

Fourth Trimester Podcast

Episode 18: Dad Real Talk - How First Time Dads Can Become The Father They Want To Be

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 benefited 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.

When I first became pregnant, I had never heard of postpartum Doulas, let alone knew what they did. So much of the training and preparation that expecting parents do is focused on the birth and newborn care. Once a baby is born, often the first interaction parents have with medical or child professionals, other than the first pediatrician visits, is the six-week checkup with the OB/GYN. *What about caring for mama and family between the birth and the six week doctor visit? What are the strategies for taking care of the partner and the rest of the family while looking after your newborn?*

Our podcasts contain expert interviews with specialists from many fields to cover topics including postpartum doula practices, prenatal care, prenatal and postnatal yoga, parenting, breastfeeding, physical recovery from birth, nutrition, newborn care, midwifery, negotiating family visitation, and many more.

First-hand experience is shared through lots of stories from both new and seasoned parents. Hear what other parents are asking and what they have done in their own lives.

We reference other podcasts, internet resources and real-life experts who can help you on your own parenting journey. Visit us at <http://fourthtrimesterpodcast.com>

Esther Gallagher: [00:00:05] Hi, everybody. This is Esther Gallagher. And today we have Andrew Gentry on the program who we're going to introduce to you in just a moment for our fourth trimester podcast about dads parenting. We're going to talk about the first three months in terms of Andrew's personal experience being an at home dad with other interesting things thrown in along the way. Um, Andrew, would you like to give yourself a little quick introduction?

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:01:18] Sure. If you have any questions, please jump in. But I'm sure you will. So my name is Andrew Gentry. I am, among other things. And in no particular order, a marriage and family therapist in private practice here in San Francisco. I'm also the at home parent in my family. I've got twin twins, boy and a girl who are about to turn five, which is pretty exciting around our house.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:01:45] Let's see. For the last five years, like I said, I've been the primary at home parent with the task of getting kids to and from school and making dinner and doing shopping and all that, all that sort of stuff. In addition to that, the the last couple of years, I've run a group for new fathers at de One Baby in Laurel Village, which has been just amazing. It's been a really great experience to meet and talk with and learn from other dads in the area.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:02:26] And so, you know, I bring, I guess to your podcast today sort of the dual experience of someone who's really been through it and we can get into my personal experience more if you like, but also as as someone that, that, you know, does my best to offer support to other new parents and other new families and new dads. You know, there's there's that sense of. If there's something that you want to see in the world, you better go ahead and go ahead and do it. And and having men support men in the fathering role is something that I desperately needed when I was coming through the fourth trimester. And so it's something I took a circuitous route towards creating. I guess creating is maybe too strong a word, but providing, I guess, is the way to talk about it.

Esther Gallagher: [00:03:26] Well, I think it's both. Personally, I like both those words, and I think they're absolutely apropos. If it wasn't there before, then you certainly created it and you're providing it. I love that story, and I'm glad that we're going to have the chance to get in a little deeper with you. It's my story, too, as podcast listeners already know.

Esther Gallagher: [00:03:50] There was an postpartum care when I had babies and. Somehow we muddled through and here we are. But it definitely drove me in the direction I'm still driving all these years later. Andrew I am personally fascinated to hear you tell the story about the first. Why don't we start with the first two weeks postpartum in your house and what that was like for you and your partner and your babies.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:04:22] So this is not really something that I've talked about in public except with really close friends, because we our family had a pretty unfortunately, it's actually pretty common. But but but a pretty traumatic beginning. Our kids were actually born at 27 weeks. Wow. So we actually spent the third and fourth trimester with our kids. So we had three months at Kaiser San Francisco NICU getting used to the idea of being parents and just being. Sometimes elated, sometimes terrified, mostly exhausted.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:05:09] And when we brought the kids home, you know, we already knew them pretty well. You know, it wasn't like, you know, a typical you know, what one hopes for a typical birth where you meet your baby at nine months and then you try and figure it out. In some ways, we had a we had a head start and we had. A whole bunch of incredible care from the from the NICU nurses and from our physicians and pediatricians and such like that.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:05:47] The social worker that came and talked to us to make sure we weren't falling apart, you know, all of that great, great, great support. Um, you know, they taught us how to how to bathe our babies. They gave us a bunch of a bunch of great warnings about what might happen, what might not happen. So we had again, we had almost three months of coaching prior to bringing our kids home.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:06:14] And then once we brought them home, then, you know, the real work begins. I mean, we I guess maybe that's not the way to put it because we were working very hard at that point. We were spending 8 or 10 hours a day at the at the hospital just, you know, being there for our kids and doing all the preemie stuff that one does.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:06:33] When we got home, you know, we were fortunate enough that my in-laws live very close. And so they made a big effort to be available to us and to come and do as much as they could to help us with, you know, brand new baby twins. And then, you know, my mom lives down in the Central Coast. And so she came up and spent a fair bit of time with us. And luckily, we actually have a couple of friends who at the time were doing their their training as postpartum doulas.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:07:07] So we had them each one once a week. And, you know, some, you know, we were fortunate enough to be able to hire a night doula a few nights a week for a while, which helped immensely. Um. And even with all of that in-home support, the task of keeping a couple of babies fed and healthy at the same time is keeping ourselves fed and healthy was still a pretty steep, a pretty steep hill to climb.

