

Fourth Trimester Podcast

Episode 107: Listening Partnerships, Unlocking Deeper Connection, and Elevating Family Dynamics

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: [00:00:00] Hi, this is Sarah Trott and welcome back to the Fourth Trimester Podcast. I'm here with a special guest today who I'll introduce in a moment. Today's topic is all about listening partnerships. So what they are, the benefits of them, how they work, and some practical tools you can use right away to put this practice into place for yourself. And the guest who I have, is someone who's really special to me. She's a dear friend, and she is absolutely the perfect person to join me for this topic because she is actually, in real life, my listening partner. And we've done a lot of talking over the years, in fact, several years when we started this off. So we'll be going deep on that and I'm going to introduce more about her in a moment.

Sarah Trott: [00:00:51] And I want to remind everyone that we have a website which is fourthtrimesterpodcast.com. Please go and sign up for our newsletter if you have not done that yet. So you can get all kinds of information and resources from us directly into your inbox, and then also wherever you listen to your podcast, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, please hit subscribe and follow or any other apps that you use so that you can be notified every time we release a new episode.

Sarah Trott: [00:02:19] So Kaitlin Solimine is a dear friend of mine who I've known for years, and she and I started our own listening partnership three or so years ago. And she is so interesting because when you meet someone in the context of a mom group, which is how Kaitlin and I met, you don't necessarily know a lot about them other than you. It's like you know everything about them and nothing at the same time, because you're going through this incredibly powerful transition into parenthood and sharing experiences at the same time together as new parents of young children. And so cracked wide open emotionally in a lot of sharing goes along with that and the mom group kind of setting. But then at the same time as an equalizer what people do for a living isn't something that's necessarily shared or encouraged. It's really like we're there to connect about the topic of going through this transition together and supporting one another.

Sarah Trott: [00:03:20] And some of the other things kind of don't apply. In fact, we had a great episode on mom groups with Rebecca Walsh. So if you're interested in mom groups as a topic, go back and listen to that episode. It's fantastic. And so this is a long

way of saying, like, I was going through Kaitlin's bio ahead of this recording, and I just find her so incredibly impressive professionally as well as her deep friendship that I have developed with her.

She is a published novelist. She has started her own companies, and her companies as a founder have been very successful. So that's incredible. She is a podcast host and she is also a mother. And I will mention her podcast now because, it's one also to go ahead and listen to and follow. It's called Postpartum Production, which is all about the intersection of caregiving and art and how to maintain a creative practice through early parenting. So that's really cool. A lot of people find a lot of creative juice flowing, after they become a parent. So, Kaitlin, welcome to the program.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:04:28] Thank you. Sarah, I've been obviously such a fan of this podcast and of you personally for a long time, so I'm excited to actually be here. That's a very out of body moment a little bit. And also to talk about listening partnerships. When you proposed this, I was a little bit like, oh, what is a listening partnership? Is that what we're doing? That is what we're doing? Okay. How does that work? And I think, like you, I didn't really understand the parameters until they were proposed. And then it was a really helpful framework to reorient myself around how I listen in general, not just, you know, in friendships, but in other partnerships. And so it's still a work in progress, for sure, for me, which we can talk about, but. Yeah.

Sarah Trott: [00:05:22] Yes. No. I'm so grateful for you and the friendship and the listening partnership that we have as well. And I agree, I'm so thrilled to have you on the program after, you know, knowing that you also have your own show for so long.

Sarah Trott: [00:05:37] Well, I think it could be useful for us to set the stage and some context around just the basics of what a listening partnership is. So you know, we learned about the concept through Reise Tanner, who was someone who we were in a mom group together with. And you know, what she is so brilliant at doing is creating vulnerability and connectedness and openness in a small group setting. And she's also a very talented storyteller. She's been on this show as well. So I'll put in the show notes, a link to that program as well, because I think she has a lot to offer, and she's done a

really lovely episode with us about realizing one's potential as a parent. So bookmark that one.

Sarah Trott: [00:06:25] And so what Reise is so good at doing in group settings is pairing up people who she thinks will have good chemistry to have these kinds of conversations and partnerships. And she recommended that the two of us, me and Kaitlin, pair up.

