

Fourth Trimester Podcast

Episode 84: New Father Support Group Secrets With David Arrell

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: [00:00:02] Hi, this is Sarah Trott. Welcome back to the Fourth Trimester Podcast. I'm joined today with David Arrell, who is the founder of Welcome to Fatherhood and I will introduce him in a moment.

[00:00:13] And before I do, I'd like to take this opportunity to remind everyone that we have a website which is fourthtrimesterpodcast.com, and we have an Instagram and a Facebook page so you can connect with us on social. And we also have the ability for you to subscribe if you go to iTunes, go ahead and click the Subscribe button and you'll be able to be alerted every time we produce a new episode. So please do that if you have not already.

Sarah Trott: [00:00:40] So welcome, David. I'm so excited you're here. David is an author, an entrepreneur, a consultant, a coach. He's currently living in Fairfax, Virginia, and he is passionate about coaching men on how to more fully prepare and embrace and embody healthy masculinity, especially through the power of modalities of partnership and parenting. And his most recent work in this area is a book that he authored called Welcome to Fatherhood: The Modern Man's Guide to Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Fatherhood, better known simply as WTF. Which makes me laugh actually. So this episode is all about dads. Welcome David.

David Arrell: [00:01:23] Hi Sarah. Thanks for having me on your show today. I'm looking forward to exploring some of the many and interesting areas that we could get into here today.

Sarah Trott: [00:01:32] Yeah, me too. Thank you so much for agreeing to be on our program. So to get us started, a question that we like to ask our guests on this program is to tell us a little bit about your own fourth trimester experience.

David Arrell: [00:01:46] Well, Sarah as other people I've worked with have found out, I enjoy sharing my foibles much more than where I've cobbled together a success or so. And a lot of the work that I have in my book and my coaching and my workshops comes from me doing things wrong multiple times and eventually figuring out a way that I realize is much better. And I wish somebody had told me to do this the first go around.

David Arrell: [00:02:09] So, a great example of this is our after our first baby was born in August and my wife was able to have three months off for maternity leave, which we were very grateful for. And at the time I was working from home and I was able to manage my schedule to be available as my very excited new dad self. And we wanted to do some adventuring during this time and like take our baby and go see some family. But one of the things we wanted to do was to go on a vacation, back to San Francisco where I spent time in grad school as one of my favorite cities.

David Arrell: [00:02:45] And I just imagined all the restaurants and all the walking around town. And as a San Francisco resident, you know that walking around town is not as simple a thing, but there's lots of hills and dales and all kinds of things. So five weeks postpartum, you know, my wife had signed up for this trip, too. We agreed we were going to do this. So five weeks postpartum there we are on an airplane and we're all excited and we get out there and things were not as romantic and easy and fun as I had imagined. You know, my wife is, you know, five weeks postpartum.

David Arrell: [00:03:17] She had a fairly simple, straightforward birth, but still, that's childbirth. That's a lot. That's a big experience to go through. Still right early adjusting to 'what does it mean to be a new mom? How am I managing my breastfeeding and mastitis and pumping?' Because we were trying to have it where I could also feed through bottles. So we were like a team. We were trying to be a great team about everything and it was just a bad experience for her and, you know, for me peripherally, but also just for our relationship.

David Arrell: [00:03:46] It was very challenging, like walking up and down hills and I was confused. I'm like, you know, in my mind I'm like, I saw that zebra give birth like on National Geographic last week. And like the next day it was running with the herd. Like, I didn't really understand that childbirth isn't just a physical experience at the time. It's mental, emotional, energetic, just all these things. And in hindsight, I would never have planned that trip. Like for our second baby, we had no trips. We had, you know, a very, very intentional babymoon, low stress, low energy, very intentional about who we were bringing into our family dynamic.

David Arrell: [00:04:21] We weren't doing any traveling for the first three months. It was like, we'll see you soon. Baby's six weeks. You're not going to want to see here, here's FaceTime, you know. So that was one of my foibles was planning this awesome adventure, five weeks postpartum to go hike up and down the various elevations of San Francisco. So guys do not plan an adventure to San Francisco or pretty much anywhere during those first couple of months of postpartum.

Sarah Trott: [00:04:49] The physical aspect of that is so important too, especially for women. If they've had any complications in birth. I mean, there's a lot there. So I appreciate you being vulnerable and sharing. Sharing that story with us.