Esther Gallagher: [00:07:46] I can imagine.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:07:48] So, yeah, so I mean, first first two weeks at home. I mean, on top of that, our babies came home separately. So my daughter came home before my son by about almost a month. So, you know, the first day that I was home, I don't mean for this to be all gloom and doom or like this was really difficult, just that it was really difficult. It just is.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:08:09] It just is the first the first day I got home, you know, my daughter was just barely five pounds. And she was the most enormous thing in my life at that point. She still she still is. A couple of weeks later, Liam came home and he was just as enormous and trying to balance the needs of those two with with my wife's needs for rest and nutrition and, and support and stuff like that. It was pretty difficult.

Esther Gallagher: [00:08:43] You know, you're naming, of course, that span in the hospital where there was a modicum of support for just caring for your babies. But would you mind? Talking briefly about. The kind of support there was for you or and or your wife, just from a purely physiological and then emotional social point of view.

Esther Gallagher: [00:09:09] I mean, each of you was having a pretty profound experience, in some ways identical and in some ways clearly not trying no doubt to be good support for each other when you're caught up in what I can only describe personally as a vortex where things are swirling around you so fast you can barely see them. Um, so a lighting anywhere and getting to have anything for yourself is darn near impossible. Now, of course, that's my projection, that's my observation as a postpartum doula. But if you can just say a little bit about your personal experience without it.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:09:57] Sure. So while our kids while our kids are in the hospital. So, first of all, we had actually gone to our first birth class like maybe three weeks, two weeks before Jessica went into preterm labor. And so we were just getting started on that whole process. But we had also been in. Jessica had also been in the care of the the midwife and the doula that was going to we were we were on point for doing a home birth.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:10:32] Like, I don't know what we were thinking, but we were on point to do a home birth with with twins. So so Jessica already had an enormous amount of coaching and support for her health and well-being from from our doula and midwife. They were amazing. They were amazing. So, you know, a week before our kids were delivered by emergency C-section. You know, Jessica goes into the hospital and, you know, luckily we were able to keep Jessica healthy and keep the babies in for another solid week. You know, to grow and get strong.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:11:10] Anyway, we already had that that that relationship with our midwife and her doula. And the night that, you know, it was like, okay, these babies are coming. They're coming out now. Our our midwife drove across the bay to get right to us, you know, probably 15 minutes before Jessica was wheeled into the. For a

C-section. And she stopped. She just looked at me and said, look, we've barely met. I don't know you, but I know Jessica and she knows you well. Here's what you have to say. This is what you do.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:11:48] I'll be here to take care of Jessica. When the babies come out, you go with the babies. I'm like, okay, done. So even though I had, you know, I didn't have a lot of contact with with our midwife, she was amazing and gave me the, the, the centering and the grounding and the courage to just go in there and support Jessica and then to be there for my kids, like immediately. So when they, you know, when they were delivered and rolled down the hallway to the NICU like I was with both of them and and that's where my experience began.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:12:22] I got really high on adrenaline and stress hormones and just being excited to be a dad. And there's a big job ahead of us. And yeah, my babies are a kilo each and they're covered in muck and this is really scary and gross and who knows what's going to happen. But I got really, really high and I stayed high for a good, solid year. Um, meanwhile, you know, their mom is recovering from a C-section that we were prepared for, didn't want to have. And. You know, she's she's a doer. You know, there was nothing that we could do to avoid that.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:13:07] And so she. I don't mind. I don't think she'll mind that I say so. She. She got pretty shattered by that whole experience. And so that was that was difficult for for us to connect in that spot because I was holding it all together for the whole family. And luckily, you know, we were in a very fortunate position where her her employer was incredibly generous with us and our family and gave her the time off and, you know, kept us in house and home and all that.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:13:43] So she actually had had the opportunity to fall apart, which I think and to fall apart at home. And, you know, it wasn't fun, but she didn't have to put on a brave face and go to work. You know, two weeks later. Right. Yeah. So, you know, eventually, you know, we got used to the new normal and got used to caring for babies and all that sort of stuff. And probably six months into their life with us, she started to get better, and that's when I fell apart. So, you know, all sudden, you know,

Mom, mom's better. She's back at work and solidly, you know, okay. And then I'm doing the at home dad thing.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:14:24] And even with all of the support and all the good friends and the people that I met at the park and that sort of stuff, that gets really lonely, that gets really lonesome, like hanging out with a couple of six month old kids. You know, I barely had any adult conversation outside of Facebook, so. So that's a drag. And so I'm like, Yeah, I've got to get back in therapy. So I called up my therapist and I got back in therapy because that was really, really important for for me to at least talk to another grown up, but also to just talk about what was going on with me. Yeah. So I don't know if that really answers your question. Oh, it.

Esther Gallagher: [00:14:59] Very much answers my question. And what I would like to just point out for our audience, something that, you know is that I it's my experience that no matter the outcome and no matter how high, good, high, bad, high, right, whatever whatever people feel in terms of high birth and getting through the moment to moment. Expansiveness of postpartum period is kind of shattering. It does like break us down to our core. I think it's meant to in a way. Everybody has their personal way for kind of coping and or dealing with that.

