

Fourth Trimester Podcast

Episode 19: Four Relationship-Saving Questions To Ask Before Baby Arrives

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>

Sarah Trott: [00:00:05] Hello and welcome back to the fourth trimester podcast. I'm here with Marisa Belger, who is the co author and editor and writer of a book that we've talked about before, which is *The First 40 Days, The Essential Art of Nourishing the New Mother*. And we're such a big fan of the book and all of the authors, we've invited Marisa to come and be on our program.

In addition to working on the book that we love so much, Marisa has co authored and authored and edited numerous publications. She's worked with HarperCollins, Abrams, Simon and Schuster, Rodale. The list goes on. She's had work appearing in numerous magazines and websites, and she's helped many other authors and her area of expertise is wellness, self-improvement, pregnancy, parenting, everything we want to talk about. So that's absolutely perfect. And she is an ex Brooklynite who now resides in Berkeley, California, with her two young sons. So welcome, Marisa.

Marisa Belger: [00:01:56] Thank you, Sarah. So happy to be here.

Sarah Trott: [00:01:59] Yeah. So to kick off, would you be willing to share a little bit about your own fourth trimester experience?

Marisa Belger: [00:02:06] Sure. For me, there's no way I can really talk about my fourth trimester experiences without bringing in the fact that I have two children because they were so starkly different. And I guess I'll just jump in and say that my my first when my first son was born, I was deeply immersed in the belief that I had to do it all, and that in doing it all, I would receive some superhuman badge of honor. And I think it was timing or age or luck or circumstances. I actually did to some degree, pull off doing quote it all, which is to continue sort of working as a freelance writer and keeping my relationship afloat and and juggling a newborn.

But when his brother was born five years later, I attempted to do the same thing, but this time with a with an older child as well and was quickly I just want to say, humbled by the intensity of trying to recover from pregnancy and birth and tend to a newborn and keep my life going as it was before.

And I actually got very sick. And it was that was the starting off point for me wanting to do this work in the postpartum care space. It really inspired me to want to make sure that other other women don't have to go through what I went through and understanding that it's really important to to give yourself a period of focused care and attention to whatever degree possible.

Sarah Trott: [00:03:47] How did you cope with your sickness? What happened?

Marisa Belger: [00:03:51] Yeah, so I had sort of the the seeds of, I guess, a pretty bad flu that was going through New York City at the time when I was nine months pregnant. And it's so amazing how the body works, but it's almost like I was able to push pause on the progression of that sickness when I went into labor and and gave birth to to my younger son. It's like the pause button clicked on. I focused on labor, felt healthy and strong and able to do so, and then almost the minute the adrenaline from birth wore off, I was I was sort of hit with this pretty strong flu.

And then instead of tending to it and paying attention, like I said, I just really barreled through my life, you know, picking my my older son up from school with a newborn strapped to my chest. I mean, really not paying attention. So what ended up happening, which I really I do love the body for this, is that the body my body made the decision for me and I was actually right. I had no choice but to slow down. And I asked for help. I had to ask for help in the in the deepest way possible.

I was really fortunate to have my mother nearby, so I asked for help from from her to the extent that she could give it. I had my my baby's father was with us as well, but he was working full time. So friends, neighbors, truly like I had people taking the baby out of my hands to to rock him and let them to sleep any any place where I could try to catch little pockets of sleep, which which a mother needs anyway in those early days after birth. But for me, because of the illness, it was even more important. So I was actually forced to slow down, which which I respect, you know, in retrospect.

Sarah Trott: [00:05:43] Absolutely. And rest is what the body needs, even when we aren't sick after giving birth.

Marisa Belger: [00:05:51] 100%. Yes.

Sarah Trott: [00:05:53] And so how would you contrast that to the birth of your first son?

Marisa Belger: [00:05:59] So the first the birth of my first son, I almost feel like. I kind of got away with it. Like I said, really like I just was. I had no idea. I want to stress this, too, with both both of my children. Zero idea about all this, this wonderful information that we have in our book and this whole concept of of postpartum care and a dedicated period of rest and recovery. I had never heard of that before.

