

Fourth Trimester Podcast

Episode 85: Fatherhood And Healthy Masculinity With Welcome to Fatherhood

Author 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: [00:00:01] Hi, this is Sarah Trott. Welcome back to the Fourth Trimester Podcast. I am extending a recording that I did once before with David Arrell, inviting him back for a second episode with us because we have so much to discuss on the topic of all things fatherhood, and I'll reintroduce him in a moment.

Sarah Trott: [00:00:18] And before I do, I'd like to remind everyone that we have a website which is fourthtrimesterpodcast.com, and we have Facebook, Instagram. You can go and subscribe to our show on iTunes or wherever you listen to your podcast. Please click subscribe. Please leave us a review. It helps us with discovery for new listeners, so you'll be helping out other parents and so we encourage you to do that as well.

Sarah Trott: [00:00:42] So thank you so much, David, for returning as a guest on our show. Welcome back. To introduce David, He is an author and entrepreneur, a consultant, and a coach. He lives in Fairfax, Virginia. He coaches men on how to be more fully prepared and how to embrace and body healthy masculinity, especially through the powerful modalities of partnership and parenting. He has written a book, so definitely go check that out. His book is called Welcome to Fatherhood The Modern Man's Guide to Pregnancy, Childbirth and Fatherhood, better known as simply 'WTF' Welcome to fatherhood. So welcome to you David.

David Arrell: [00:01:25] Hi Sarah. Thanks for having me back. I appreciate it.

Sarah Trott: [00:01:28] Yeah, so happy to have you back. So in our last conversation, we talked about the top three topics that you tend to go through with new dads, things that we wish dads knew. If you haven't listened to that episode, definitely go back and check it out. Listen to that one too.

Sarah Trott: [00:01:44] Today we want to touch on the topic that we just mentioned in your introduction, actually, which is this topic of healthy masculinity. It's not something all men are necessarily thinking about or exploring as part of their parenting journey. It's just this innate thing that happens.

Sarah Trott: [00:02:01] For a lot of women I've had discussions with about their transition to motherhood, for anything that isn't necessarily thought through beforehand, there can be a tendency to default into the experience that they had growing up, to the examples that they had around them.

Sarah Trott: [00:02:20] And so being proactive and curating an experience, writing down, or just thinking about how you want your own experience to be can go a really long way, especially when it comes to thinking about what kind of parent do I want to be? How do I want my experience to feel? What do I want my relationship to feel like? How do I want that to work?

Sarah Trott: [00:02:42] And so we talk a lot about this on this program, about expectations and about preparation, which we talked about before on our last episode as part of the mapping sessions that you do with new fathers. So that's incredible. Thank you for your work that you do.

Sarah Trott: [00:02:58] So just maybe just to warm us up, what are we talking about with this concept of healthy masculinity?

David Arrell: [00:03:06] Well, Sarah, I think that's the million dollar question these days. Or with inflation, it's now the \$10 million question. Yeah, that's something that I think it's an undercurrent that sort of permeates our culture as a whole and where it really starts to go from being an undercurrent to the the waves on the surface is in that new space, that space of new parenthood, especially for us from, you know, I'm a guy, I'm a dad. So that's my experience, that's mine and that's who I work with.

David Arrell: [00:03:35] But a lot of the guys that I see, that's the question that's up for them. They're very clearly, hey, I don't want to be the that's smoking cigars in the waiting room and high fiving my buddies because the nurse came in and said I had a boy or had a girl or whatever. I want to be a parent. I'm a partner. I want to be in the delivery room. I want to be with my partner. I want to catch the baby, cut the cord. I want to be right there. I want to get my skin to skin.

David Arrell: [00:04:01] And so they want to really embody this new vision, this new version of what does it mean to be healthy, masculine. But they don't really have any good ideals out there. There's not a really clear picture of what does it mean to be an awesome, great parent and partner. And I know new moms struggle with these same things. What does it mean to be a great mom? We get all these competing demands. It's like the super woman with the cape and she's nursing and she's got her judicial robe on and she's like, changing a diaper.