Esther Gallagher: [00:15:44] And, you know, it's hard enough if everyone sort of physiologically intact, you know, if the physical body is pretty well, that doesn't make the social emotional any less strenuous. Challenging in my experience, which, you know, 37 years of experience, I look out into the world and observe my clients and even the ones who are having a great time of it. Look at me, deer in the headlights at some point, you know, and we do, you know, we do have these markers for when, say, depression is kind of the catch all term for it these days. But when people start to experience coming a little bit unglued and there when partners go back to work, I mean that's a classic one.

Esther Gallagher: [00:16:33] Like when your core support isn't there kind of all the time you can really feel out to sea and like you're just barely keeping your nose above water and it is profoundly lonely. Being with infants isn't like pure entertainment and joy and fulfillment 24 over seven and it cannot be. We did evolve in small groups of people that

knew us intimately, and that's not how we live anymore. Even if we're lucky enough to have people showing up for us.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:17:10] Well, I mean, at some point, at some point, the novelty of a new baby wears off and your friends and family kind of get back to their regular lives and assume that you kind of have it handled. And I mean, either you do or you don't, but you don't really have much of a choice but to try to handle it. That's when we you know, that's when we really leaned on on our friends that that were training to be doulas.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:17:34] You know, and one of the things that I say in my dad's group is like, look, if you have friends and family, don't, you know, don't hesitate to ask for help and ask for more than you need. If you can afford to pay for it, pay for it. You know, you need to have more support than you possibly can imagine, you know, especially in the first 3 or 4 months when you're just getting your feet under under you. But even, you know, the rest of the time, like even if you're fortunate enough to have, you know, someone that's got a job that's lucrative enough that somebody can stay home, they need support.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:18:08] You know, they need a mommy's helper or a daddy's helper or a, you know, a part time nanny or something like that. You know, it can't just be evenings and Saturday morning that they get to go off and have a facial or whatever, you know, it's like, no, there's like, there's a grown up there that needs to like, continue being a grown up. And if that's going to mean, you know, either investing in having your mother in law come and live with you for a while or, you know, having a having a nanny or getting them into daycare or something, you know, it's maybe not the way it was supposed to be, but it's the way that it.

Esther Gallagher: [00:18:41] Is, right? Yeah. It's what we've got.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:18:44] When our family kind of got back to their regular lives, you know, we were just sitting there one, you know, one evening after the kids were finally asleep and we pretty much would collapse on the couch and binge watch Mad

Men. And, you know, in between episodes, you know, we're taking a bathroom break and getting some more popcorn. And we we kind of did the math. I'm like, okay, so when a newborn comes home, it's usually dad, mom, maybe grandma maybe and grandpa. So maybe it's 3 to 1, 4 to 1, you know, adults to baby.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:19:19] So, you know, we figured with two babies and two of us, we were down by at least four people. In terms of the typical support that somebody can imagine having in the first in the first four months of their babies being around. That's not to say we're special. I think that's that's pretty typical. You're usually short of grandma or grandpa. You're usually even with a single baby, you're usually short grandma, grandpa, grandma, grandpa, aunties, uncles, everybody else. It's supposed to be around helping you, but they're not. And it's not it's not their fault. It's just how. That's just how we've organized it.

Esther Gallagher: [00:19:58] Not only that, I don't know what your experience was, Andrew, but what I continually get just being interviewed as a potential postpartum care provider for potential clients is, you know, one of the three things is, you know, our parents aren't around anymore. I mean, when people are starting to have their babies in their 30s, their parents might be in their 70 seconds in some cases. Right.

Esther Gallagher: [00:20:24] Ours are right and our parents are around, but they're no longer that able bodied or we don't have such a great relationship to our parents. We can't imagine them being appropriate support for us. So if one of those three things is on your list, that really cuts down your possibilities. We love our parents, but we can't imagine them supporting us in the way that we think we're going to need to be supported. And so that's the fourth issue, right? We want them to come visit. We'd love to see them, but they don't know how to take care of us.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:21:00] Well, there's there's there's there's two things to say about it. There's there's a fifth thing to add, especially here in the Bay Area, which is where everybody is from someplace else. Yeah. So. So grandma and grandpa are on the East Coast or in, you know, some, you know, some place overseas. Yeah. They're in

India, they're in, they're in the UK, wherever, wherever they're from. And it's just not possible for them to be here.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:21:24] But then in terms of we can imagine our parents taking care of us that way or we don't like the way grandma or grandpa, you know, were like, I don't like the way they raised me. I don't want them near my kid, you know? And anywhere in kind of in that spectrum is like the thing that I encourage my dads to talk about with with their partners, but also with their potential caregivers, whether that's a doula or grandma and grandpa is like, get really clear about what it is you need help with and get really clear with Grandma and grandpa. Okay, So you're not so great at playing with the baby, but you're a wicked cook.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:22:07] Cook us a month worth of dinner and stuff it in the freezer and we'll call it good, you know? Or, you know, you're really great at hanging out with the baby, but, you know, she needs to have some downtime, too. So don't be like, all up in her face all the time with, you know, playtime and this and that. But I mean, just be really particular with it and understand that. You know. Yeah. That's your mom or your dad that you're talking to. But you're the grown up in this situation. It's your baby and you're in charge. Yes.