Sarah Trott: [00:05:04] I wanted to dig in, sort of draw the curtain back, so to speak, on the mystery shrouding the dude's group. You run lots of men's groups for new fathers, second time fathers. You do a lot of coaching. So you probably hear a side of dads that not that the women wives, mothers, everyone involved don't necessarily hear or see. And I'd love to understand from that perspective, like what are some of the main topics that that are discussed? What are the three say, the top three topics that you discuss with men as they enter fatherhood?

David Arrell: [00:05:42] Yeah, that's a great question. Sarah Thank you. Well, one of the things I like to share with all the guys, especially when they're first joining one of my calls or one of our groups, is the simple statement that men are people too. We are allowed to have our own feelings, our own difficulties, our own messiness. And what I want to provide to the guys in the space is an opportunity for them just to kind of show up and fall apart a little bit. Just be like, "What's where are you at right now?"

David Arrell: [00:06:13] Like with no filter, like you don't need nobody's going to say to you, well, she had the baby after all, you know, or just you need to suck it up. You need to man up here and just do what needs to be done. Like, that's not what we're saying. We're like, Wow, that sounds hard. Yeah, I get it. It can be really difficult to try to figure out how to be successful at any one of these things that you're dealing with, much less all of them. Yeah, it can be hard when the person you're so used to relying upon as your

partner is struggling too, and you can't really go to them for help and you're kind of too depleted yourself to be able to offer them the help that they need.

David Arrell: [00:06:49] And you just kind of feel like you're failing at everything and you're tired at work, so you kind of suck at your job right now and your coworkers kind of understand that. But at the same time, facts are facts. You know, if you're getting paid the same as them, they're expecting you to produce. Or if you're supposed to be managing people, you need to do it well or, you know, whatever this is.

David Arrell: [00:07:05] So it's really just a place for them to sort of allow to be freely expressive of where they're feeling challenged struggles and, you know, crying tears, a little bit of yelling sometimes a little bit of like fist shaking at the world, like all that stuff that they're not really allowed to express elsewhere, especially in the relationship with Mama and her newness and her her challenges.

David Arrell: [00:07:30] That's what we want to provide for them. And that's where I get so much of the gratitude from the guys like, Wow, I didn't know I needed just to sit here and cry for five minutes. But I feel kind of weird. But thank you for holding that space. I guess that's what the right word is, you know? So it's that vulnerability and that messiness that we really provide.

Sarah Trott: [00:07:49] Yeah, that's really interesting. And then what kinds of questions come up? What kind of advice do you like to give?

David Arrell: [00:07:57] Well, there's three things I'd like to offer as a helpful reframe, just to kind of give them a map that they can use on their own to get their own way out. Because what we don't really want to do is like, well, you need to do this because that's all they've been hearing. Um, all around. So there's the map we'd like to give them. I like to give them three different things.

David Arrell: [00:08:16] 1) The first is I like to remind them or inform them for the guys who still haven't quite figured this out yet, but there is no bouncing back. You have to bounce forward. So some of the guys that I see, especially in their first coming in,

they're like, David, you know, I just want to get back to the way things were. I want to know when we can go out to dinner with our friends again? When can we have a cocktail party again? When can I go back and join my golf league again? I used to play every Saturday and I haven't been out in months and the future doesn't look any better. And so I want to catch these guys like, okay, very fair questions and everything is new now.

David Arrell: [00:08:52] You're now a dad. And as monumental as that may be for you, it's probably five X for Mama because she actually was growing this baby. Her whole reality transformed from the most fundamental cellular level up to the most existential spiritual level. This is a full transformation. You guys are new people. Your life is new. So what your task is now in front of you is not to figure out how to bounce back, but figure out how to bounce forward and build new relationships that can be extensions of the previous ones or variations or even revisitations. For example, golf. Maybe golf isn't the priority it used to be. You just need to consciously acknowledge that. So that's number one, not bouncing back. We're bouncing forward.

David Arrell: [00:09:34] 2) Second thing I like to remind them is to really help them appreciate the importance of cultivating a very healthy sense of teamwork with Mama or with their partners, where they are viewing that relationship as the primary thing that they should be investing in, because that strong relationship will be a foundation upon which they can grow their new family, especially if they're planning on having other children.

David Arrell: [00:10:02] They can focus on taking care of Baby as a team by having shared agreements about how we change diapers, about how we put baby in the car seat, about how we tend to, you know, burp baby after baby's been nursing or feeding or how we like to hold baby. And sure, there's plenty of room for fathers not mothering. That's one of my Dad Tips from my book is fathers don't mother. So there's plenty of room for, you know, a twist or a spin on. I like to hold baby football style, for example. And my wife preferred to hold cradle style and Baby was perfectly happy either way. So we didn't need to have the right way for that.