Sarah Trott: [00:06:40] And what a listening partnership is at its core is kind of exactly what it sounds like. It's an opportunity to be open and speak and be listened to. So it's that core concept of being seen and heard and listened to without interruption. And really, it's about holding a space for someone in a mindful way where you're not just meeting up with a friend for coffee and chatting, but you're being very mindful about listening without judgment, listening without interrupting, and without giving advice.

It's really about allowing someone to be open and vulnerable and speak about their thoughts and their feelings and their needs, and then to feel accepted and loved and feel kindness as the result of that sharing. So that's my definition in a nutshell. And I'd love to hear what you think as well, Kaitlin.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:07:38] Yeah, I think that that was probably hard for me. Like, I think that my impulse and I don't know how much we could, should, should get on this on this podcast, but maybe it's unique to me. Maybe it's just human. Maybe it's, I don't know, cultural in some ways, but I feel it's hard for me not to want to do that, dive in and say, oh, have you thought about this? Or oh, have you considered this resource? Or oh you know, this is what worked for me or something like that.

And so really just listening. I recognized him myself early on how hard that was. I know that sounds terrible. I feel like I am a good listener, but it's like, it's just like, you know, it took me a little time to recognize those impulses in myself and to and to also see how helpful it is to do that and also to be provided that on the flip side, too I think even more so potentially for me as well, to have someone just listening. but yeah, I think I was thinking as you were talking too, about Reise's groups.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:08:55] And I actually had recommended her to to my sister in law recently because she is a young child and just moved to the city, and there's been nothing. I've done a lot of mom groups, and while they've been lovely, there's been nothing like, I know you and I are both like repeat alums of her group as well, and I think there's something that's happening in those connections and in the space that she creates.

I think also in some ways, the types of people that she draws in. And again, I think there's something like relating to listening partnerships that tends to be people who want to be able to be vulnerable in that way. And so I think that's probably what makes it so fruitful. And was obviously compelling and exciting to me, and I assume to you too. But yeah, I think there was like a little bit of overlap there and probably why, for the two of us then it created an environment that could facilitate that as well.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:10:04] And it was, I guess, Covid, I don't know why it feels relevant to me just in terms of what has happened through that and just early parenting and a young child through that and the listening partnership, you know, and how that's played a role of of having to navigate, not being able to be in person as well and what sort of, you know, like what sort of ways you can connect with people when you're not able to actually be in physical contact with them?

Sarah Trott: [00:11:02] Yeah. And I think it's like a few points we can pick on there, like, on one hand, as new parents, it can be really hard to find time to get together. Right so there's like that organizational aspect. you know, pandemic or not, there's just that challenge. and so being able to be virtual has been very nice. and Reise's groups are virtual, which is helpful. Like we all had the option because we were in the same geographic area in real life anyway, to get together in person if we wanted to, but it certainly wasn't necessary and that was helpful. And then, yeah, just the convenience of it being, you know, you can just be where you are and pick up and dial on online. That was useful.

Sarah Trott: [00:11:52] And then, you know, for sure, it was like we went through a lot of tough stuff together at the same time, not only transitioning into parenting, but, being through a very unique experience with the pandemic, where we didn't have a lot of information and it was hard to feel connected. That was also a huge benefit of having a listening partner.

Sarah Trott: [00:12:12] And, you know, like I said, I think there is definitely a difference between just meeting up with friends and then happening to talk about something versus the listening partnership. They're very different. Sometimes there can be expectations or feelings around, not wanting to share anything that feels negative because it might be burdensome to someone, or you might or you could feel shamed for being so vulnerable, or someone might dismiss your feeling or just kind of brush it off.

Whereas when you're making the effort to have conversation in this way, you're really inviting an openness and vulnerability and meeting it in kind and not necessarily turning around and saying, uh oh, well, this is, you know, that's tough, but that's his fault. Or this is, you know, just kind of the kinds of things that people can say when they're trying to be well-meaning, but it ends up feeling dismissive or shaming.