So I was I always use myself as sort of the what not to do example when I speak to expecting mothers and whatnot. So my, my first son, I, I think it was just the I was able to keep all the, all those balls in the air and, and I found myself feeling proud. I remember I remember strapping my my firstborn onto my chest in a Brooklyn winter, you know, And I would if there wasn't such a lesson embedded in this, I would be embarrassed now, but I strapped into my chest. He was a week old and I walked out in the winter to a friend's house several blocks away. And I remember thinking, wow, you're you're tough girl. You can do anything. Right. And now I understand. I would never do that ever to myself or to the baby. Yeah. If I had it to do again.

Sarah Trott: [00:07:26] We have a lot of listeners who maybe haven't had their first birth experience yet. So to ask the simple question, why? Why wouldn't you do that again?

Marisa Belger: [00:07:36] Yes, right, Right. No, thank you. And it's I had no idea at that time either because those those those early days and weeks after giving birth are are are an incredibly tender period of of entry into the world for the baby. Where the baby is is adjusting to to the absolute sort of bombardment of sights and sounds and everything after being in the womb for nine months.

It's a really delicate period of adjustment for the baby. And it's also an extremely delicate and important period of adjustment for the mother, especially for brand new mothers as

you transition from. From an old way of living your old life before you were a mother. And also physiologically and emotionally, your body is going through a massive transition as your hormones readjust and your your body tries to find its equilibrium again. And so it's very, very encouraged to to give yourself the time to rest, recover and heal. And this is information that I did not have at that time.

Sarah Trott: [00:08:47] We've had a past guest come on the show and say that when she had her first baby, she felt like a pioneer woman. That pioneer women survived out on the trail. I can do this. I can do it, too. And she was she had this mentality of survivorship. So do you think your your former self would have identified with that?

Marisa Belger: [00:09:08] Very much. Very, very much. You know, survivorship, superhero, superwoman, doing it all, quote it all thinking that that that that was the right way to handle things is a very, very common perspective. Really, really understandable. A lot of us think that.

Sarah Trott: [00:09:29] You know and I wonder if here in the United States there is one model that women have for postpartum. I mean, for the most part, in my personal experience, I see women kind of just making it up as they go along or like maybe subscribing to one or two books that they read, but really mostly looking to find pride in the Oh, my body bounce back, I bounce back, I'm fine. I can do everything.

And some I don't know where this expectation is coming from, but it seems like there's a lack of a different way or a different a different guide for women. I just wonder why that is or what? Why, if that's true for if that's just my experience.

Marisa Belger: [00:10:11] No, I mean, I agree with you 100%. And all of the thinking along those lines added up to to to help us with the motivation to write this book. So my my co authors who, you know, Heng and Amely and I are all all working mothers and we have six kids between us. And we we really experienced that that firsthand, that sort of unspoken pressure societally to to bounce back. And just the concept of bouncing back now that we're now that we're so, so immersed in in this concept of postpartum care

and attention, we I'm just so amazed that women are expected to go back. Just even the idea right there is no going back. There's only through.

So in our book too, we encourage women so much to let go, if you will. Like if you're holding on to the old way. And this can be applied to everything. And this might be a nice segue whenever you're ready to relationship but holding on right to how it looked before and that is your body, your social life, your relationship, your philosophy, your perspective on life, your value system, even all radically shifts when once your baby arrives.

And I think staying open. If I could do it again, I would have I would have loved to have given myself the space to stay open to whatever it was transforming into. You know, there's some unknown there that you're going to have to trust is going to I.

Sarah Trott: [00:11:49] I'm going to quote you. I know it. It's so good. I love what you said, that there's no back. There's through, there's through. And that is a perfect segue. We wanted to focus today on relationships. And I think kind of the point that you're making in general applies, although we are going to deep dive, but just that, you know, when we when we have a baby, our lives change, our bodies change, everything changes. And I think maybe let's talk about relationships specifically as well. But like, what's the benefit of preparing yourself for for that change beforehand?

Marisa Belger: [00:12:25] Uh, well, there's immense benefit. We believe very much. Just as you prepare your mind, your heart, your body, your home for the arrival of your baby, your relationship requires similar attention. We call it fortifying your relationship in our book, which I really, really like. I like the idea of of adding in sort of reinforcements for this this uncertain territory and time that you're about to embark on together. And it's kind of exciting to know that there are there are ways of doing that. Yeah.

Sarah Trott: [00:13:11] When people are when two people decide that they're ready to enter parenthood, what are some things that they could start to think about beforehand?

