personal.

esther gallagher: [00:09:38] Not only that Sarah, and I think that's brilliant what you're just pointing towards, but i also think that you know when you're faced with just this list of how it's supposed to be and then you get there, and that's not what you're experiencing, it can be pretty frightening for people. And I think it's important to help people have a little bit of a reality based sense of what each day and each developmental phase can be like and sort of the ups and downs of it all. Because there are lots of ups and downs, by way of saying, These are things that are pretty normal." And also by helping people, later on in our future podcasts, understand what might be the edge for you, what might be the point at which it's clear that you need added resource. Right. Not just the regular forms of resource but something deeper to really help you cope with a mood disorder or any number of health issues that could arise. I mean being postpartum is like everything else, it can be very healthy and it can be not so healthy. So I think it's important for parents to be able to move towards an understanding of where they're at now in that whole process. So next question for you to write down and take time to write about is, "What experiences would you like to have. In other words what are you looking forward to?" And of course some of those things might be on the list that your friends and family have told you and some other things might be things that you alone uniquely have come up with as things that you would really like to have happen in your social emotional world once your baby's here. Again this is just put forth to encourage you to begin to solidify some of these ideas. Not so much solidify whether or not they will actually happen but to actually hook up with the fact that you would like them to happen so that we can move toward questions about, "Is this an appropriate thing for me at a particular stage? Is this something that maybe needs to wait until our baby's a little more mature?" Questions of that nature. For instance I'm working with a family now who planned their pregnancy, got through, made

some empowering decisions along the way about where they'd like to give birth, having a birth doula, they hired a postpartum doula. But they had this question for me which is, "When do you think it's OK to fly on airplanes with our baby?" Now they weren't talking about a short flight. They were talking about 11 hours on an airplane. The interesting thing for me was that this question was moot. They'd already decided that they were going to do this. And that it would be fairly early on in their fourth trimester. So while we've had this discussion and they've sort of loosened up around having any dates for this, they're determined to go quite early in their fourth trimester on a long trip with a newborn baby. That's an experience they're determined to have. So maybe you're making those kinds of plans now. Maybe it's more like you would just really really really like to experience having your family, whatever you think of as your family, whoever the people in your family are, come in close and have a really really wonderful welcoming experience of you and your baby. I think this is a really common desire that somehow, this baby coming forth into this family will be a kind of rite of passage that will potentially open up relationships that have been closed or empower people who have felt disempowered. So these are common experiences that parents think about during their pregnancy but often keep to themselves very close because they can't imagine that anyone else shares them or thinks them or wants to feel them. And I'm inviting you to bring forth anything that is feeling important to you in terms of what you'd imagine experientially would be nice for you.

sarah trott: [00:14:27] Are there ways that people can set themselves up to have those experiences better or maybe preparing themselves for those experiences not turning out the way that they thought.

esther gallagher: [00:14:38] Yes. And we hope to address both of those in this podcast and beyond. You know part of this what's inherent in your question I think Sarah is the appropriateness of these desires. And when I see appropriateness I don't mean whether or not you should or shouldn't think about something. I'm not a thought police person. What I'm saying is do think about these things. Be really curious about these things. They could be perfectly wonderful valid things but if they don't get expressed then the chances are they may pass you by. They may be perfectly appropriate but nobody in your world has ever thought about them. And so it may take some preparation in order to bring them to manifestation. Right. And then there are going to be those things that without any sort of moral judgment may be inappropriate in the sense that the timing of

when these kinds of experiences can be had isn't linked up with the reality of your postpartum healing and recovery, for instance, or the reality check is that you don't have family members who are going to meet you where you are spiritually, emotionally and socially. For instance. So you know those are the sorts of things that we contend with when we're imagining the experiences we'd like to have.

sarah trott: [00:16:04] Do you find working with couples or any partnership for bringing a new baby into their lives that they have different ideas about the experiences they want?.

esther gallagher: [00:16:14] Almost always. And I will add almost always I'm intuiting that. they're not telling me right. I'm hearing responses. I'm watching body language. I'm asking questions and it's clear that they've had parallel existences that didn't overlap in these particular ways. And so this is another reason why this is a wonderful exercise if you can get yourself and your partner to kind of do a journal experience around these things and be real honest in your writing about these things, you're going to have the potential to share these musings with your most intimate partner or co parent or parent or grandparent or whoever it is who you might like to share with about the kind of experiences you'd like to have or the things you're worried about or what you've imagined things would be like and actually get some feedback you know and actually start a dialogue about stuff that many of us just think well we just kind of have to shrug our shoulders and keep it to ourselves and see what happens even though we may be very deeply emotionally attached to our ideas, at the same time and would love it if somehow magically these things would just happen. So you know, if we can really get engaged with some of these questions maybe they will happen. And that would be lovely.

sarah trott: [00:17:48] So true, AND be able to cope with it better afterwards if there is a difference in desired outcome because assuming someone wants the same thing as you is definitely something that happens in all kinds of situations and relationships not just when there's a baby. So dealing with that before the newborn is in hand it's probably worthwhile.