That's something that's really hard for vulnerability in general. I've certainly found that it can develop over time. And the degrees of openness and vulnerability can increase over time with trust and experience with someone. It's like openness and vulnerability begets openness and vulnerability that people feel more comfortable. Like if one person kind of starts making a bit of a leap, then that can be additive and people can feel more comfortable based on how you like you're expressing yourself.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:13:59] Right, right. Yeah. As you were talking, I was thinking too, about, you know, how we've come to know each other through this. And also, I guess I had two questions for you since we're talking about listening partnerships. and they're kind of for myself too, at the same time it is like, first is, Do you feel like you need to approach someone, whether they're someone you know casually or someone you know deeply and say like, do you want to have a listening partnership with me? Like, is it something that you have to have that framework set? That's the first question.

And then the second is: Do you need to be considered friends with them? Or like, how close do you need to know them ahead of that? Like, I don't know if they're, you know, since this is a topic of this conversation. I was curious about your experiences, and I'm happy to talk also about some experiences I've had around, around in and around listening partnerships and, um. Yeah. What do you think?

Sarah Trott: [00:15:00] Yeah. So the questions were like, how do you go about inviting someone? And then secondly, do you have to be friends? Right. Consider who you are asking. I don't know, kind of speaking to the second question first, I don't know that you necessarily need to be close friends. I think that if you can connect with someone who you know might want the same thing or you have something in common with, I think both.

You know, on the fourth trimester, we're speaking to new and expecting parents, and they're supporting communities here. So the context of this conversation is parenting, but I suspect these are going to be really valuable tools for anyone in any walk of life. Right? We're all humans, and we all have the human experience in our feelings and our needs and the universal need to be seen and heard and valued. So in this context of parenting, finding someone else who maybe has children around the same age could be useful and then testing the waters with them. Have you heard of a listening partnership? No. Oh, hey. Well, I just listened to this great podcast. Why don't I send it to you? If this sounds like something you're interested in doing, I'd love to try it out with you. I think that would be a great thing to do. so that would be my take on it. Yeah, I'd love to hear yours.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:16:21] No, I think it's funny because I don't know if it's around the same time, one of my friends who I am very close friends with had proposed a listening partnership with me. So this friend who had proposed this listening partnership with me, we pretty much ran that on Marco Polo, which is an app that I think you and I have used, we've used as well. And it's a way to leave each other video and audio messages. and honestly, we don't always use it.

Sometimes we'll use an audio, and I've actually been doing this a lot more. It is like text audios of just leaving a text audio message, which I think as a parent, especially in early parenthood. Like I don't have time to just sit and type or I'm like, in the car, I'm walking and I just want to leave a message or I want to hear a message. And so I find that that format works a lot better for my life right now.

But she had proposed this a while ago. and honestly, I haven't even checked it. I'm like, maybe I need to check in with her. Like, are we still doing a listing? Is this what we call this? Are we following the rules? I don't know, we can dig in deeper therapy sessions around my obsession with rules.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:17:45] But I think that you know, I guess what I'm saying is that for me, I have a number of friendships that have found this format of leaving each other these long, long long form, I guess you could say, monologues of talk. And then my responsibility on the other end is to sit and listen and then to respond. some of that is in response to that, and some of it is my own space of where I'm at. And they don't always totally sink in or intersect.

But I know that I'm there and I know that they're there for me. And I've actually found that I have a handful of these relationships right now in my life. and they're with a wholly diverse, I say, wholly like w h o l l y not how holy they are, though they sometimes feel quite spiritual. but they are diverse sets of individuals from totally different walks of my life. whether that's you know, someone I met abroad at some point. one interestingly, which I find really lovely and I haven't even voiced this to her, and now I wish I could.