Marisa Belger: [00:13:21] Well, so many. But it seems like the the first thing to really sort of wrap your mind around and your your heart around is the fact that your relationship will change. I don't like to use absolutes. I definitely tend to to sort of dance around them because everybody's experience is different and I can confidently say it will change. It's absolutely inevitable.

Before baby's arrival, you, you and your partner were were this island. Where was just the two of you and you were able to focus your attention and your energy and your forward thinking around each other. And now, not only is there another human being in your what has been this really special duo, but it's the most needy, demanding in a way, creature, too, that comes into your life. So it's it's it's absolutely shift.

So I think the first step is understanding that your relationship will change and beginning to get comfortable with that idea. And then from there there's an understanding that yes, it will change and it's not all all going to be challenging. There's some incredible, incredibly beautiful things that are going to happen, too. I like to really make sure that we we look at the balance that's taking place as well so we can go into more detail, if you like, about the things that are going to change. But I think the first thing to remember is is going to change.

And on the positive note, what's going to happen? Is there going to be this increased intimacy where it was just to now you're now you're you're a family and you're sharing this incredible love that you have for your baby with someone else who gets it like you do. And there's an incredible sort of warmth and intimacy that's born from that bond and connection. I think that's really important to remember and to turn to when when times feel challenging. And then there are all there are all the other places that can get rocked by the baby.

Sarah Trott: [00:15:23] And well, I mean, just one thing that comes to mind is, as an example, I know that a lot of people, before they get married, they go through like they have. There's this own set of expectations about a relationship milestone, like getting married. You know, a lot of people go to counseling either like with a with a church person or just like a therapist or like whatever, you know, or maybe it's just people, you

know, why is people from the family, you know, like sitting down talking with a couple like about, you know, what what this milestone means and how it's going to impact their relationship.

There's probably a huge amount of value in maybe going through the same process before one has a baby. It doesn't need to be anything formal, but just at least giving the giving the whole the milestone because it is such a huge milestone in anyone's life, having a baby, but just giving it that same kind of thoughtfulness and consideration about how that's going to change.

But I think it's a little less common, like maybe maybe people have the like the fairy tale dream idea that like, oh, we're going to have this baby and it's going to we're going to get all get all of these good things, these benefits out of it, but perhaps not fully considering. And I'm not saying that like, oh, it's all doom and gloom, but just not considering some of the other pieces as well.

Marisa Belger: [00:16:40] I love what you're saying. And this is another piece of the conversation, the conversation that we're having now and that I hope that we're all going to be having in greater detail and on an ongoing basis. It's it's a having a baby is a huge thing on every level.

And simply acknowledging that bringing awareness and attention to that has great impact. And again, not at all to be to be gloom and doom, but to be realistic. I mean, studies say that two thirds of couples experience a significant negative shift in their relationship within three years of having a child. So what can you do to cut that off at the pass?

And to circle back to what you said. Yes. I don't I don't necessarily think you need to bring in an outside person. It's absolutely fine and encouraged if that feels good to you. But we also feel that you can have them one on one with your partner before the baby arrives. And before is really, really the key word, because once once the baby arrives. Right. It's very hard to bring your attention. To these things. Oh, yeah.

Sarah Trott: [00:17:48] Oh, and energy levels are different and hormones are all over the place. But what? So I do have a question for you, though. Like when you talk about before baby arrives, do you mean before you're pregnant or before you sign the adoption papers or what? Or do you mean like during the pregnancy? Just like at least before the baby's born?

Marisa Belger: [00:18:08] Great question. I don't I don't think there's there's a particularly right time in our book. We we base the majority of our book the first 40 days is about the preparation period because just having been mothers, being mothers ourselves and going through that newborn period, we just know that basically all bets are off, right? When you're in those early weeks of the baby, it's just full on sometimes survival mode as you as you tend to the baby and you heal and rest and recover and tend to all these other changes in your life.

So for us, even the third trimester is absolutely fine. You know, during pregnancy, third trimester, just be able to sit down with your partner, just pulling, pulling, you know, 20 minutes, 30 minutes, just sit across the table from each other on the couch with each other and actually have a dedicated conversation about what it possibly will look like. And most importantly, I think, what the expectations from each of you are about what this period is going to be.

