

# Fourth Trimester Podcast

## Episode 69: The Dos & Don'ts Of Being A Respectful & HELPFUL Visitor To A New Parent

**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:** [00:00:43] Welcome to the Fourth Trimester Podcast. This is Esther Gallagher with you this week. Sarah cannot join us due to family and work commitments and so it's just me today. I'm sorry Sarah can't be with us - she's always got the best queries and input and I miss her when she's not here with me.

This week we're going to be talking more about visiting. So this is food for thought for parents to be for partners of moms who plan to breastfeed for adoptive parents who have friends and family who've offered to help. Or I might add who have not offered to help because somehow they think that just because you didn't give birth to this baby you're not going to need help. So hopefully all of the tips that I'm going to discuss today will be helpful to new parents.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:01:52] My deepest wish is that these tips are heard and understood by those who have decided that they ought to be able to visit new parents and maybe have been asked to visit in the first six weeks by the new parents but maybe haven't really thought about how to make that visit a truly enriching experience for everyone involved and really giving thought to how can I be an agent of support. And what can I do to minimize any sort of stress for the new parents?

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:02:42] So we're going to launch in. Remember how often I have iterated and reiterated on this podcast how important it is for new parents to sleep when the baby sleeps and in order to do that they're eating when the baby eats and when the baby's needs for burping, diaper changing holding while they get through a fussy period or just are in active alert and quite alert states and not sleeping, that parents have the opportunity to do this self care that cannot be done for them.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:03:32] So that's where we start. That parents really part in a state of recovery and healing having given birth and their bandwidth needs to be focused on the baby as well as how to do their best self care when and how. Now most parents imagine that the time to do self care or anything else that they've put on their plate is when the baby's sleeping and I'm here to tell you that in the first six weeks that is a dangerous notion.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:04:18] We live in a culture where we are learning more and more about what has been true for a long time since before we started to acknowledge that the mental health state for new parents is shockingly not a picture of wellness. And we know that in this culture parents struggle to get. Healthy nutrition adequate sleep and time for self care whether or not they're pregnant or postpartum but particularly when they're pregnant and postpartum or going through the process that takes so much time and focus and effort of creating their family through foster care adoption that when this is so true we need to refocus on basic human needs nutrition sleep appropriate exercise and those little fundamental self care moves like brushing our teeth.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:05:35] So how can you support a new family? Well the first thing you can do is not insist that you need to see them or their baby. Right. That's not a need, it's not a need on your part. There are lots of ways that you can stay connected and be supportive to new parents. It's a longing I totally resonate with and it's a wonderful longing but it's not an entitlement.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:06:16] It just isn't. And as I said on the previous podcast when asked you know the question Sarah put forth in the voice of the visitor, the potential visitor oh we just love that baby we just want to see that baby. My answer to that is have you forgotten the parents. Have you forgotten your baby?

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:06:42] A person who just adopted their child or gave birth to their child or is supporting the person who has just given birth to that child. Have you forgotten that they too have a deep. Abiding basic human needs in this sacred and fraught and vulnerable process they're in. Please please don't forget the parents put them first. After all, they are now responsible for the well-being of that baby. You're not. You get to go home. You can give all your advice and leave however you may think you're responsible for all of this.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:07:32] The actual bottom line fact is that you are not the parents and they are the ones who require our support and that needs to come primarily in the form of basic human needs and respect for this sacred nature of what is unfolding. Now I know there will be people out in the world who say it is sacred. Are you kidding me?

People are giving birth and adopting children 24/7 around the world all the time. What's sacred about that? Well I will ask you to just take a step back and ask yourself why. So many of the world's. Sacred practices being a newborn being a new parent is the story. It's THE sacred story.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:08:29] It is sacred. However mundane it is also Paradoxically true that it is sacred, it's a sacred time and it's not over with the birth. It extends into the lifetime but especially in the first six weeks to three months. So much is in transition. So much of this is a journey that parents are taking. It's an exploration they've never been on this journey before except as a newborn themselves. So they are learning as they go. So how can we respect that? Well as I said often.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:09:11] But I feel it's very important to say again and again the way that we respect that is to quiet our minds, quiet our hearts, open our eyes and ears. Be observant when a baby is sleeping. Encourage parents without words. Right. Without a whole lot of explanation I see the baby sleepy now would be a great time for you to lie down and rest. I will go do the dishes and prepare some snack plates for you and put them in the refrigerator before I go. Thank you for letting me come visit you and your wonderful baby. Thank you so much.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:10:09] Noticing a mother who's clearly very tired who cannot stay focused in a conversation whose eyes are starting to whose lids are getting heavy. Notice. Offer, 'would you like to take the baby into bed now and breastfeed, lie down and just relax? I am happy to clean their bathroom quietly and prepare that sitz bath for you while you're and the baby are resting. Thank you so much for allowing me into your home and allowing me to be in your presence in this sacred time'.