We only intersected friends in a mutual friend who was. I met through another mutual friend, introduced us because we both happen to live in San Francisco at the same time. We only really probably met up a few times in person, and then she moved out of the country, and then the pandemic hit and blah blah, blah, blah blah.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:19:29] But we've maintained this type of almost like a listening partnership that we've maintained. and it's really interesting to think about, like how we've built this friendship virtually through that one unifying factor, for the most part, I

say, aside from one friend is parenthood for sure, is that we are all we are all currently mothers and our mothering pretty young children for the most part. So I think that there's, there's something that's a necessity in that moment for us. I think it's both the listening part of it. And it's also honestly, in many ways, the utility of how our time is managed.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:20:25] And it's very hard, as you know, and I'm sure listeners of this podcast know it's really, really hard to have synchronous conversations. I say that because one of my dearest, other listening partner friends is always - she's a scientist and she's always like, is 'are we going to have an asynchronous or a synchronous call'? I've never heard those terms until we started talking.

But you know, it's hard to find the time to actually have conversations live. And especially when, you know, we're busy and even with people that, like you and I, that, like, live. What? Maybe three miles away from each other. Like you have to actually get into virtual spaces to have conversations.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:21:07] But I do think there's something about that, like finding ways to connect and really not just finding, but really wanting and yearning for that connection and for those vulnerable and also supported spaces. I think what's really valuable about listening partnerships, whether they have that specific framework or not.

But you know that there's someone that's there that you're kind of on a little track with, right? Like there's a pace to like, oh, I'm responding and they're there, you know, they're going to leave me a message. And right, like there's a consistency, at least in in the conversation and the relationship. And so I feel really grateful because when you proposed this, I thought I was thinking about it, I was like, oh, wow. I do actually have a number of really lovely relationships that through this have been able to also continue the friendship, which is nice. and in fact, one of the friends yesterday, I was listening to her polo and she said, the thing that I like so much about this is that I actually really feel like I know what's going on in your life in a way that I don't think I would if we otherwise, we probably wouldn't have the ability to connect as much. Or she's like, I feel like we get

to go deeper because we can just have that sharing space kind of just letting ourselves go a bit versus if we're trying to catch up, it's like a little bit more superficial.

I think at times when you're, you know, you haven't talked to a friend in a while and you're just like, oh, what's going on in your life? Versus like, really having this space and time to dig deeper so that that was interesting that she raised that point actually in a polo yesterday. I'm like, I actually feel like I, you know, I know what's going on. And so we can have these deeper conversations too. and whether they're live or not you know, I think it's just it allows the relationship to find a kind of more. Yeah. Like a more grounded space to exist. yeah. But I don't know what your experience has been in your listening partnerships. I'm curious. Or how you feel like the framework works or doesn't work or like what you would tweak.

Sarah Trott: [00:23:33] Well, thank you for sharing that story. We should talk about some of the nitty gritty because you talked about rules. Yeah. And there are, if you Google around, there's all kinds of great guides I would recommend. Like Hand in Hand is a great resource and they have guides for how to do these things. So we'll link to that resource in the show notes.

But the typical setup would be you identify someone who's also interested in having this listening partnership, sharing kind of relationship. And then you can either pick a specific topic or not. You can decide if you want to do it live in person or virtually live or asynchronously with a tool like Marco Polo, like what Kaitlin and I use or not. And these are all choices, and they're all okay.

Like, there's no set way - the rule is basically more about the respectful listening and the non-judgmental non-advice aspect of listening and essentially holding space for that other person to share. And then the benefits that come out of being purposeful about those aspects specifically.

Sarah Trott: [00:25:06] And if someone's getting this started, my \$0.02 would be if you're not sure where to start and you don't have subject matter that you want to start

with, I think something that's really nice is you can start with your high and your low for the day or the week.

You can just say, this was my high and my low and my preschooler actually does this at school. And she calls it her rose and her thorn. And I have incorporated that into my language actually, now. And so our family talks about roses and thorns. And that can be a way to be vulnerable and open up about something that was hard. And what's interesting is sometimes I'll ask people these questions and they think, oh, okay, I've got my rose, I've got my rose, my thorn. That's a hard one. I don't know if I had one. Oh wait, yes I did. And then that opens up the conversation in a different way. That's an easy icebreaker type of opener for having those conversations either in the session or just in the relationship.