To me, that's so key to get to get each party's expectations onto the table so you both can have a really nice, clear look at them and then be able to say, Oh wow, I had no idea that you were expecting to have help. Have some paid help. Tending to the baby while I was at work, the partner might feel, or I had no idea that you were hoping that I would take two weeks off from work. I'm not. I'm not able to do that. Or I am. It's really good to hear that that's what you're looking for. You know, being able to put that on the table is so important. Mm hmm.

Sarah Trott: [00:19:47] What questions would people start with?

Marisa Belger: [00:19:51] And so we have we have outlined, we call them, for relationship saving questions to ask before a baby arrives. And they simply are one.

How will we divvy up baby caring responsibilities? Two, how will our finances be influenced by baby's arrival? And how will our sex life be affected by the addition of a newborn? And for how will our social lives change once a baby is here?

Sarah Trott: [00:20:24] Let's go through each one.

Marisa Belger: [00:20:26] All right. Let's do it. So, number one, this will bring us back to what we were just speaking about, sort of the expectations. How will we divvy up baby caring responsibilities? So for us, I say ask me and my lovely co authors and I we because we just as a little sidebar, as we were writing this book, we kept checking each other.

We were each other sort of check points for, Hey, is this does this sound. Is this useful? Is this what is this What we would have wanted during our third trimesters or postpartum periods? Is this is this filling a gap that was sort of empty and echoing when we were going through the same thing? So this is how all this information came to be. It was just this sort of the three of us really checking each other like that.

And so for us, we thought a good place to start would to be would be to understand sort of the biological imperatives that a new mother and a partner are contending with when a baby arrives. Just sort of the innate differences there. And if you look at that. You'll see that a woman, a new mother, is really programmed to to nurture and nourish. Right. Sort of inward. Activities and processes that really have to do with tending and caring and soothing. Right. And then partner.

Marisa Belger: [00:21:55] Usually an historically has has a desire to to keep that sort of keep the nest afloat. Whether that means supporting through through work financially, through making sure that the mother and baby have what they need. There's a bit of a sort of external caretaking situation going on. And so just understanding that that's biologically generally how things are unfolding is kind of a good first step.

So that said, this might help a partner understand, och, she's not, you know, my, my, my spouse or partner hasn't even looked me in the eye in this first week since babies

arrived. She's absolutely consumed with getting the baby to sleep, getting the baby to latch, combating diaper rash, whatever it is. Is this unbelievable sort of myopic focus going to shift, you know, understanding that she's motivated by something bigger can help. Mm hmm. So that's number one. Oh, so that's that's the basis for number one, which is understanding first what what we're doing biologically.

And then from there, how will we divvy up the responsibilities. And that brings us back to that conversation that hopefully you had before the baby arrived, which is okay. So we there's going to be outside help, whether it's in-laws, the mother's mother, a postpartum doula, whatever, whatever that that outside care is. It's agreed upon before the baby arrives. So everybody understands what's happening.

Sarah Trott: [00:23:30] Right. And if if the couple doesn't necessarily know what's the right thing, maybe they could talk with their friends, get you know, listen to their friends experiences, or ask family members what their experiences were like and maybe embark on that. Like, it might be nice for the relationship to embark on that research together and come to the conclusion together about what's right.

Marisa Belger: [00:23:53] Yeah, I really like that idea and I think that again, giving yourself time, so having these discussions significantly before your due date, I think will really give you the space to to be able to explore together without feeling so pressured. Mm hmm.

Sarah Trott: [00:24:12] Right. And I really I like the I like the openness of the conversation beforehand and your point about expectations. Because if there's one person who has the expectation that, like, okay, you're the nurturer, you're the baby person, I'm the worker. So that's your department, this is mine. So you'll be fine if there's that expectation on one side and then on the other side, it's, well, I expect you to be there to take out the trash and make me food and take care of me while I'm recovering. Then you know that that potential for misalignment is very real. And that could be really hard for a couple to deal with 100%.

Marisa Belger: [00:24:49] And again, cutting that off before cutting it off the past before your baby arrives and sort of the stakes are higher is a really wonderful relationship. When you say saving technique.

Sarah Trott: [00:25:02] Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Yeah. Because as you said, once a baby arrives, it's like it's just full on baby and recovery mode. And that's that's a difficult time to. Have an not an argument, but just like have any element of conflict or negativity. It's just like that zone when you're at home with baby is pure love. It's pure tiredness and pure love and creating the space in alignment between you and your partner or your caregivers, just whoever is there with you beforehand so that you can enjoy it is wonderful.