Focus on creating that shared agreement so you don't have these unconscious expectations or unexpressed hopes. So turn those hopes into plans, expectations into agreements, and those can help you build that sense of teamwork. That's going to be really helpful for helping you both navigate some of these trickier moments. Coming up, If baby's not eating, sleeping, et cetera. And then the third thing real quick here.

Sarah Trott: [00:11:01] Yeah, on that one, I just have a question. So important. When do you recommend doing that mapping and that partnership? Expectation setting.

David Arrell: [00:11:10] Well, I try to catch the dads as soon as possible. I mean, like I say for them in my book, fatherhood actually starts with that positive pregnancy test, just like motherhood does. But Sarah, I see you laughing. You've seen so many people where for them, like, you know, my wife and I, same thing. She's like, Oh, I'm a mom now. And I'm like, Oh, cool. I'm going to be a dad in seven months. Like, we are just on different journeys.

David Arrell: [00:11:33] And so I, I recognize that and I speak to that explicitly in my work. However, what I want the dads to try to do is not force themselves to be a mama's journey and pretend that they're pregnant. Oh, I guess I'm not drinking beer anymore either, because, you know, we're pregnant. It's like, no, that's not the right idea, nor do you need to drag Mama onto your path and be like, Come on, it's 9:00PM, Let's go out and have fun. And she's like, I'm in bed and I've been here for an hour. So it's about even though you have those separate journeys, building those bridges to acknowledge and appreciate each other's journey, but still maintain that interest and staying connected as a team and doing a little bit of extra work to build those connections, build those bridges, because your journeys are now a little bit divergent.

David Arrell: [00:12:15] So I try to get that as early as possible, but as every mom in the audience is listening and nodding, a lot of us guys, we just don't get it. During the pregnancy. We're like, Well, I'm going to be a dad later. Like, you know, for example, right now it's spring. I'm not worried about buying a snow plow right now. You know why? Because it's spring. And I'm not worried about my baby coming in November because it's spring. Like us guys get stuck in this very sort of like concrete, visceral,

physical. What's real today? What's going to be real tomorrow and two months down the road? I can't really I can't I can't get serious about planning for something that's 2 to 3 months down the road. So that's where it's really tricky. With those expectant dads. It's a very different audience.

Sarah Trott: [00:12:57] So would we make a request then to any dads and expecting parents who are listening to go ahead and start doing that mapping, maybe reach out to you, work with someone else, work with their partners on their own, whatever that may look like. Do that right away. Is it easier to do some of that work before the baby comes versus after?

David Arrell: [00:13:18] It definitely is. Because I would agree with you 100% there Sarah, any dad or dad to be listening, the time to start investing in strengthening your relationship and working with the differences that exist and appreciating them and valuing them and trying to find ways to connect above and beyond those differences. No time like yesterday. It's like buying real estate. The best time to buy real estate was 20 years ago. The second best time is today. So that's the same thing with these relationships.

David Arrell: [00:13:46] I would say start now. Find ways to be a better teammate, find ways to better connect to your partner. And these are some of the things I explore with the dads when I'm working with them one on one coaching, whether it's pre baby or Post Baby, it's like, Hey, what's what's really you? What's your sacred individuality? What's important to you that nourishes you?

Okay, let's get this clear. This is going to be where you sort of drink from this cup when you're feeling overextended and lost in the familial responsibilities side of things. Okay, Now let's also look at all the things that you and Mama like to do. What nourishes your relationship together? Where do you guys feel most alive, connected, intimately supported, not necessarily sexually intimately, but like emotionally intimately. Like what are the things that you do together? And you're both like, Yeah, this is, this feels good and get clear on what those things are.

David Arrell: [00:14:32] So if you find yourself drifting a little bit too far the other way you can counterbalance be like, Oh, I spent last weekend playing golf and then football was on. So this weekend I want to really be intentional about setting up a date or whatever. And then the most important part of this is baby planning. This is where a lot of new moms get or expectant moms get frustrated because they feel like they're doing all the planning and they ask their husband or partner and he's like, back to my snowplow example. Like, I don't want to go to the baby store again. Like we went three weeks in a row. Like, I don't know about teething rings, I don't care about teething rings. And why are we thinking about this now?