Esther Gallagher: [00:22:35] That is such a great point, Andrew, because so often I'm interviewing families who are so enmeshed in a dysfunctional way with their parents that when I make the strong suggestion that there's appropriate care and not appropriate care, they look at me like I could never say anything like that to my parents, in which case I suggest, well, then maybe your parents shouldn't come because you're going to need a certain kind of care.

Esther Gallagher: [00:23:08] And anything that's outside that is either too much or inappropriate. So. Yeah. How do we find a way to communicate that and make sure that you understand what your needs are in advance so that you can communicate them. But also, like you just pointed to this. These are your children. You are the person in charge. Even if you do it by default, you're the person in charge. So it's helpful if you can get there, you know? Yeah. And it's at a time in your life if we're talking the first six

months, honestly, you're really vulnerable. Most of the time you feel like, I'm not sure I know what I'm doing.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:23:55] I'm not sure I know what I'm doing. I'm, I'm not I don't want to adult today. I want my mommy to take care of me. Yeah. And and my mommy's trying to take care of me and doing her best, and I see that, but it's driving me bonkers. I mean, that's. It seems. Thanks, Mom. Yeah, right. Thanks, Mom.

Esther Gallagher: [00:24:13] My mom was so sweet to me when I had my daughter, and she dropped a pot on the floor, and I almost lost my mind. Yeah, just because I just. Couldn't sleep. I just. Yeah, I mean, these little things that happen can just kind of throw us over the edge. I think it's so hard to understand how wide open and vulnerable we are in those first months as parents, you know? Totally.

Esther Gallagher: [00:24:41] And if if people around us really can't hook up with that and understand it and be protective of us, they don't mean to protect our babies from us. You know, they need to support us so that we can have a direct bonding and supportive experience vis-a-vis our newborns. Not that them being cared for by other people isn't wonderful, but, you know, too much can be too much, right? But just having a sense of being held ourselves is what we really benefit from, I think most. Not being told what to do, but being sort of nourished and supported.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:25:19] Yeah. Well, I think, you know, our family, again. We've we've we've had really the best of what started out as kind of a bad situation or our parents have been have been enormously supportive and have been there you know, in the best way that they can be. And and that's been that's been fantastic. What you're what you're saying about sort of the the the emotional state of new parents. You know, in terms of just.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:25:49] Like being wide open and kind of wanting to be parented yourself while you're having to like take care of a newborn and all that you know, it puts me to mind of what Preparing for Parenthood is like and Preparing for parenthood like really does go pretty deep into the first six months to a year after you're

you know, you're always becoming a parent. You're never a parent. You're becoming one.

Esther Gallagher: [00:26:15] That's the title of my favorite book, by the way, *Becoming Becoming the Parent You Want to Be*. Oh, there you go. By Janice Kaiser. It's fantastic. I can't mention it often enough.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:26:25] So, so, so keeping that in mind, like so much of what we're focused on is getting ready for the birth and just like getting the nursery ready and like all the stuff that goes into it. You know, again, we you know, Jessica and I weren't able to complete our parenting classes. So no disrespect to anybody that that does pre-birth classes. Maybe they talk about this. I don't know.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:26:54] I would Hope, though, that in leading up to having a child and Starting a family, that. You know mom and dad to be can have a frank conversation about okay is great at this. She's not so Great at that. Grandpa is great at this. She's not so great at that. You know, somebody's going To be, you know Awesome all the time or not.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:27:17] You know, just maybe, you know, maybe grandma and grandpa really dig in when the kids are five. You know, they're better with older kids and, you know, that's when they can really be supportive or maybe grandma and grandpa are far away.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:27:31] But they've got some you know, they've Planned well and they've got some extra money and they can they Can help you support a, you know, a night doula for a couple of months just to keep your head on straight. Having a frank conversation about what kind of resources your family has on offer and is available. That's available To you.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:27:52] And even just getting real about 'Yeah, we got nothing' So we got to start patching it together From our community and from our friends.

Esther Gallagher: [00:27:59] Who do we know? Who said, Let us know if we can help you. Okay. There's the list of people who've offered. Who of those people do we actually feel we can we can accept something. And then what is it that we would like to ask them to do? If it's just grocery shopping, that will be huge, right? If they can be the ones to go to the store when they're going anyway. Yeah. You know, bring three bags over for you, leave them on the doorstep and go home without disrupting your sleep. Sure you're not getting enough of already.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:28:38] Make us Food. Walk the dog, take my Husband out for a beer. You know, take me out for a beer, whatever it is. Yeah, yeah. And not just not being shy about asking for what people have offered, even if they're just sort of offering it as sort of a platitude of.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:28:54] Like, Oh, yeah, great. If you have anything, if you need anything. Oh, actually, can you come do my dishes? Can you come wash some bottles. Yeah. Yes. Can you come take my Older child out to the park.

Esther Gallagher: [00:29:06] I mean the list goes on. Right. And each one of those things can be critical. So. Yeah. Wonderful. Um, let's, let's circle back to. And of course, you did a great description of talking about how the first month was actually not even spent at home. And then the first weeks home were actually tag team with your babies. And this is a pretty common experience I find with with twin parents is that babies don't come home at the same time.