We have instructions on how to prepare sitz baths in previous episodes but I will go by that little process in a moment observing the mom whose baby he has come off the breast and offering, 'Would you like me to hold the baby? Maybe burp and diaper change the baby? I don't know if you've had a chance to brush your teeth today or go to the bathroom. Why don't I walk the baby around for a few minutes and see if a burp comes up and I'll check the diaper and change that. And when the baby shows signs of

wanting the breast I'll let you know. Thank you so much for letting me come and visit you and your new baby in this wonderful time of healing and recovery. I hope you're healing and recovery is going well.'

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:11:51] That's sort of the attitudinal stance that I always love that our culture could adopt when visiting new parents. Now the thing that you're also going to do when you show up for a visit is you will bring nourishing food not a baguette and chocolates actual nutrient dense foods that you've shopped for. And prepared before arriving you are not entitled to time in their kitchen. You've prepared wonderful snacks and nourishing things. You're not bringing out croissants and scones and coffee.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:12:42] You're bringing nourishing teas, proteins and fats, fresh fruits well prepared and properly prepared lots of vegetables. These are the things you're arriving with when you arrive with gifts for the new parents. By the way, Babies don't need gifts. Their parents have seen to that adequately.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:13:08] As the moment you arrive, having been granted this wonderful opportunity you set your timer for 20 minutes. 20 minutes that's about the time it takes to breastfeed a baby on the first breast more or less. So babies lots more, some babies a little less. That's about the time a mom really can sit in your presence and tell you how she's doing. A dad can talk about what it's like having a new family and then they're ready really they're ready to rest.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:13:52] So a 20 minute visit, think about well if you have 20 minutes and the parents actually aren't really available for social emotional time, What can you do in 20 minutes that would be helpful. You could throw in a load of laundry. You can notice that there's a clean load and put it in the dryer. You can notice there's a dry load of Foldit. You can do all three in 20 minutes. You could. Go into the kitchen and put the dishes in the dirty sink, wash them or put them in the dishwasher and put away the clean dishes. You could go to the fridge and put your snacks in the refrigerator having given some to the parents already perhaps. And whip up a quick smoothie for the parents so long as they're not sleeping in that blender won't wake them up.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:14:54] So those are just a few things. Now a sitz bath, preparing a sitz bath may take a little longer. So what does that mean? That means that you've gone to your local herbal apothecary wherever that looks like maybe you've ordered things online. You brought a pasta pot full of water to boil and turn off the heat. You've added the loose bulk herbs to this no longer boiling water and put the lid back on and you let it steep for 20 minutes.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:15:34] If mom is awake and prepared for a sitz bath meaning right away she's prepared. Then after 20 minutes, steep those herbs while those herbs are actually steeping. You scrub out the tub and rinse it really thoroughly. You strain the herbs into the already-plugged bathtub. And you add the appropriate temperature water to bring the level of the bath water up to no more than four inches. And then you help mom by holding the baby. Get into the bathtub. If the baby is hungry you give mom the baby to breastfeed while she's having her soak. By the way she's not sitting on her stitches or hemorrhoids, she's leaned back lying flat for her sacrum in the tub so that this area is not pressurized and is getting the full benefit of the herbal water. She then breastfeeds the baby while you sit nearby and you take the baby when the baby is done breastfeeding or when the mother is ready to get out of the tub.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:17:04] That's an herbal sitz bath for a new mom. Very simple procedure. Very important that moms have sitz baths in the first week postpartum and very much something she should not have to do for herself. Even though it's very, very healing and nourishing for her to have that time to rest. And meditate and so this might not be the time that you're going to talk with the mom. You're going to let her rest in the tub.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:17:39] OK. So I think those are some pretty simple pretty straightforward do's and I want just very quickly but hopefully thoroughly go over the don'ts.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:18:01] I talked earlier about the "Don't" of entitlement just because you claim some relationship to the new parents does not entitle you to invite yourself to visit whether or not you've offered to air quotes help. You're not entitled.