Sarah Trott: [00:25:54] So going back to some of what you just said, Kaitlin, I love the convenience of it being asynchronous and I have a story to share about our listening partnership, which is a couple of things. One is I have such fond memories of, like getting your polos when we were both, you know, we both had infants, and you were like, like on a walk, and you had your mask on and you're like, walking up a hill or something, and you're, like, doing various things and then I would kind of get this message where you, you wanted to talk and share something that was going on with you.

And then I would do the same thing. I would respond, and you would see me like in my backyard in between work meetings or something like that, where I just needed some fresh air and a cleansing moment to go outside and express myself and talk about whatever's going on with my family and my life and and share my feelings and needs in that moment.

And what happened out of that is that when the first time I came over to your house, because we'd been kind of previously having met either in various places around San Francisco in real life or virtually, I came to your house and I felt like I'd been there many, many times because I'd just seen you, you know, in your environment so many times.

And I think that's something that's really neat, is that when you're using a tool like Marco Polo or, you know, something like that, then you get the chance to see the person's face and you see their expressions. And that's I think that's part of what creates the closeness in that sense of closeness. And, or and simply hearing someone's voice, even, as you said, with voice memos, I think you kind of get the same thing out of that to a degree. Right?

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:27:44] Yeah, text doesn't feel as connected.

Sarah Trott: [00:27:45] Yeah. In a way you don't get with an email or texting. Yeah. Agreed. So I think on that point, I agree 100%. I think that's a big part of it.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:27:54] Yeah. No, I agree, although I have to say that with polo I see my friends do this too. And I remember like it's like you're always like, especially if you're going it's like you're like, oh, what is like, I don't want to see me. I know you see me now, but like, I don't want to see like a lot of my friends will be like in the car. And it's like, you know, it's like they're driving and it's like, oh, where am I putting the phone? Or I'm putting it over here and it's like, you know, this angle, which is super fun.

Speaking of vulnerability, I'm like, I love that my friend. Like, all of us can, like, have these vulnerable video moments where we definitely don't look our best. And yet we're willing to share emotionally and physically with each other. And that at that moment, which is kind of a fun part of that. yeah, like always. And I just feel like so much of that is, is nice to see and also makes you just feel so much more connected to the person, right, of like, wow, you're really letting me in in your life right now because, you know, this isn't the perfect Sarah that I'm seeing right now. Like, this is Sarah in between moments, like finding the time.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:29:01] And also just taking, I think to your point earlier, I think you were mentioning this of just like, it sort of feels like a breath, right? Like when you were saying like, oh, I was between meetings and I went to decide I just needed to stand outside. And it sort of gives you that pause in your day. of wherever you are, to just take that moment. I find that really nice. And so especially if in the listening partnership you

each are doing that, then it can kind of, you know, each time you dip into it, you're both like, if you're listening, you're listening to someone who's saying, I want to take this time right now. And even if they are busy while they're doing it, they're driving there, but they're trying to be more present in that moment and sit with themselves and sit with you. And so I think that that can be a really nice, a nice way to connect.

Like I was thinking, I have a friend in London and she always walks out in like, I don't know, the heath. Is that what it's called there? Like, it's just like, it's so beautiful. And it's like every time she connects with me, she's usually on one of these walks and she'll sometimes like, show me where she is or. But I can, like, really feel that that's her moment or another friend will often be running. Although I had to ask her, I'm like, I don't know if I can listen to you running while you're running anymore because it's very it's very shaky.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:30:22] So speaking of rules, like I had to kind of like set a boundary and be like, it's hard for me to hear you when you're running. Maybe walking is a little easier. but every now and again she'll be like, sorry, I'm running, and I just have to. I just have to say this one thing. I just have to get this off my chest or whatever. but, yeah, I don't know.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:30:42] So speaking of rules, I guess, like, they can also be distinct to that partnership, right? Like, it might be something where you feel like you need that person to really be, like, sitting down and not moving or on yourself. Or maybe it's a rule for yourself. Like, you feel like I need to. If I'm going to do this, I need to not be also doing other things at the same time or something like that. I don't know.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:31:09] Or how are you? Like a rule. You seem like a. You seem to me like someone. Like even. It's fun to be on this podcast with you. I was thinking like, because you're very structured in your thinking. and so I'm curious if like for listening partnerships, do you prefer to have structure or do you prefer to have it be something that can be more loose, I guess.