Esther Gallagher: [00:29:40] Um, would you talk just a little bit more about that from your experience.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:29:47] Just in terms of actually caring for two two infants? Yeah, like actually.

Esther Gallagher: [00:29:51] Being home where the nurses aren't coaching it. Um, you know, there's good things about being home for real, right? Like, you lie down in your own bed when you ever get to lie down. Um. Uh. Maybe a little bit about the emotional

quality of making the transition from basically caring for your babies, primarily in the hospital setting and making that move to actually not have your wing ladies there.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:30:20] So my personal experience was that it was just it was like a natural next step. I wasn't, you know, the experience of that. Some of the dads in my dads group talk about is like they handed me a baby and sent me home. And now what? You know, there's that sort of shell shock of like.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:30:43] Oh, now it's all. Up to us. Not ready? No, not ready.

Esther Gallagher: [00:30:48] Three days after a birth. Not ready.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:30:49] Yeah. But so, you know. And again, we had gotten to know our children in the NICU pretty well. You know, again, I keep I keep mentioning we were able to to rely on family and professional support So I didn't feel. Alone in that. Right. And and Jessica and I are a great team We couldn't have done it without the other at all.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:31:14] So I'm not sure that I can really speak to the. You know, it was it was like this in the hospital and it was really different at home and and shocking. It was just the next thing to do. And I think on a day to day basis, like that's what you focus on, is like what needs to happen now? And you just get through.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:31:34] The next ten minutes, the next hour, the next. Day. And it's a cliché. You know, the days are long and the years are short. Right? Hated that when people would say that to me. I just want to. I'm just Not listening.

Esther Gallagher: [00:31:50] Have a long day with me.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:31:52] Yeah, right. Yeah, But it's but it's absolutely true. Like you really are going moment to moment from what needs to happen next. And so whether that's changing a baby or calming a crying baby down or Trying to boil some

pasta so somebody Can eat or cleaning an enormous pile of bottles and and pump supplies and all of that.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:32:17] So for me, as as the dad, it was just kind of keeping on top of of the Tasks, one task after Another. With mom, it was super difficult, pretty much because they were in the NICU. They had gotten really used to being bottle fed. And so breastfeeding didn't go at all the way we wanted it to. We wanted she wanted to breastfeed both of them.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:32:41] I won't get into the details. It just didn't work. Trench warfare. It was horrible for a long time. Wouldn't eat while she was awake. We had to figure out a way to basically dream feed her during the day with a bottle and make fortified with, you know, breast milk and formula and all that, you know, then she couldn't keep anything down. So that was crazy making.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:33:02] You know, sort of the details of all of that aside. Like, again, I say this to my dad's group from personal experience, like what you're expecting is a beautiful new age home birth with the beautiful Oxytocin high of the instant bond With your babies and Breastfeeding and really Feeling that threshold. That entryway. That that welcome into womanhood and motherhood.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:33:27] And you get, you know, a traumatic Birth and breastfeeding that's that's not going at All. That cuts right to the core and I won't speak For her but I can I could see how deeply scarring that was, how Deeply hurt and disappointed She was and The enormous Amount of effort that she put in to feed those babies and to try to feed a baby pump for a while, feed another Baby pump For a while, you know, instead of like, oh, my God, I'm Up every three hours feeding my Baby - It was I'm up every three hours And it takes me an hour and a half to feed my babies and pump. And then they're up in another hour. So, like, we're not sleeping at all.

Esther Gallagher: [00:34:11] Yeah, there's got to be a better way. Well, no, there wasn't. Yeah, there was not.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:34:15] No, there wasn't.

Esther Gallagher: [00:34:16] There was just no there was just no better.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:34:18] Way than than what we wound up doing. So yeah. So I guess back, back to your question of, of like what was the emotional difference? Like at some point, like I said, at the beginning, I was I was still Really high on dad hormones. And like on just the tackiness of it all and like, oh, this is a big problem and I can fix it, you know, not that I could fix it, but for, for a lot of the first 4 to 6 months of having babies at home, we really I really had to put on hold any of the like really feeling deeply any of the shock or the hurt or the disappointment or the fear like that. There just wasn't room for that. Yeah, like I could talk about it, but I was like all up above my eyes and, you know, there was just no room for that. Meanwhile, Jessica is having, you know, just this Crushing Experience of being a first time mom.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:35:14] And it's not going Anywhere near what we expected it to be. We love our kids, but we're just kind of hating being parents. Yeah, it's like this is not what we signed up for. So, I mean, in terms of like the emotional tenor of it, like I was kind of dissociated, which is a good thing when you're trying to keep, you know, trying to keep functional. It works until it doesn't. And so, you know, except on like a functional, like day to day level, like, you know, like our emotional connection just we were not we weren't even in the same galaxy.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:35:48] So, I mean, I think That kind of did a Number on us for a while Too.

Esther Gallagher: [00:35:52] Yeah, absolutely. Why wouldn't it? I mean, I honestly don't know how we prepare parents for what it potentially does to relationships. We I think I think it's really pretty normal for us to imagine while pregnant, if we're lucky enough to have a pretty deep connection at that stage of our lives. And of course, not everyone does that. Bringing the babies in is just going to deepen that and that somehow that's going to be immediate and perhaps sometimes it is that way. Well, if it is fantastic and if it is, that's what everyone hopes for. And it's my observation that. That there's so much

that mediates that and can, you know, bring stress in in such a way that parents feel. I wouldn't say disconnected, but like sort of like whatever that connection is, is, is is pulled out to its.