esther gallagher: [00:18:11] Yeah. If you have a chance it's always great to communicate. Right? Of course this leads to sort of the converse question which is, "Is

there anything you'd really like to avoid experiencing in the first days and weeks after birth or after your baby comes home?" And of course yeah this is very very important material. This is sort of the shadow side of the other question, like maybe you're really worried that this or that is likely to happen. Maybe there's dynamics amongst certain people in your life who for instance use a specific example have offered to help. Right. They're just raring to go to be your savior in the first six weeks after you have a baby and maybe you know something about your dynamic in that relationship that you know bodes something less than really comfortable for you if this person shows up with their agenda. That's one I run into all the time with helping parents sort of plan for their fourth trimester healing and recovery period, is that there's usually a mother who's about to be a grandmother who's decided that they're going to show up. It's not always a question, in other words sometimes it's just you know I've bought my plane ticket and I will be there on your due date or whatever. That's not always appropriate. So if you have inklings about these sorts of things that might crop up in your life and might be disruptive or disturbing then it's pretty important to be really owning those things, really hooking up with them and really finding ways to communicate about them so that if there's a way to avoid a disturbing experience you get to have that. And this isn't a scourge. All grandmothers and mothers you know of course many of them are just the ticket when it comes to having your first baby and are wonderfully resourceful and helpful and have good boundaries and all the things that are important. And speaking as a mother I know that you know I can be really good at offering good postpartum care and I still can manage to step on my daughter's toes. But you know it's important that daughters get to be adults when they have their children and to tell their moms that they're gonna do it the way they're going to do it and have that be OK. So again that's just an example. There of course are innumerable possible relationships that are going to be a challenge when you're also trying to heal and recover and take care of a new baby. So the next question which the past question was a nice lead into is, "How are you supported?" And this is a multi Question-Question: "Who do you imagine can or will help you? What are their strengths and weaknesses? How would you characterize your relationship with them?" So again the past example sort of enfolds all of those possibilities. Right. But no doubt you're already supported in some ways. What are those ways? Do you imagine those ways are going to seamlessly take you right into the end of pregnancy and the beginning of postpartum and throughout that trajectory or not. Are they limited. When we ask the question, "Who do you imagine can and will help you? Are these people actually really available? What is their kind of

availability?" I think it's fair to say that there's probably special people in our lives who we think, "Wouldn't it be great if that best friend could just be the one to show up and take really good care of us the way we would love to be able to do for them if we were in a similar situation?" What's the reality check behind that? How available are they? It's no easy feat for people to, for instance, take time off work. As I talked about in our first podcast, my mom was just so dear when she came and she had three days that she could afford to be with me and help. It wasn't nearly adequate from my end, it wasn't really adequate. Brilliant and helpful but I needed much, much more for much longer period. So figuring out who can help, how available they actually, these are pretty important things. And then of course: What are the strengths and weaknesses of this actual person? No doubt they're not perfect. If you can hook up with wow, you know they're just an excellent cook. I love the nourishing food they make. I want to eat that nourishing food when I'm having to heal and recover and take care of a newborn. What's the strategy for having that happen? Maybe you love their food but really they talk too much. You're just going to be too tired if they're actually in your house cooking for you, so perhaps you can set up a system where they make meals and they drop them off, as an example.

sarah trott: [00:23:23] You know I really like the idea of honing in on things that you actually need and aligning those with the people who can provide that, because thinking that there's one person or one partner who can fulfill everything you need is probably not realistic. And I did read somewhere a great idea about making a list of practical things that you would need so that you're prepared when someone says, "What can I do for you?" You can hand them a list and say, "Well these are the things that I need doing. If there's anything on this list, then feel free, you may do these." But then going beyond that as you say, and actually identifying people who you think would be helpful in reaching out to them. Sometimes I find it hard to ask for help. But having something very specific in mind might make that a little bit easier.

esther gallagher: [00:24:12] Yeah. And remember Sarah when we were talking prenatally you hadn't decided whether you and Ben would like to have postpartum care and I threw out the broad question of "How do you imagine you'll be cared for after the baby's here?" And the first answer was the answer I hear most often, which is, "My partner will have two weeks off work." And two is the number, two. Like it's amazing if I ever hear that a partner gets more than that and sometimes that happens. But it's very

rare and that's if they have any time off work, it's two weeks. Reflecting back on that now what do you think about that.

sarah trott: [00:24:58] Well it was three weeks we were lucky enough to have of his time off. And I would say I didn't know what I was needing to expect. I didn't know what to expect. I thought that having my partner at home with me would be sufficient. And I was grateful for that, for what little time of his that I had, I was so incredibly grateful for and I thought that that would be enough. Now having gone through the experience of actually working with you, a very experienced postpartum Doula, I am extremely grateful for having you there. Not because I don't think that my partner and I couldn't have done it on our own, because I think we would've been fine. But the grace with which I experienced so many difficult things because I had discussed it beforehand and knew a little bit of what to expect because things weren't as surprising, I think perhaps as they would have been had I not been cared for so expertly by you I think it could have been a lot harder. I think that people don't need to suffer quite as much and by suffering I don't mean extreme physical or emotional anxiety but I do mean that for example when I run into other moms on my baby walks now in the park, on the street, I get chatting and when they talk about their experiences I think, "Wow yeah they just didn't know some some pretty simple things they hadn't been warned about this or that and they didn't have someone there just making them feel special and cared for and loved in small ways that make the biggest difference."