Marisa Belger: [00:25:38] Yes, that's such a good point. I think that having whether it's conflict or just just difficult conversations, right, having them when a baby has arrived and is in your arms is decidedly more difficult. Yeah.

Sarah Trott: [00:25:54] Yeah. And it feels a little more pressured, like, ooh, my needs aren't getting met. And that's. That's harder. It's a lot harder.

Marisa Belger: [00:26:02] Absolutely. Then you're almost racing to catch up like, Ooh, och. We didn't realize that. We really need the two of us. The way our lives are shaped. Right? We need some extra help. But we didn't arrange it. So now, of course it's possible. Right? But now we're scrambling to do that. And with baby here. So it's just. It's just more challenging.

So the number two is a big one. And again, not exactly a sexy topic, but incredibly important, which is how will our finances be influenced by baby's arrival? And I really like this this side note, this includes the time, if any, that the mother will be taking off from work and any professionals that will be hired to help like we just discussed. Mm hmm.

Sarah Trott: [00:26:43] I am a lover of spreadsheets. Are you? Yes.

Marisa Belger: [00:26:47] No.

Sarah Trott: [00:26:48] I love spreadsheets. I love forecasting and planning. I do it professionally. I do it at home in my household. I know that's not the case for everyone, but I like the visibility and the openness and kind of the predictability of all of that. So I enjoyed sort of geeking out on my plan and the financial side of my own pregnancy and maternity leave. What are you if money is an awkward situation for any couple? What are the what are the openers there? How does this how does this get addressed? Like, some people have financials combined, some people don't.

Marisa Belger: [00:27:27] Well, for me, yes. There's so many so many different scenarios. And every every couple and family is different, obviously. And I think a lot of it has to do with not only the actual practicalities of the financial makeup that that a family is dealing with, but also the individual hopes and desires for the early weeks and months with the baby and ongoing.

This really this is the time to really explore for for the mother. If she if she is employed and is engaged in as part of a career path that is ongoing and unfolding, is that something that she wants to continue really being honest and realistic with both parties so so the mother can bring to the table to her partner? You know what? Yes, my career is incredibly important to me.

And in the best case scenario, my my postpartum period looks like this X, Y, and Z, and then I go back to work or I don't think I want to go back to work. You know, a guess again, you don't you don't entirely know. There is that space of unknown. I really like to emphasize we can only predict so much, but coming to the table with those those thoughts really, really honest, you know, being being courageous, to be as honest as you can with your partner before the baby arrives again is so important.

Sarah Trott: [00:28:51] Yeah. And and I like what you said about maybe not knowing because it's so true, like the way you might feel now and your expectation now might be so different once that baby is in your arms. And I think being open to the possibility and

acknowledging that with your partner in your relationship that things might change, that's kind of.

Marisa Belger: [00:29:15] Nice. I really like that a lot. It's almost planning for the unexpected. Yes, I'd like to factor in a period of not knowing, you know, I can't exactly tell you how I'm going to feel until it happens, right?

Sarah Trott: [00:29:28] Absolutely.

Marisa Belger: [00:29:29] Yeah. So that's all important stuff. And then moving on, another big, big issue that's talked about a lot, I think, in some capacities is how will our sex life be affected by the addition of a newborn? And. For me. So there's sex, but there's also intimacy and there's.

There's connectedness with your partner. To me, that's all under the same umbrella. How will that shift and how much can you predict and what can you bring to the table in those early conversations? I'd love to hear your thoughts, too, on that. In interfacing with mothers and whatnot, is that a topic that comes up a lot?

Sarah Trott: [00:30:12] It does, somewhat. I also think there's like the medical aspect of that conversation, too. You know, I, I think people can talk to their OB-GYNs about like certain aspects of the like the physical side of of sex and what that means, you know, postpartum.

I like what you're saying about intimacy. I think that in a lot of ways, you know, having a baby brings couples so much closer. You know, you're sharing that experience, that bond. It's a different kind of intimacy. It's not better or worse.

Marisa Belger: [00:30:46] Yes, I agree with you. And I really like that bringing attention to to the actual medical, physiological facts of what's happening to a woman's body in a woman's body after giving birth and after pregnancy, maybe a partner is not completely versed in those.