Esther Gallagher: [00:36:58] You know. If you think of it as a rubber band or rope or something like it is pulled out and stretched to its maximum with you at both ends sort of circling the room, trying to hold it all together

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:37:14] And. You know part of an an online Dads group called Becoming Dad, which is fantastic. Yeah. Um. And it's shocking the number of of dads that say, I've got a four month old baby and we're filing for divorce.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:37:29] Right. So, I mean, sometimes that connection just can't bear it. You know, and who knows what's going on, but Um, you know, whatever connection was there, I get stretched past its limit, and that's shockingly common. Yeah.

Esther Gallagher: [00:37:44] And super sad.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:37:45] Really, really sad.

Esther Gallagher: [00:37:47] Yeah. And I was one of those. I was very young mother in a relationship that couldn't, couldn't hack it. Couldn't hack it. Yeah. And I knew before it. Right. And I knew before the baby was born it wouldn't hack it. But that doesn't, you know, that doesn't.

Esther Gallagher: [00:38:07] You know, knowing in advance that something isn't tenable, doesn't make the strain or the the or the hope that that yeah, you got the hope at the same time any easier, you know, it's just you're living with this anyway. Yeah it's it's pretty rough I, I always feel sort of kind of hopeful that living in an urban setting, there's a lot of resource and that people will be able to find it. And it's so interesting to me. I'm curious about your experience. It's so interesting to me that people don't find it, you know Somehow That resourcefulness does not exist.

Esther Gallagher: [00:38:58] If you haven't heard of it, if a friend doesn't tell you about know like it's not there. If you don't have the words for it. I mean, I can't tell you how many people I meet on a daily basis, even those with kids who say, What's a doula, for instance? Or Oh, you mean my partner. There's a group where they could go and talk about being the partner and the, you know, the parent who's the partner who didn't give birth. Yeah, like people have no idea. And it's. It's a huge disconnect in our culture, right? Like where where are you going to hear this from? Not at work.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:39:39] Certainly not at work.

Esther Gallagher: [00:39:40] Well, so. And that's where you Live your life. Otherwise, in our culture so well.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:39:47] You live your life at work and online. So if you're not looking for It in either of those places You know, I guess for for our experience, we were lucky Like we were among The last in our group of friends to have Kids. So we already knew.

Esther Gallagher: [00:40:03] That is a Lucky place to Be. That's a good spot to be. That's a really good spot to be.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:40:07] And So we knew we knew that that if we were going to do this well, we needed to have people around us that could that could help us. But you're right, it is. It is not something that people know to ask for the. Um.

Esther Gallagher: [00:40:29] Is it fair to say sorry to break in, but is it fair to say partners even less?

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:40:36] You mean dads? Yeah.

Esther Gallagher: [00:40:38] Well, I also mean lesbian moms.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:40:40] Sure. Even better, you know.

Esther Gallagher: [00:40:42] Like, right? Like who Tells them? Hey, going to be a lesbian mom? Here's what you sign up for. I mean, you're pretty lucky if anybody comes along and says, hey, there's groups for you, too. And there are. There actually are, but you might never hear of them. Still. Yeah.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:41:05] I appreciate you bringing that up. It's important. I will say that there is an enormous amount of support available for parents, especially here in town. If you're fortunate enough to have somebody tell you about it, that helps a lot. Most of what I've seen that's available for parents is aimed at hetero moms.

Esther Gallagher: [00:41:32] I agree. Which is. Which is I mean, fine, That's, you know.

Esther Gallagher: [00:41:36] Well, I mean, I do think it harkens back a little bit to what you said about your own experience, which was I started a dad's group because it was what I needed. Well, let me let me.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:41:48] Yeah, let me let me tell you a little bit about that, which is so This this this online group that that I that I joined and have been a part of is put on by a guy named Darren Mattock. Who you should know about. Okay He's fantastic. So his last name for Matt. Okay great.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:42:05] He is dad coach and And birth Educator with a passion for Preparing dads and Supporting dads in becoming the best dads that they can be. Um And among other things, he's run a group An online group called Becoming Dads. For Dads Only.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:42:27] And it's it's been a pretty amazing resource and it's grown a lot. Um, anyway, I always admired what he was about And kind of, you know, put the check mark next to it. Like, yeah, I want to work with him sometime to make a long story long. He posted One day. He says, Who do I know that might Want to run a group in San Francisco? And so I you know, I replied to him on Facebook, How about me? And, you know, through the magic of the media.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:43:01] So our friends at day one baby over in Laurel Village, you know, who have been there for 30 odd years, I think anyway, they had just recently moved their space down to a more a more retail retail oriented space instead of a clinic oriented space. And so they had put out to their network, Hey, we want to do a a dads group. Who do we know? And then it went to this person and that person and that person. Eventually it wound up with Darren in Australia.