David Arrell: [00:04:31] It's like these are all these impossible ideals of being like a player in every possible domain of your life. And us guys having our own version of that sort of what's the ideal, What's the expectation, what's reality, What's my experience? How can I understand my experience in a way that is supportive and encouraging and opening? And yet why do I feel like I'm failing kind of no matter what? So it's all a big open question. Sarah When I get the final answer, I will happily come back and you will hear it first.

Sarah Trott: [00:05:02] Yeah, I mean, I think we're touching on this concept of stereotypes like masculinity, stereotypes. You know, boys don't cry, classic things that get ingrained sometimes culturally. And so when it comes to fatherhood, when men are preparing to become a father, there are these labels around being a protector, a role model, a caretaker, a provider, a father. And now, when we talked about this a little bit when we were prepping a few weeks ago, we were talking about how men go out there and hunt and protect. What are the versions of that pre and post fatherhood?

David Arrell: [00:05:49] Yeah, that's a good lead in there. One whole quarter of my book is devoted to fatherhood. The postpartum chapter, the fourth trimester I even call it in my book, is titled Protect and Serve. And that's sort of the embodiment that a lot of us guys really feel into. Like, I want to be a protector and I want to serve my partner and serve my family. And what's the fine line there? How do I show up? What does it mean to be a protector? Does it mean go make a bunch of money? But if I'm out making money at my job, then I'm not home serving? Well, if I'm only home serving, unless I

have a trust fund or a bunch of passive income, then I'm not really protecting my family's financial well-being if I'm home all the time.

David Arrell: [00:06:32] So they kind of get themselves caught in all these things they see, like, you know, the tough, macho guy. Like most of the guys I work with, they see the tough macho guy and they're like, Yeah, I'm not really trying to be like, you know, some, like, dude like that. And then they see the guy with, you know, the man bun and playing a ukulele with birds landing on his shoulder like, Well, that's kind of cool. But I'm not, I'm not really shooting for that either. Like, what's this middle road where I can still be me. I can still, you know, feel like I'm legitimately grounded in my deep masculinity, just like I want my partner to be grounded in her deep femininity.

David Arrell: [00:07:06] But then how do I show up in this way to be an effective protector and a protector, an effective care taker in that serving domain? And what you said, the stereotypes. You know, in one of my classes I have all these silly pictures of Homer Simpson with an X, like we don't be like Homer. We don't want to be like, you know, Clint Eastwood, the strong, stoic, quiet type. We don't want to be like this bodybuilder, ginormous guy that's all muscles and no heart.

David Arrell: [00:07:30] Like there's a lot of anti examples, but there's not a great a lot of great examples like, Oh, look at this guy. He's like, you know, he's capable. He's not the buffoon dad and all the sitcoms and commercials who can't do anything right. He's reliable, he's dependable. He takes care of his family. He finds ways to make the right sacrifices of the right things at the right times. And for us guys in the trenches, it's like half the time we don't know which way is up, which way is down. And we feel the struggle, but we don't have those ideals of what success can look like so that we can sort of try to emulate them or replicate what we've seen, be successful elsewhere.

Sarah Trott: [00:08:08] Do you ever run into questions like, I'm not the mom, so she does the baby stuff. Like intimidation or men waiting to feel like they're invited into playing some of those roles.

David Arrell: [00:08:24] Yeah. And then honestly Sarah, that's where I feel so many of the guys I work with, they've sort of painted themselves into that corner. You know, they defer out of a sense of respect and responsibility, like, Oh, well, she's the mom, you know, I'll be over here. I don't want to do it. I don't know what I'm doing. I don't I don't know how to do it. I don't want to do it wrong. It may, may or may not surprise you, but a lot of men have never held an infant until the nurse or doctor or midwife or whoever says, Dad, do you want to hold your baby? And they're like, Oh shit, yes is the correct answer.