These parents very much need to know what they can tolerate. What would be nourishing and what is too much.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:18:38] And no doubt they have a whole list of people who they are concerned about welcoming into this new baby's life in an appropriate time frame but having just given birth whatever they may have thought prenatally about how they're going to feel what it's going to be like after the baby arrives.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:19:06] No matter how much time they've had to prepare for the first weeks after bringing home their adopted baby or child of any age they really don't necessarily know how those first moments and days and weeks will actually unfold. That is very very important that they be allowed spaciousness to take these moments in one at a time as they're unfolding. It's huge. So you may be anxious and chomping at the bit but it's very important that we all respect the time and spaciousness needed on the part of new parents to integrate this new experience of being parents.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:20:05] So you're patient. You don't send email after email saying I can't wait. I can't wait. Like, you really can. And you really have to. And you really should. And that would be the most nourishing thing that you do for new parents is you wait, patiently without comment or commentary about the waiting. And you integrate your own experience of waiting. Wouldn't it be nice to insert yourself in the waiting and see what arises and address it as an adult from your own perspective the best you can without smearing that on the new parents. You channel the love and nourishment that you want to give these new parents into something nourishing.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:21:02] You could prepare several meals. Put them in your freezer. And when the time comes and when their freezer is welcoming you get them those frozen. You could look into funding college you got time and money to spare. Go to your bank and figure it out. You could do artwork for yourself about this process of becoming somebody related to a new baby and new parents. There's lots of things you could be doing with all that time and energy that might be way more appropriate than just showing up because you want to.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:21:50] I have to tell you how many times I can't even count how many times I've been told by my clients by new parents, 'Gee, When I hadn't been pregnant yet. And I hadn't given birth. I really when I showed up to visit my friends who had just had babies. I was so clueless. I had no idea. And that's the truth of it'. You actually don't have any idea. That doesn't mean you're not a good friend. It means you just don't have any idea. And so maybe you can take yourself and say since I have no idea about what this is like for new parents I'm going to contain myself and I'm going to wait for the moment and I'm going to try to learn something from people who are no longer in the three months postpartum. Maybe those friends who are now out of the Fourth Trimester can actually teach me something valuable that I can actually take with me. Next time friends or family are in the Fourth Trimester.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:23:05] I also want to briefly talk about the kinds of blaming and shaming that go on in families and amongst friends. This is no small thing. It's really really hurtful to new parents and again and again I see and hear from parents who say yeah I just had to cross that person off my list. It was very painful, or yeah, that really changed the relationship that I have with my parent or parent in law. When I realized that they just can't be adults. And take good care of themselves when they're in our presence they expect to be the center of attention.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:24:02] They want to talk about politics. What happened at work without being asked. They're just entitled to spout on for three hours about how terrible you know what's going on in the world is without any regard for how that might be met by the wide open hearts minds and souls of new parents who need to be able to experience that wide open vulnerability on behalf of each other and their new child and not for the world outside their nest. They can't do anything about it. They probably didn't create it.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:24:56] And what they need now is a kind of protection from it. So knowing how to contain your own stuff in the world outside the nest, like trauma. Containing those things is very, very important. And if you cannot do this hopefully those new parents know this about you and they are opting to have you not visit. Until they feel less vulnerable. They feel they can integrate your personality and your modus



operandi. And they're entitled to that. So once again when you are being given the wonderful opportunity to visit new parents you arrive with curiosity for the other.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:25:56] Alright. You have no needs. You don't require them to tell you their story. That's their story. They have good reason to need to contain it. If they've told it at all they may have told it already too many times and they just need to be in the present moment not present moment maybe filled with a lot of quietness and deep observation for themselves and their new baby. What a gift for you to be able to participate in that. So showing up and having the first thing you say to new parents is so. Tell me all about the birth. That's not appropriate. It's not you're not entitled to that story. There may be very good reasons why they are not ready, willing or able to tell that story because it was just overwhelming. No matter how it was overwhelming it was overwhelming and they are still in the process of integrating their story together and individually.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:27:09] And that doesn't happen when they tell their story to other people who might decide to comment on that story. Right. They don't need to integrate your comments and your opinions and your judgments about it. However skillful and skillful you or I and I will fully admit to having been very unskillful in this parameter for much of my life and career. I did not know that. So that was their primary essential. And hopefully you understand the basis.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:27:54] Think of yourself. Put yourself into a time or a place where you yourself were quite vulnerable and needed intense self observation and perhaps loving nurturing, witnessing and observation from others. And what it was like for you when you got that and when you didn't try to hold that for yourself as a reason for your behavior when you're in the presence of new parents.

**Esther Gallagher:** [00:28:33] Thanks very much everybody for tuning in. And if you get a chance go to our Patreon page and consider supporting us in some small way. It's been a pleasure to be with you once again and hope to see you next time on the Fourth Trimester Podcast. Tell all your friends, not just the pregnant ones, not just the adopting

ones, not to the new parents. Everybody needs to learn about the Fourth Trimester because everyone is affected. Love you. Take care. Bye for now.

**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.