esther gallagher: [00:26:28] Yeah I also think about how partners have just typically gone through the baby-having experience with their partner and that's a really intensive social, emotional, spiritual experience and it can take any number of days to kind of come to terms with that big transition and be in the next transition because they're kind of back to back aren't they there. It's almost like one big transition from the end of pregnancy into the first few weeks. So I think often parents to be imagined we're just going to be able to be in this love bubble and take care of each other and do everything that needs to be done with and for each other. And it's all going to be great right and it's going to enhance our relationship. Of course if they haven't done this yet they might not have a clue as to how grueling some of this might be. How really exhausting some of it can be and how your bandwidth has gotten chewed up during the night of being up and down many times to breastfeed, burp and change a baby or wonder whether those chills mom is having are normal and healthy or require a trip to the hospital or you know,

any number of kinds of things that new parents will experience, for the first time. So often the functionality for those simple things like making sure mum's got enough to eat. Making sure everybody has enough to eat. Making sure that there's time to get to the bathroom. All of those sorts of things can start to really overwhelm. And so having that person who understands the enmeshment of all of these things and can help the family sort through them and get a little more enjoyment I think can be really helpful. It doesn't always have to be a doula, you may have a brilliant friend who just can kind of cut through the red tape and get right to the thing and be really helpful and that's why I think strengths and weaknesses in terms of the quality of presence that friends and family members can have at a social emotional level is a very very critical understanding to have. To just know, "OK my mom can really show up for me emotionally. Who cares if she can't boil an egg. If I can call her at 3am and she's going to be there and she's not going to foist some horseshit on me you know that I just can't even deal with right now, Great! And if that's not my mom, fine." Who is that person? Is there that person? Does it need to be a social worker? Fine!" Find that person who can really show up for you in those moments when you think OK this is all going to hell in a handbasket. Yeah I'm ready to throw the baby in the bath tub and go to Mexico.

sarah trott: [00:29:36] Oh I found it incredibly helpful to have visits from someone who was with me end to end from before i had the baby to after my partner had gone back to work because that was another transition. Because just as I was becoming accustomed to life with a newborn at home with my partner he went back and then I'm home alone. And as simple as it sounds, it can be intimidating for some new mothers. That's tough. And so having someone who is experienced and was there through each stage to come and check in on me was really helpful.

esther gallagher: [00:30:10] Yeah. You know we have a structure set up in our lives around work and family leave and each person's is unique to their family and often that structure is just, prenatally, you go, "OK that's what we've got." If it's like that then it must be okay. We'll accept it. We're going to just dive in and figure it'll all work out. But all of these things, as you say Sarah, are big transitions for the family and just because two weeks is on the docket doesn't mean that any of the family members will be actually ready. I mean I know that there are a lot of partners going back to work full time after two, three, four, five, six weeks. They're sleep deprived, they're not wanting to leave their partners, they just are really enjoying, despite the sleep deprivation, being home

with their family and getting to experience every little new thing that that baby is manifesting and being supportive of their partner and they're not ready emotionally or physically, necessarily. And so it is a very big thing in families and whether or not it has to happen that way, just getting some support around it can be pretty valuable.

sarah trott: [00:31:28] So this is probably a good time for us to stop and take a break because we've covered a lot of ground and there's a lot to think about there. Do you want to give a last thought?

esther gallagher: [00:31:39] Well I think it would be really interesting to hear feedback on what people have journaled. Anybody's interest in getting back to us somehow, I have a website, Esther Gallagher dot com and I have the email associated with it if you want to go there and get in touch with me and just give me any of your musings or topics that you'd like us to touch on in terms of the fourth trimester. We won't get to everything but it sure would be interesting to hear what's out there. I think that one of the things that might help you ground into how to prepare for this next phase, is to start out with a very very very simple simple questions of "What's it going to be like to be able to do self care?" Think in terms of self care being tied to newborn care. So How are you going to eat? How are you going to sleep? And how are you going to get to the toilet? Okay, some pretty basic stuff. Enjoy!

sarah trott: [00:32:41] You can find out more about Esther Gallagher on <http://www.esthergallagher.com/>. You can also subscribe to this podcast in order to hear more from us. [Click here for iTunes](#) and [click here for Google Play](#). Thank you for listening everyone and I hope you'll join us next time on the Fourth Trimester. The theme music on this podcast was created by Sean Trott. Hear more at <https://soundcloud.com/seantrott>. Special thanks to my true loves: my husband Ben, daughter Penelope, and baby girl Evelyn. Don't forget to share the Fourth Trimester Podcast with any new and expecting parents. I'm Sarah Trott. Goodbye for now.