David Arrell: [00:08:58] But I am absolutely terrified here. It's like they're being handed, you know, the most delicate thing in the world. One sense it is. But like all that fear. So they're very uncomfortable. And so, you know, when I'm able to catch the guys pre-baby, I'm like, look, you know, this is a recent blog post of mine on my site, like skin to skin. Get your skin to skin dads. You want to be in there, You want to do as much of everything as much as you can from the first hour plus one minute because mama gets first skin to skin. Give her the full 60 minutes and then be there and take the shirt off and sit right down.

David Arrell: [00:09:29] Get your blanket, get your skin to skin. You want the baby to see you as primary caretaker. Also you want baby to feel your vibe, feel your voice. They've already felt your voice echoing through the womb. Now they can feel it. Chest to chest. Or they can get your smell or your chin scruff or whatever. Whatever is you. They can kind of imprint on you, just like they imprint on mama and, you know. Diaper changes. If Mama's pumping so you can do bottle feeding to be a team player on the on the feeding or whatever that looks like as much as possible.

David Arrell: [00:10:01] You want to be in there from the beginning so that you are starting at this place of shared co-parenting. It's not pilot and copilot. We're both copilots and sure everybody, all the dads I know, they're very happy to say she had the baby. She's Parent one I'll be Parent one A And that's great. Nobody needs to like, we don't need to argue about this stuff. It's all about just being that team like we referenced in our previous conversation. It's all about building that sense of teamwork, connectedness.

We are strengthening our relationship together so that we can be great parents. Not, Oh, I'm the mom, you're the dad and all that stuff.

David Arrell: [00:10:34] All that static just tends to snowball. So you want to get ahead of that as much as possible. And if you're in the static, find ways out of it through turning. I think you mentioned that a moment ago, those unspoken expectations and two shared agreements or turn those unspoken hopes into shared plans where you're not talking about a thing rather than talking from a place of frustration, resentment, etcetera.

David Arrell: [00:10:57] Because those things, especially resentment, is a thief from your relationship. So wherever that resentment is, you want to replace it with gratitude, teamwork, appreciation through building those shared agreements, through sharing, turning those hopes into plans. So Start went on a little bit of a run there. But these things are so deeply intertwined when it comes to strengthening and building that relationship as teammates, as co-parents, so that together you can take care of baby rather than the dads that sit off to the side and now they feel like a third wheel.

David Arrell: [00:11:29] And now mom is like, Why am I doing everything by myself? And he's like, Well, you wouldn't let me hold the baby three weeks ago. Like, it creates all this like, this vicious circle of shame and blame. So I want to replace shame and blame with space and grace.

Sarah Trott: [00:11:42] Oh, I love that so much. And when fathers are first learning how to do some of these things, I mean, you mentioned birth classes. There are ways to build confidence and maybe just giving men permission to be that copilot is a good place to start giving men permission or even just raising the topic like what is your version of masculinity for you as a father?

Sarah Trott: [00:12:09] Something I want to go back to as well is just that what you're talking about, of gratitude and appreciation and a relationship, I mean, even before pregnancy like this is about foundation, right? The foundation isn't suddenly going to be perfect and strong just because you've had a baby together. Monumental milestones to

go through as a couple, for sure. But the stronger the foundation is in the first place, the stronger it's going to be afterwards. Right.

Sarah Trott: [00:12:37] And to continue building, like you said before, there's no there's no bouncing back. We've had this topic on our show before with other guests as well, saying, you know, there's no going back. There's only through - there's only through. It's different. It's this new thing. So like, as you continue to build and build and build every day, every week, every year, you're building on top of the foundation that you have. So I would just apply your advice to all relationships all the time. And then in particular, when going through such an important event like becoming a parent for the first time.