David Arrell: [00:15:07] And they might not be explicit, but those three challenges are always in the head. So I always remind guys like, Listen for the real message. Will you team up with me to help plan for our baby? And if a guy can hear that question, they're going to be like, Well, yeah, rather than let's go to the baby store for the third time in a row, they're like, No. So that bridge building, that relationship deepening, that investing in the connecting across the chasm of our different experiences. Again, no time like the present. So if you're listening today, tonight, find a way to try to connect with your partner.

Sarah Trott: [00:15:39] I love that so much. You heard it here today. Now is the time.

David Arrell: [00:15:43] Yeah. It's never easier later, you know?

Sarah Trott: [00:15:46] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay. Did we talk about your third thing?

David Arrell: [00:15:50] 3) Third thing real quick is to what I would recommend is to the guys out there is to build your own village. We don't have the benefit of sort of growing up in these small communities surrounded by friends and relatives. We've known our whole lives who we've seen them have babies, we've seen them be pregnant. We've been around childbirth. We've been around caretaking of babies. We have older siblings. We have younger siblings.

David Arrell: [00:16:14] There's not a there's not a lot of guys I talk to who say, oh, I had seven brothers and sisters. Like, that's just not our current reality. So we're sort of left to figure out what this whole pregnancy thing is like now what? Like we know it exists, but we're not embedded in it where we've sort of learned just by being present, like almost by osmosis, as we may have been, you know, you know, several hundred years ago. And then all the way back until, you know, we were cavemen like that. That was our human history, our legacy.

David Arrell: [00:16:44] But we're so disconnected from that that now we're trying to, like, figure it out. And it's really challenging, especially once we get into this postpartum space when all of a sudden it's like, wow, this is like all the time, not like some of the time or most of the time, But I'm always a parent. I'm always on call. I'm always, you know, working with my partner and our other obligations around a social professional. Et cetera. And it's not fair when we're struggling as either mom or dad to put all of our needs for support, help directly to the other person who's really right there next to us struggling too. So getting this village built ahead of time is so key. Whether it's signing up for a birth class, which is tip number six, I recommend it 100% to anybody who asks me where you're meeting other people also in this pregnancy journey.

David Arrell: [00:17:32] These are going to be your new friends because they're going to have their babies. You'll have your babies and you guys can go to the park together versus your other friends at the pub who don't want to hang out with you and you're your new baby. Like, why would they. Right? Or meal trains or chores.

David Arrell: [00:17:47] Postpartum doulas are amazing. This is something I would look into interviewing. Dad Tip number six was birth class Dad Tip number seven is dude, hire a doula. It's the one tip I am 100%. No equivocation on that whatsoever. Like birth class is 98%. You may not, there may be two out of 100 that it's not the right fit for, but everybody can benefit from a doula, especially a postpartum doula. That's something that I'm recommending more and more - they've been. There. They got the t shirt. They're selling t shirts. They know all about this new baby space and they can be a great resource for you.

David Arrell: [00:18:17] So but you don't want to be waiting until your 3 or 4 months postpartum. And you and mama are both just really struggling and you're like. You're like bickering over the dumbest stuff about the forks tines being up or down. Like everything's an argument because you're both so frazzled. That's not the time. Well, I mean, if that's what you are, get help. But preferably you want to avoid that space in the first place by having that village and those professionals around you as your resources. So that would be my third, third recommendation there. I got 37 more, but we'll stop there.

Sarah Trott: [00:18:47] Okay. I've heard people talk about putting a page on the fridge. This is who I call if I want help with someone, a friend of mine who said they'd pick up groceries for me. Here's someone who will walk my dog. Here's someone who will watch the older kids. Here's the phone number for my postpartum doula. Just having that there and having it be visually as a reminder to, remember 'Yeah, hey, reach out'. These are your people who agreed to be helpers for you and your family and who want to help, who want to be there for you, especially if anyone's dealing with any kind of mood anxiety disorder stuff in the postpartum period, it can be harder to reach out for help.

David Arrell: [00:19:25] Oh, absolutely.

Sarah Trott: [00:19:26] You know, establishing some of those relationships in that village beforehand is something I certainly highly recommend. I love that tip so much, and I just really appreciate what you're sharing with us today. So thank you, Dave.