Esther Gallagher: [00:43:33] Outsourced. Yeah.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:43:34] And then Darren puts out, Hey, who do you who do you think would be who would Run a group? And so it comes back to me here in San Francisco. Day one had the idea of putting on a dads group and just needed somebody to facilitate it. And they'd been talking about that for a long time and it just never found the right person or the right time because, I mean, they've got however many mommy and me groups for working moms and at home moms. And and that's a tremendous thing, a tremendous resource for moms to go and just meet with other moms and share Horror stories and Tips and tricks and just to have that community and see other moms being You know, being moms with their with Their kids and just to not be Alone. And so anyway, the word comes Out and, you know, I worked with Darren and he he really helped Get me Set up to be a dads group leader at And day one has been fantastic and supportive of having us there. Ours is pretty Much As far as I know, the only official sort of dads Oriented Support group for new dads in the Bay Area. That's kind of shocking to me.

Esther Gallagher: [00:44:51] Yeah, you know, I moved to San Francisco in 92 and there were two men running fathers groups and they were wonderful. You know, everybody just raved about them.

Esther Gallagher: [00:45:05] You know But you age out of it in a way. Your kids get to a certain age and you're kind of moving on with a family. I think that was the experience for them, and it was like a real loss to the community. And to tell you the truth, I don't

remember hearing about anything much in the interim except there's a man whose name is Abraham Brandt, I believe. And so he was circling around for a short period.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:45:32] So it's pretty clear that The idea that moms turn to other moms for support, whether it's formally in a in a mommy and me group at day one or informally at the playground or, you know, moms turning to other moms for support is it's kind of a given, right? That's what we expect and that's what moms expect from each other. I'm not sure that the same can be said for dads. Now, again, my Experience of fatherhood is really, really different than what the stereotype would be You know, I'm at the park with my kids With All the other new moms and all the Nannies, as opposed to After work or Saturday and Sunday mornings where all the dads are like Saturday and Sunday Mornings were my days off. So I didn't get to the Park with When the other working dads were There as much.

Esther Gallagher: [00:46:24] That's fine. But even so.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:46:26] You know, When I am at the Park with the other working dads and even when I was at the park with other at home dads We Were sort of as a Group, more comfortable Talking with the Moms than we Were forming our own little clique. And I don't know if that's just a guy thing or what, but the idea that that men turn to other men for support in becoming the fathers that they want to be, that feels pretty fresh. And even even if it has some antecedents, it it's definitely something that's come to the fore. And, you know, maybe it's just because I'm a dad now.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:47:07] There's a whole world of parenting that I don't you just don't even think about until. But anyway, that aside, like the idea that the dads would meet with other dads and talk about being parents with their children present, that feels pretty fresh. And that's that's one of the main things that that's one of my main goals for our dads group. It's sure tips and tricks and horror stories and.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:47:34] You know, mutual Support from one man to another. But the big for me, the biggest thing that we, you know, that I demonstrate with the group is watching another man take care of a crying baby and feed a crying baby and

all of that, just watching other men, you know, just that that that silent example of seeing, Oh, I'm not alone in being a dad. Yeah.

Esther Gallagher: [00:48:01] And that parenting gets to be less and less a gender determined endeavor. You know, you can or cannot do parenting based on your gender. That idea is slipping in some place. In some families, it's completely gone. Which is so refreshing to experience. And and just as a little personal side note, my own dad said to me when I was having a very fraught and interesting and emotional conversation with him many years ago when my son was a baby.

Esther Gallagher: [00:48:41] He said To me, I would have loved to be home With you when you were babies Yeah. You know, and he was a school teacher, so he at least had summers off when he had them, you know? Right. But but the idea that he, in his heart would like to have been a day to day parent and that that was just completely unavailable.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:49:05] It was Completely off Limits. Yeah.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:49:07] And I'm remembering the context for it. Evan was newborn and dad came over to to visit. We lived actually in a house down the street in a rural place. Evan was born at home and Dad came over and I lifted Evan towards my dad. And my dad was like, you know, he was very nervous about taking my son despite the fact that his two hands are bigger than any baby he could possibly drop him. And I was like, Dad, what's what's going on? He's like, I'm nervous around babies till they're about four months old. And I said, Oh, get over it. And I kind of made him take my son into his arms. And then, of course, he calmed down and he was fine. He had four kids in five years. He knows about babies. A lot of experience with babies.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:49:58] Just get over yourself. Well, yeah. Yeah.

Esther Gallagher: [00:49:59] It had been 24 years, you know, like, okay, but. You know, that generated this whole conversation about gendered parenting and and you know what it all means and whether or not it's For the good.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:50:15] So a few things That are abundantly clear is, you know, we live in the future. The rules are gone. We make we Can make them up as we go, which is great in a lot of ways, and vertigo inducing in other ways. But there is an Unavoidable And hugely important Gendered aspect to how parents Behave towards their children But gender is not destiny. And just because you're You Fancy yourself, the breadwinner doesn't mean squat About who you Decide you want to be as a parent. You get to pick that. You get to decide. Oh, being a parent is really important to me. Leaving the office at 5:00 is really important to me. And, you know, especially in the Bay Area where we have our children a lot later than the rest of the country. You know.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:51:09] Most Dads in their late 30s, early 40s are pretty senior in their companies. And they Can make fatherhood look like they want. You know, that's one of the that's one of the gendered aspects of being a man is like, you've got the power in your workplace. Use it. Yeah.