David Arrell: [00:13:16] Yeah, absolutely. Sarah And I think, you know, one of the things I wanted to just add another wrinkle to there is that the idea of this gratitude I think is so important. I wrote a piece recently in one of my on my blog called Gratitude the Sixth Love Language, because I talk a lot about the five love languages and being intentional about how you're connecting with your partner in ways that they can best receive and appreciate it.

David Arrell: [00:13:41] And that's the five love languages. You know, I'm always happy to recommend those, but gratitude is the sixth one. It really can sort of become a trump card for the rest of those where who doesn't want to hear, hey, you know, you did a really good job with that and or I really appreciate how you showed up for me or for baby or whatever like that. Just like that's win, win, win.

David Arrell: [00:14:01] And one of the things that guys really struggle with and again, I'm not an evolutionary anthropologist, so I don't have studies I'm going to cite and point to here. But I have a lot of experience with a lot of new dads. And so one of my favorite tricks back when I before I had W.T.F. as a book and it was a workshop is all the guys would show up and I would sit there and be like, okay, guys, let's talk about what we're excited about when baby gets here.

David Arrell: [00:14:23] And invariably some guy would be like, Oh, I can't wait to take my kid fishing. We're going to go to this pond. And the other guy's like, Yeah, I want to

you know, I've always played baseball growing up. I want to take my I can't wait to see my kid playing tee ball and got her little hat on and her bat and riding a bike. And I'm like, nodding. I'm like, okay, so how old is your baby and all these visions you have? And they're all kind of like, Oh, like 3 or 4? I'm like, Yeah, you got a thousand days and nights of baby prior to tee ball and fishing. And bike riding.

David Arrell: [00:14:52] And so what I gather from that is so many of us guys, we just don't have an easy reference point of what does it mean to be a dad of a new baby? We get when they're walking and talking. Okay. Now, Dad zoned. I can show up at this early infancy. So many of the guys I talked to are like, I don't know. And you see that show up. They don't know how to hold a baby. They don't? Well, let's say they don't feel comfortable holding a baby. They don't just sort of like, Oh, yeah, of course you just do this or like, how do I not break it? You know? Or like when a feeding a baby with a bottle, like, all these things, they're very they feel very out of their depth.

David Arrell: [00:15:26] And so having, you know, those shared agreements about, Hey, mama, why don't you show me how you want me to change a diaper? Like, I don't care. I don't have a I don't have a dog in this fight about which way we do it. Why don't you show me? So I encourage you guys to be vulnerable and ask for help. Ask for guidance, ask for assistance to show mama that they're available, interested and ready, and that they're willing to learn and they can.

David Arrell: [00:15:47] This builds that trust, that credibility, that sort of shared sense of how we do these things, which those are those little tiny planks and the bigger bridge of strengthening that we space of the relationship. So I just want to speak to the challenges that a lot of new guys have. They just don't know what's going on. And so they tend to sort of shut down and pull back. And I'm like, no, you've got to open up and go forward. Like you were saying, you got to go through this and lean in to parenthood as a way to sort of show up and and step up. Don't just show up and sit back, you know, show up and step up. It's kind of one of the phrases I like to use there.

Sarah Trott: [00:16:23] Yeah, definitely. Yeah. Love that. If there are dads listening right now and you are to address those dads directly, are there a couple of questions, maybe

2 or 3? Any questions that you would have them sit down and write down and think about and answer for themselves around this topic?

David Arrell: [00:16:44] Yeah, I would say kind of get clear. Number one, and we talked to, you know, we started this episode talking about healthy masculinity, a healthy masculinity. What is your ideal of healthy masculinity? What does that really look like to you? And if you draw a blank, that's a perfectly expected bingo. That's the normal answer. But don't stop there. Start to delve into that. What does it mean to protect and serve? That's the phrase I use because I think that covers a big chunk of what most of the guys I'm working with are shooting for. But what does it mean for you and your life and your unique circumstances to protect? Does that mean you're a financial provider? Does that mean you are, you know, adding security cameras? Like, what does this look like for you and what does serve look like for you? Again, it's your unique life, your unique relationship with your partner and your unique circumstances with your family and baby. Et cetera.