That might be a nice place to start to. So he or she is understanding there. And then. Yeah. I think you may have to me think about something when you were just speaking out. I think that having these conversations before the baby arrives also opens the door to to maybe feeling a bit more courageous or a bit more comfortable to really speak from your heart once the baby has arrived as well. Really being able to say like what feels comfortable and what doesn't feel comfortable and maybe looking at about why or why not together. I think is really, really nice. Yes. Great.

And then that brings us to number four, which is how will our social lives change when the baby is here? And, you know, that's a that's a that's a significant one. There might be some feeling that it's implied. That both of you do understand each other and you can make some assumptions, but we really feel that making those assumptions can be a bit dangerous because when when the actual event takes place and the babies here and in your lives, you might be wrong.

So it absolutely does not hurt to to add that to the list of things you talk about. You know, if you, you and or your partner have a robust social life, extracurricular activities, sports are involved in, who knows what is the expectation that those will continue as is, especially for the partner, the support partner? Or will there be a shift in the early weeks and days? What what do both parties want and can there be a compromise?

Sarah Trott: [00:32:45] Mm hmm. Yeah, a couple of things that come up. I remember going through my birth plan, which I liked calling my birth intentions, planning with my postpartum doula before my baby arrived. And she was talking about, you know what? So let's talk about the delivery room.

You know, who's going to be there and what is that like? And she said, I'll just remind you, there's a limit on the number of people who can be present. And it just it just made me laugh because, yeah, I guess, you know, there's all there's every color in the spectrum, right? Some people are going to want absolutely no one except their partner and their doctor. Other people are going to want to pack that room full of friends and family and cameras and videotapes, everything.

Marisa Belger: [00:33:30] Right.

Sarah Trott: [00:33:31] And so, like on that more social side of the spectrum, like thinking about like how social do you want to be like how soon as well, I think is an interesting consideration, right? Like, do you expect to have your house being sort of a revolving door of people visiting and seeing the new baby? Like immediately? Does that happen later?

And, and yeah, then there's the so I think that's really interesting. And then also sort of the the me time aspect of it, right? Like if, if boyfriend or husband or partner is used to playing tennis every Tuesday night, are they going to stop that, Are they going to keep doing that? I mean, there's there's an element of it being important that everyone is able to sort of maintain a little bit of their own self care. And if that's part of their self care, then that's, you know, that's really important. So then the conversation goes to, well, how do we accommodate that? How do we make that work? So that all feels really relevant.

Marisa Belger: [00:34:31] Yes. I'm so glad that you that you brought up sort of the internal at home aspect of a social life and the external pursuing your own own pursuits and activities self care wise. They're both part of the conversation for sure. Absolutely. And for us. We really, really encourage the expecting mother to get a sense of her own needs. And that in and of itself can be a process.

You know, what do I really what do I really want or how do I really operate? You know, there's a piece of me maybe that's pleasing, that's a pleaser, or trying to make other people happy. And then there's the piece that's authentically me. And having a baby is no better time than ever to really, really tap into to your truest self. And if your true self does not want acquaintances and friends streaming through your living room in those first weeks with your new baby, it's really okay to say that. To be really clear about it. You can do it in a way that's kind. But to be clear. Mm hmm.

Sarah Trott: [00:35:38] What are what are the options for a social life postpartum? Like, what are what are some of the other like considerations that come up?

Marisa Belger: [00:35:50] In terms of you and your partner?

Sarah Trott: [00:35:52] Yeah. Or just I mean, I guess there's like digital social as well. There's lots of ways to stay connected.

Marisa Belger: [00:36:00] Absolutely. And so if you are. That makes me think of this the support team that that we really suggest that an expecting mother creates for herself to really ensure that that she isn't alone as well, which is the other side of this spectrum. Right. That she doesn't feel isolated and lonely when or if her partner does go back to work or life does resume some of its old shape, you know, to to the degree that it can.

And a mother is sort of left there with a new baby. It can look so many different ways. Exactly. It could be Skype dates with a friend who lives in another country. It can be check in texts from a friend. It could be a knock on the door with the understanding that you might not answer from your neighbor. I think it's the idea. Of opening opening the door to receive support.

But knowing that ultimately you're the. You're the gatekeeper. Without sounding too, too harsh, like you're in control, you kind of got your hands on the wheel there, you know, with gears how fast or how much you want to engage socially. Yeah.