Esther Gallagher: [00:51:25] You know, so what if you're the first.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:51:26] One, especially if You're the first one Because then you can pave the way for the other Younger men that are becoming and for the women that work in your organization. Like if you don't have a parent friendly workplace, you're not going to keep the best and the brightest You're just not. But yeah.

Esther Gallagher: [00:51:42] Good, right? I mean, finally. And and it's still I mean, I think it's a continual thing, right? Like it's I use this phrase like every parent Who's You know, about to have their child for the first time Is Reinventing the wheel. On every level, including this.

Esther Gallagher: [00:52:03] Right. What their relationship to work and family is going to be gets reinvented with them. How that touches other families. It will you know it will. You're not in charge of it, but it will touch other families and not making choices about it as as we used to say, like you're still making a choice, right. If you choose not to involve

yourself in that decision process and, you know, imagining what it could be like and moving in that direction, then.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:52:33] Okay, we live in the future and we can make it up as we go along and decide what our families are going to be like. And if it works for your family, that there is a really, you know, what we would understand as a really traditional division of labor. Dad works, Mom stays home. If that really works for your family, there's no shame in that. That's just how it works for your family. And if it doesn't work for your family, there's no shame in that either, you know.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:52:59] I mean, as, as as, as it worked out for my family. My wife makes a healthy son more than I do. And we were going to we were going to burn every penny that I earned on child care for who knows what, you know. And as it turned out you know, we wound up with a pretty traditional division of labor except for the gender role. You know, there's a lot, I think that I can get away with being an at home dad. Like I've I've an A-plus at home. Dad's like a C plus at home mom. You know, there's there's definitely a difference in in how we evaluate moms and dads. You know, there's there's a whole ocean of information that will tell a young mom that she's doing it wrong no matter what she does.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:53:48] And if a dad if a dad picks up a baby, it's like, yay, way to go Dad.

Esther Gallagher: [00:53:53] So you're the best, which is great.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:53:56] I mean, we need we definitely, you know, dads definitely need a little encouragement. It's pretty typical of a moms group to get into a situation where they're they're just complaining about all the work that they do and that they don't get enough help or they don't get any help or anything else like that. And which is legit. It's lonely work and it's a lot and it's hard to quantify.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:54:18] But then The teacher would say, Well, do You let him help? And it's like, no, he would do it wrong. Like, okay, lady, you got. To let you got to let Him try. Yeah. And I think you won't know.

Esther Gallagher: [00:54:30] You won't know what works Until you try Something. Right. And in Life

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:54:35] So as much as it's Dads stepping in, it's moms letting go and letting dads do it. The way dads do it. There's a way that that both mom and dad, you come smack up against your own assumptions about how to perform your gender. You know, if it's about dad stepping in, it's also about moms letting them and letting them do that. There's nothing special about being a parent. I mean, if you're especially if you're an accomplished professional, like you know how to take big problems and make them into smaller problems and then execute on the smaller problems. You know how to deal with people, you know how to deal with systems, you know how to document if that's important, you know? And there are a lot of ways that dads that men get teased for always wanting to fix it.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:55:16] Well, get in there and fix it You can do this. Don't worry about Dropping the baby. You're not going to hurt him too bad. You know, just dig in, Get. Get up to your Eyeballs in being a dad. Whatever that looks like for you. It's kind of a nicer way of saying, just get over yourself and go do it. There's stuff that you're going to be scared of. There's stuff that you're going to kind of wonder, you know, how the hell am I going to get through this?

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:55:40] There's going to be stuff that you do that you regret. At the end of the day. You learn from that and you and you learn more and you do better the next time.

Esther Gallagher: [00:55:48] Failure is more interesting than success.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:55:50] It really is. It's certainly more Poignant. There's a there's a group you're probably aware of hand in hand, parenting down, down the

peninsula. They do listening groups. You know, they do. They do one on one, listening. You know, they they have they form listening partnerships where you just call and you talk and the. Other person doesn't fix it. They just listen. They're like. Yeah. Okay, my turn. Okay. Yeah. Great, Great organization for for Support at a distance, you know, where you can feel safe to.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:56:22] Just To let it all hang out because, I mean, what's the first thing that you say when somebody asks, How are you doing? Oh, I'm fine. There's a big push to be Fine And to have it be all okay. There's so much media that that we pull in that is just showing us only the the highlight reel and shows us that, you know, if you're not if you don't keep your house absolutely perfect and feed your kids organic food that you grew yourself, that you're somehow failing your child, you know you're not doing it right.

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:56:50] Who wants to be subject to that kind of shame On a day to day basis? And then who wants to admit, Oh yeah, I did this thing that I'm really not proud of and I feel terrible about, you know, who wants to talk about That online Or in person or anybody Else. So definitely, you know Back to getting ready to be a parent, getting ready to be A family, like Lining up. Okay, who am I going to talk to when the shit hits the fan? You know, who's who is that?

Andrew Gentry Law: [00:57:19] And, you know, obviously talk to your midwife and your doula and your pediatrician and, you know, your ob gyn and your psychotherapist and your lawyer and everybody just talk To everybody that You know, your your friends that have parents, your friends that have parents, your parents, your friends that are Parents. Yeah You know, getting that sorted out kind of ahead of time. It's so you know who to call.

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