Sarah Trott: [00:31:35] Yeah. My answer is that it depends. So if it's asynchronous like what we do, which is kind of my preferred approach, then I feel very like, not bound because of my own needs. I choose when to listen in a time that works for me. Like, you know, talking about boundaries, you know, finding the appropriate time and space where I have the capacity to be a present listener and not feel like it's something that I feel time pressure around is really important for me. So I would say that.

But if it were live, which is also very lovely and I have done that, I think some of the things that are helpful in the guidelines that I would like to adhere to is one, have a set period of time, we're going to talk for five minutes or 10 minutes or 20 minutes each and try to be respectful of that, because as a busy parent, that's important to me, like being becoming a parent and also being a professional person. Like there's nothing that's better for time management than, you know, having a lot of time requirements outside of work. Right? Everything's done. Everything's organized. Parents know how to get stuff done, which is amazing.

Sarah Trott: [00:32:56] So if it's going to be live, then having that set of time and then you can use a timer, like on your watch or your phone or something, and then when the timer goes off, give that person another minute or so to finish their final thought, whatever they're going to say, wrap it up. And then at that point you can have like a little palate cleanser, something to bring them back out of that sharing mode and into a different plane. Like name six different kinds of nuts, you know, like just completely different, something different.

Sarah Trott: [00:33:30] And then from there, the only other thing I would say is from a guideline perspective or rule perspective, it can be nice if the thing that is on your mind is potentially triggering for that other person. Do you think that might be the case to ask them first? This is the thing I want to talk about. Do you have the capacity for that at this moment? I think it can be really nice because it's just a respectful step that I would want to put in place if it were in particular, specifically if it were live. I suppose that's true. also, if it's an asynchronous topic, but I think it's just a really nice, respectful thing you can do for the other person.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:34:14] Yeah. What? You were saying that too? I was thinking that I was listening and thinking like, is that allowed? no, and I was thinking about how, especially with parenting, there's so much where I mean, there's a whole industry around solving problems or, well, problems. I mean, I'm sure you and I know that having listened to a lot of your podcasts like you're addressing this and I'm also addressing this in my podcast of there's so many structural issues that parents and families face, especially in the United States. And then there's a whole industry that's trying to make you pay money to solve those problems, as opposed to creating obviously much better conditions so that those problems don't exist.

All that being said, I think that a lot of the times, some of the venting or like the, the, the challenges that someone's facing especially when it comes to parenting and early parenting, right. Like there's this there's this impulse to say like, oh, well, here's a solution to that problem. Right. And so I think what's really beautiful about listening partnerships is there's not meant to be a solution. Right. And that the space is a space to share and to be and to be held and to be listened to and to be to understand or to to feel that that the person on the other side of that is really there and they're not going to try to intervene or guide you in a certain direction or make it all better. Right?

I think that's also probably ... I don't know how American this is, but this sense of having big feelings, right? Like we need to fix them, that having feelings is not okay and we need to kind of like hold them in and tamp them down. So whether it's like a feeling of rage or defeat or you know, like really being at rock bottom in some way like that sometimes, just like getting that out right can be so helpful. and I think knowing someone in your life that, you know, can hold that space and not try to solve it for you is really nice. And I think I feel really grateful because, like I was saying, I feel like I've found that in a lot of people and at times, right.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:36:26] Something I've also learned is like, like you said, when you say how to set the parameters, kind of at the beginning of like, this is going to be a challenge for you. This topic is something that I haven't ever done and I need to do, haven't done prior, I guess, to kind of learning about all of this. And, and I'm trying to do more often is to say, are you looking for advice right now or are you just sharing? Right?