Sarah Trott: [00:37:09] Great. I love those four questions. I will. I will definitely include those on our site as well so people can reference that. And then I guess I'm just curious because you're you're a second time mom. Like, what is your experience with kind of going through relationship changes with first and second or not necessarily your experience, but just. In general is any differences that may crop up.

Marisa Belger: [00:37:35] So what comes up? Thinking about that too, for our differences and obviously life, the shape of your your family life just continues to expand, sort of like this entity that has its own life and energy to it. And when you bring another person into the fold, obviously it comes with its own set of dynamics and challenges as well.

And so I think it's again, it's it's preparation. It's similar conversations that you had before your first baby, but now factoring in your older child who is going to pick up the older child from school, that would have been great for me. I so wish so simple. I still wish I had just seriously, Sarahh, I cannot believe I didn't do it. I still wish I just asked someone at my older son's preschool, you know, set up a little team just to have someone help me get him home for those first few weeks. Yep. Didn't do it. What a change.

So much for me. So I think simple little things like that really looking at. Yeah. What your support team looks like and how to factor in time of the baby time with older child. Obviously making sure the older child feels comfortable with all these changes that are happening in his or her life as well. I also love to bring up if this is the right time, you can tell me that I want to make sure that we speak to the partners experience during the first 40 days, kind of just like turn the light to the partner for a.

Sarah Trott: [00:39:02] Minute or so.

Marisa Belger: [00:39:03] Yeah, Perfect. Yeah, if that's okay. Yeah. It's so important for all of us, for John and Emily and I, that, that we, that we loop the partner in as well. It's not just they don't just have this secondary role and obviously in those first 40 days it can feel really it can feel secondary.

We hear so many stories from spouses and partners that just kind of feel on the outs, not sure how to participate, how to how to really dive in and how to really support their the mother. And I think, again, bringing attention to that is so important. And while I know that a new mother can feel so overwhelmed, it can feel overwhelming to manage all that you're managing, healing, recovering in your own body, adjusting to this new life, all of that while caring and tending to your new baby. And all the challenges that that can or cannot bring up.

Maybe you're attempting to breastfeed and get the baby to sleep and all of that. It can seem like a lot to add to that list, you know, paying attention or honoring or respecting

your partner's experience. But we figured out that it doesn't have to be hard. Simple, simple little. Gestures, little steps and small acknowledgments really go a long way to helping a partner feel involved and important, which ultimately is more fortification for your relationship, the two of you. Yeah. So that's just something I really want to emphasize.

Sarah Trott: [00:40:40] And what are examples of that? Do you mean things like giving, giving the partner or the spouse, practical examples of sort of answering that question, like how to help, how to be there, how to support. And and, you know, you talk about acknowledging and little steps like what are some examples?

Marisa Belger: [00:40:57] Yes, I have them. This is really important. Yeah, this is really important to us. So one of the first things that really comes to mind that's sort of prevalent for us is giving your partner space to to be a parent the way he or she wants to be a parent. So that may mean like I'm trying to think of a nice way to say like backing off creating space for. Right.

Sarah Trott: [00:41:23] I think that's okay to say just back off.

Marisa Belger: [00:41:25] Is it is it you know have your so yeah like that to back off to allow you know he might not change diapers the way you would change the diaper you know and there's definitely a sense of of control that can come in with a new mother so much so much protecting. Right. Even with your even with the the baby's father or partner. Right. Your partner.

But giving yourself almost the courage to allow him to to tend to the baby in a way that feels right for him, really gives him some autonomy and some sense of relevance, I think is incredibly important. Keeps you all really looped in together as a family. So just as one example, tending to the baby, rocking the baby the way he feels is right. Obviously it's not harmful, but just giving him space to do it his way, I think is one and another Really key thing is you might a new mother might be incredibly drained or feel depleted, tired, but even just looking at your partner, just like catching his eye for a minute might A minute like a second, Right. Thank you.

If he hands you a glass of water or touches you on the shoulder and just looking at him and acknowledging him for a minute, you know, you matter. Thank you. It counts, you know, is really key. And then one last thing I think is you might be touched out. You feel completely maybe drained of touch because the baby is in your arms or on your boob or whatnot.