David Arrell: [00:17:31] But don't just leave that as a I don't know, because if you have an ideal, it gives you something to sort of like lean towards or strive towards or try to bring from the ideal into the real. So number two would be what are your aspirations when it comes to being a great partner and a great dad? And again, like Sarah's question was spot on because she wants you to write this down.

David Arrell: [00:17:53] Don't just sort of have a vague notion and think you've answered the question, like actually write it down as a great partner. What that means to me is this. And then you write out five things about what you think about being a great partner, given your capacity, preferences, abilities, etcetera are, and what does it mean to be a great dad to baby? Because again, the relationship is primary, but then what does it mean to be a great dad and being reliable and dependable, also able to soothe your infant, not just, oh, I don't know. Baby's crying. Here you go, Mama. Like you want to develop these capacities to where you are. The one, a co-parent there.

David Arrell: [00:18:29] And then finally, what do I want my future trajectory to look like? Do I want to work more? Do I want to work less? Are we planning to have more

kids? Even if that's an open question like these, this is day one for the rest of your life and what do you want to have as that vision beyond just your personal sense of healthy masculinity, beyond just your relationships with your partner and baby? But are you are you trying to make partner at your firm? And if so, how does that fit into this other thing, these other things that are more important? Are you trying to semi-retire in a few years? Are you trying to get a remote job?

David Arrell: [00:19:00] Getting more clarity on all of these things almost acts as a sort of like the secret like a magnetic attractor to help you achieve those goals by moving you forward, but also can sort of magnetize the circumstances around you to make achieving those goals a little bit more easy and a little bit quicker. The more clear you are about having articulated them and the very list that Sarah wisely asked you to write down with a pen and paper where you can see it every day.

Sarah Trott: [00:19:29] Thank you so much, David. If someone wants to work with you directly, can they do that and how can they do that?

David Arrell: [00:19:37] Yes, thank you, Sarah. They can reach out to me directly at David at Welcome to fatherhood.com. I answer all my own emails. I don't have a publicist team. I don't have executive assistants. It's me and I will happily answer your emails in addition to that direct question.

David Arrell: [00:19:54] Support. You know, Sarah was kind enough to recommend my book, Welcome to Fatherhood, which can be purchased on Amazon. I definitely recommend the audible version because I'm reading it so you get all the proper inflections. And you know, FYI, there's a few curse words there. I'm from Philly. We like a little salt and pepper on our food and a little salt and pepper in our language. So just don't listen to it. If you have an older child in the back seat, you may be having some 'splaining to do to mama as to where they heard that word, but it's easy to listen to when you're at the gym or driving to work or whatnot.

David Arrell: [00:20:24] And then I have some classes and workshops and coaching sessions. There's a lot of ways to connect with me and my work, and I try to make it a

variety. So if you want to be quiet and just sit in your room, you can read my blog. If you want to really get involved, you can show up at one of the new dad support groups I have, or you can set up a coaching relationship. Just do one on one with me. There's a lot of options out there. I aim to protect and serve my audience as well.

Sarah Trott: [00:20:51] Thank you, David. You've very generously offered a special offer for listeners of Fourth Trimester Podcast exclusively. So, folks, if you want to take advantage of this, please do so. When you're booking with David, please mention Fourth Trimester Podcast. You can use a discount code which is "WELCOME4TH" for 25% off of his thriving workshops, the mapping exercises. So definitely book him. Use the discount code. We'll put all this information on our website as well so you can find it on fourthtrimesterpodcast.com. We'll link to the book. It will all be there, so go check it out. Thank you so much, David. We really appreciate your conversation and your time today.

David Arrell: [00:21:33] Thank you, Sarah. I appreciate you having me on your show here today. It's been a great chat with 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.