Because even outside of listening partnerships, people obviously are always sharing things and sometimes it feels like again, or do they actually want you? Sometimes, right. Someone does want you, or sometimes you want that like you're like, no, I need, I need, I can't figure this out like I really need.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:37:07] Like I recently wrote to a few friends about night weaning my toddler because I have had some health issues and it just feels like, okay, I'm ready. I don't know if she's quite ready, but like, it always sort of at this time feels like the right time. And so I wrote to a few friends who I knew had nursed to a certain point, and, and I was very explicitly asking right for their experiences and advice. but there might be a moment where I'm like, I don't want advice, I just need to share. I'm having a really hard time, and I had a terrible night's sleep, and I don't want you to tell me how to fix it. I just want to share. and I think that for me personally, I could be better at framing where I'm at and like, explaining, like, actually, I don't want advice right now, or I really do want advice right now. and I think that maybe, maybe, I don't know if these listening partnerships have sort of given me more of a sense of how to do that. Like, I do feel like, again, it's a work in progress, but I'm feeling like I'm better at it over time. And also now I can see that impulse and others in my life and say and recognize that it comes from a place of love, but it doesn't always hit the right way, right? Like it's always coming from a place of love when someone is trying to help.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:38:22] One last thing. On that note, I know I'm talking a lot, but one last thing was that I didn't know I had so much to say about this. my brother, if I can say this on the podcast, I think recently was telling me about a framework that he came across in the therapeutic world around, and I'm totally not going to get it right. But maybe we can find the resource and link to it somewhere. But it was about in relationships, like how you. How you respond to things. And that advice was actually like, the last thing you should do is like, give advice. So it was like working down these steps and I can ask him if he has the it was like an acronym, you know, and it had and then like advice was like the last thing.

And I thought that was so funny because that's sort of not my family of origin. And so I think growing up and becoming a parent also, like, right within your relationships with

your children there's always this instinct to protect and to make sure that they're okay and to fix. Right. and so unlearning that for me has been a huge process. But I do think that, again, these listening partnerships and these relationships are ways that you can practice that and can cultivate that in other relationships in your life. So I've been grateful for Sarah for you, for helping me. It's always a work in progress. But I do feel like I've learned a lot through these kinds of relationships where listening is definitely a skill to cultivate.

Sarah Trott: [00:40:01] Oh my goodness 100%. Yes, 100%. I feel exactly the same way. And I'm so grateful for you too. And, the benefits that you're mentioning are things like, learning in your own self-development. Talking about breaking generational patterns. That's huge. Just being aware of being able to discuss those and also practice that change through the listening partnership is huge.

Sarah Trott: [00:40:28] And it's really a form of self care. I would say what are the benefits of listening partnerships. Certainly self-care. It's something that's for you. We've talked a lot about friendship and developing connection. Connection is so important throughout our whole lives, especially for adults in their sunset years. It's been a factor that's tied to all kinds of outstanding benefits for people. And as it relates to their health and their happiness.

Sarah Trott: [00:40:54] And then as it relates to parenting specifically, I don't know about you, but when I'm able to process something that's hard or, you know, when you have like a feeling you're like irritated or unhappy or there's something going on that's hard, being able to to stop and take care of myself and process those feelings and express them and get that off my chest, so to speak. It's huge. Because then having done that, I'm a more patient and present parent. You know, I'm much better able to care for myself and my family in that way. Even if it's just like a five minute SOS, like help. I just need to talk for five minutes. This thing blah. Get it out. And then, you know, it's like something that's, you know, released in my body, and I can go and I can parent in a different kind of way. So I think that's a huge benefit that makes this whole thing worthwhile. and a very real, very helpful tool for parents.

Sarah Trott: [00:41:55] And using Marco Polo was a huge part of that for me, in part because like I said, I as a busy parent, like it was hard to find the time, you know, several times a week to try to meet up with someone in person, like, that's like you're dreaming. That's not going to happen. Balancing work and kids and all the things. It's just too much. So I think that there's just a fantastic benefit from that respect, just to be able to pick up in the moment and, and feel like I'm seeing someone's face, being able to connect with them and really feel heard and seen. So I mean, I don't know how you feel, but those are some of the biggest benefits I've experienced for sure.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:42:40] Yeah, absolutely. I think like you said too, I think that in doing that we're modeling how to do that for our children as well. So I think there's that added kind of ancillary benefit of taking that time and having those relationships and being vulnerable or, you know, I think, like you said, stepping away and protecting that space for ourselves, I think it has been for me. It doesn't feel selfish. It doesn't I don't feel guilty at all about the time that I take to maintain and nourish those partnerships. and I think that, you know, like you said, it makes me be able to show up in my life in a much better way. And so I'm really grateful for them.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:43:30] And what I love is how unexpected they often are, too. whether it's the conversations themselves or the people with whom you do connect. Right? Like you just kind of don't know where it's going to come, but it feels like it for me at least. It feels like it's snowballed in that once I started it, it became easier to do with a diverse set of relationships. So I'm really grateful for that too.