And sex might be off the table for you right now. But there's you still can cuddle. And I think carving out dedicated just snuggle time whether it's on the couch and your bodies are just touching each other or spooning just for a few minutes in bed before you pass out. Just making sure that there is a little pocket of time that's just for the two of you is so beneficial. Oh. Yeah.

Sarah Trott: [00:43:28] Right. Because here's this person who's who's so concerned about you and you're so focused on the baby, sort of closing that loop and bringing it back together and giving that energy a little bit back to him or her as well, just to just so that they're. Yeah. Acknowledged. That makes so much sense.

Marisa Belger: [00:43:46] Yeah. Acknowledgement. And also another big, big word and this is a big word with Hahn. I just want to throw it in there because I agree so much is kindness. And it's really simple. It's simple. It's not complex, Right. It's just really simple. Don't forget. Right. Small kindnesses. Again, that is a gesture. That's a touch on your partner's arm, a little squeeze on his forearm when he brings you a cup of tea, anything like that. They really they add up and they become the glue. That keeps you together. I really think so.

Sarah Trott: [00:44:21] Wow. I like that. And I like what you're saying about. I think another word that comes up for me is confidence. Making sure that your partner feels confident. Maybe it's not the same way you would do something, but they can feel confident doing that thing, even if it's a little bit different. And that's.

Marisa Belger: [00:44:37] Okay. Yes. Yeah, definitely.

Sarah Trott: [00:44:45] Yeah. Well, that's perfect. Thank you so much. I mean, the last thing I would just want to ask you is if there are any specific stories that you would share about that you think would be interesting for people to hear about, you know, how relationship issues have come up and were dealt with for for other couples, for anyone you may know, if if we don't have any of that's fine. But I just thought I'd throw it out there.

Marisa Belger: [00:45:07] Yes. No, thank you for asking. Perfectly. I actually just met with a a mother and friend of mine yesterday who inspired me. And I really would like to just bring a bit of her experience very quickly into our conversation, if I can. She is the mother of a one year old and a four year old. So they're just getting out of that baby baby stage. And I asked her if she's been married for since her early twenties. Now she's in her late thirties and I'm just asking her, how do you do it? You know, I always like to ask couples, how do you how do you do it?

You know, you're in the heart of life with these two young children and trying to make it all work. And she told me that one of the key things they do and that she has awareness around is is making sure that they don't fall into. The trap of a power struggle or or any sort of power dynamic. And really what that means is sort of like a tallying or keeping score of who's doing what. So I wake up with a baby every night, but what do you do? And really, really trusting that both parties to the best of their abilities in their own unique ways.

So her partner goes out and works all day out in an office and then comes home at night. Right. And so she's with the kids. And just how how they how they trust that both parties, they're both doing the the best they can to keep their family system cruising along as it as it is. And also that they can ask, though, this doesn't mean you don't you ask for what you need.

So instead of kind of point a finger pointing, you don't dot, dot, dot, dot. And I always do a very clear request. You know, it would be meaningful if maybe sometimes on a weekend nights you could wake up with the baby. The days. You don't have to go to work.

Sarah Trott: [00:47:02] And that is like a night and day contrast. That example. I love it. Yeah.

Marisa Belger: [00:47:08] Right. And she said that. Wow. She said, Marisa, it is really it is absolutely saving our marriage. It makes us that she goes that and. Every every now and again, we both take time to look at each other really clearly in the eyes and say, you know, thank you for X, And it could be a small gesture, like for the way or I see the way you dot, dot, dot, dot. I see the way you pay attention to our four year old in the mornings or I just very clear acknowledgement to just really fills up the heart.

It's all about fortification, right? How do we fill up our hearts and and steady our relationship for the long haul? So this I just thought that was a sweet example, like really trusting in each other, asking for what you need, and then acknowledging the good things that you do see.

Sarah Trott: [00:47:59] Mm hmm. Yeah. And asking. Asking in a way that comes from kindness, asking in a way that that speaks to what, you know, such and such would feel good to me or I, I really miss having this or that in my life. And I would love it if we could figure out a way to to help make that happen, rather than pointing fingers. That's so powerful.

Marisa Belger: [00:48:20] Exactly. Yeah.

Sarah Trott: [00:48:23] Marisa, we've learned so much from you. Thank you.

Marisa Belger: [00:48:25] Yeah. Sarah, It's really fun. So happy to talk to you.

Sarah Trott: 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 Podcasts](#). 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.