Sarah Trott: [00:19:40] There's so much I want to talk to you about. What we're going to do is bring you back for a second segment. So we're going to sign off now and then bring you right on back so we can keep recording. And then I'll just break this into two recordings for everyone. So for everyone listening now, though, I want to definitely remind everyone. So David has an excellent coaching program. I'll talk about it for a minute And David, I'll let you talk about it too. But it's your dad's zone thriving coaching. Maybe just break it down for me too. I'm curious, like, what does that look like? So you

book a session, you have a conversation, it's just you and Dad, or is it you and Dad and mom or what does that look like?

David Arrell: [00:20:26] Well, it's interesting. The the Dads Zone Thriving now there's three options because so many so many guys still are very resistant to asking for help, especially to some schmo stranger like me. They don't know me. They're like, what's this guy? How is he going to help me? You know? So I have three different offerings currently available.

David Arrell: [00:20:44] The first and most basic is just a one hour dad zone thriving mapping session. So we talked a little bit about that mapping earlier and that one time session, just me and the me and the dad we just work through what are their what are their sacred individuality, personal, nourishing support, How do they keep their cup full? And we look at their core activities like things they've done their whole life that they just love doing, whether it's mountain biking or fishing or golfing or what are their social connections, what are their friendships or non mama relationships, work colleagues, whatever that they really value?

David Arrell: [00:21:16] And then what are those self care items, whether it's yoga or reading or having 20 minutes by yourself in the morning to quietly drink your coffee and not have anybody ask you any questions like, what are these basic things? And then we also look at those same mom, partner, family relationship dynamics and what are these same things. And so we sort of plot that out and then we it gets more complex than that.

David Arrell: [00:21:38] But I don't want spend too much time. But, but we just give them a sense of what how to build that thriving in the dad zone where they're feeling great, they're doing great. Their partner also thinks they're doing great because we've seen those guys who think they're crushing it and their partner's like you, not five stars. Two stars need some help. So we really want to kind of give them that map. That's their own reality, their own relationship, their own stuff. So it's unique to each guy.

David Arrell: [00:22:03] And then the second two are more of an arc of coaching where it's spread out over 6 or 8 different meetings. There's the one I catch them in pregnancy,

which is pretty rare, but I love those guys because I'm like, Oh, this will be so much easier. Like, like when you find yourself in a hole, the number thing to do is stop digging. Often on the postpartum sign, they're all I see is the top of the shovel. And they're like, Now what? It's like, stop digging. We got to get you out of this hole.

David Arrell: [00:22:24] So in the pregnancy side of things, we do a little bit of that dads zone mapping. But then what we do is these real time check ins, like where are you struggling now? Are you finding yourself missing too far to the right, which I call Jerk ville, where you're just a little bit too 'I'm not pregnant. You are' Or are you missing too far on the left, which I call Wimpy Town, which is like. Yes, dear, whatever you want, dear. I guess I'll stay home again tonight, dear. Helpful and supportive. If you're missing too far. How to like, what can you do in the moment or tomorrow to kind of help pull yourself back to dads own thriving where your partner thinks you're doing awesome and you feel awesome at the same time.

David Arrell: [00:23:00] And then the third one is in when they're new fathers. And that's kind of where things are a little bit more volatile or they're just struggling more now. They're desperate, so it's a little bit more empathy appreciation really, like allowing them that space to feel heard, seen and validated. And then we again try to get them that give them the ladder where they can get themselves out of that hole. They've dug in and start to continue to climb up into that thriving space where they're feeling great. Their partner thinks they're doing great. Their relationship is growing in its new direction of bouncing forward. So they are similar but different.

Sarah Trott: [00:23:36] And if you're listening to this podcast and you're interested in working with David on a Mapping Session, anything he just described, there is an awesome offer that we've put together for you exclusively. So if you want to book David, go ahead and reference "4th Trimester Podcast". When you're scheduling that mapping exercise with him, you'll get a discount 25% off. That's awesomely generous. Thank you so, so much, David. And you can use the discount code: WELCOME4TH.

Sarah Trott: [00:24:06] We'll put all of this information on the website as well fourthtrimesterpodcast.com with links to David's site, links for how to book with him, and

you'll get 25% off his workshops. This is amazing. So please, please take advantage of this. He's got workshops scheduled regularly, so definitely check back and see when the next one is coming up for you. You can always check back and see when the next one is. So book it. We encourage you to.

Sarah Trott: [00:24:44] Thank you so much, David. We're going to stop here and then we're going to come right on back. So, listeners, if you enjoyed this conversation, listen to the next one with David Arrell and myself. We'll see you next time on the Fourth Trimester Podcast. Thank you, David.

David Arrell: [00:24:57] Thank you, Sarah.

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.