Sarah Trott: [00:43:55] Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Especially like, I don't know, it's just I think it's a little bit cultural and like societal, like we're just not necessarily encouraged to, you know, like the whole thing about, like, women should just smile and, you know, be strong and kind of take care of everybody, like all of those, like, falsehoods around, you know, in expectations, unrealistic expectations of motherhood and of parenthood and you know, not needing help, like, it's okay to ask for help.

And actually, it's necessary to have a village around you, to support you in lots of practical and social and emotional ways. and I would I would just say to all of the

parents and their supporting communities out there who are listening right now, take this tool of listening partnerships and put it in your toolbox. It's one part of a sort of a whole array of things that you can do around self-care and nurturing that, like help support you in your parenting journey.

Sarah Trott: [00:44:58] So especially if you weren't raised in an environment that encouraged you to express all of your feelings in the full array. Sometimes, every family has its own culture even. so it can feel hard at first to open up if it's not something that was naturally modeled for you or demonstrated and, you know it felt safe, if it didn't feel safe for you to express sadness or anger or fear or any of these things like it can be hard to like, learn how to do that, but so absolutely rewarding in the long run.

Sarah Trott: [00:45:32] So yeah, I mean, I think we've covered a lot here. And I would love to just invite you to share any other thoughts that you wanted to share on the subject.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:45:43] Well, yeah. I think just one last thing was, as you were thinking, and probably because I'm obsessed with this idea, it's not even an idea reality on my podcast, which is of productive time that this doesn't have to be a space where anything happens, where there isn't a goal even. Right? And I like that. I like that in some ways it's very counter to the pressures that we face as mothers in American society. And so it feels like this tiny little you know, sort of reactionary little jab at like, hey, we're going to take this time. And like, I'm not doing, you know, even if it doesn't, it doesn't produce anything specific. Right.

But it still matters and it matters and it can matter in a really important way socially, communally, you know, personally and I like that it can sit outside of that framework. and I feel like it. Yeah, it works against some of the constraints of time and work and productivity and yeah. So like, that's why the idea of the framework is nice. I think there isn't really a goal to it. Right? It's really just sitting in it and letting it be what it is, I think is something that was hard. It was harder for me for a number of reasons we don't have to get into it on this podcast. But it was harder for me to be comfortable with.

But now I really love and love to just kind of dive into listening to others. Sharing feels so nourishing, even for me. and again, it's not it shouldn't just be like, oh, it's about me again. but like, you know, but it is, it is about taking that time. And obviously our time is really valuable and challenging to protect when we're in, you know, the throes of early parenting especially. But it feels all the more important to have that space for yourself too.

Sarah Trott: [00:48:05] I couldn't agree more. Thank you. And I think that's a lovely place for us to start to wrap up. And I thank you again, Kaitlin, for being such a wonderful guest. Oh, thanks for having me. it's been such a pleasure to talk.

Sarah Trott: [00:48:19] And I want to mention for the final time, that, again, we've listed a lot of resources throughout this conversation, will put them in the show notes and link out to Fourth Trimester Podcast with all the resources and links. We'll also put links out to some of the ideas we discussed for practical tools, for having your listening partnerships asynchronously. And we'll also have a link for Marco Polo, since we've called that one out a few times specifically, so you can try that out for yourself.

Thank you Kaitlin. Appreciate you.

Kaitlin Solimine: [00:49:22] Thank you so much, 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 Spotify](#). 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.