S2EP5 - Where Evolutionary Parenting Meets Modern Practice: A Conversation On Postpartum, Parenting Culture, And Creative Pursuits With Tracy Cassels

[00:00:00] **Tracy:** It's okay to struggle in a society that doesn't support you. It's okay to be like, this doesn't work and I have to get some stuff done. The question is then how do you approach those changes that you have to make with your family and mind and while considering everyone, so it's also looking at your child and saying, yep, this may not be the ideal.

It may not be what I want it to be, but how do I do it? Knowing what's most important to my child.

[00:00:28] **Kaitlin:** I am your host, Kaitiln Solimine, and this is the Postpartum Production Podcast. Here we hold conversations about the intersection of caregiving, creative practice, and capitalist production, as well as what it means to be producing art while also being a parent in modern society. Find out more@www.postpartumproduction.com, where you can also sign up for our newsletter.[00:01:00]

So I was just thinking that these recordings are these incredible little time capsules of sorts because. Of the way production works. Speaking of production, which is obviously such a core facet of this show, we take our time here and I hope that it shows in the quality of the conversations and the content and the audio quality as well.

We have a fantastic team that does really, really diligent work while also balancing parenthood. So this season we have Erin Greenhouse who has three year old twins and is an incredible editor that is working with us, and I recently talked to her because her children are on break and mine are also on tandem breaks.

So it feels like this eternity of trying to balance a different schedule, different routines, [00:02:00] caregiver schedules that are obviously out of whack, both from paid care and the unpaid care that we do as caregivers in the home, and I'm sort of reaching my breaking point. I just feel very tired and even the kids I can feel are frustrated as well.

So trying to take a pause here, and I know that even this audio will serve as a little memento to myself of Oh, right, remember that time. You know, a couple weeks, couple months ago or whatever that you were feeling that, where are we today? So just checking in on you, where you're at, and curious to hear your thoughts on the balance of routines and schedules and caregiving and the work that we do, both in and outside the home, but onto much more exciting things.

Today's conversation is with Tracy Castles, the director of Evolutionary Parenting. An online resource and community she founded in [00:03:00] 2011 after the birth of her daughter, Maddie Tracy studied cognitive science at uc. Berkeley received a master's in clinical psychology from the University of British Columbia and a PhD in developmental psychology, also from the University of British Columbia.

The focus of her dissertation work was on empathy and theory of mind. In young children, research she draws upon on evolutionary parenting. Her academic works have been published in peer review journals, including psychological assessment, midwifery, and more. She's worked in the nonprofit sector in education and social emotional development.

She's married to Brian and mother to two young kids and a stepmother to one older child. She lives in a small town in Prince Edward County, Ontario, Canada, and I came to know her work when seeking more evidence-based resources and early parenting, and I've always appreciated the community she builds. By way of her thoughtful

[00:03:47] **Tracy:** approach.[00:04:00]

[00:04:00] **Kaitlin:** Thank you so much for connecting today. I've been following your work, I think really since, I'm trying to remember how I came across it, but after I had my first child, I think I was just really hungry for it. Really smart and well-researched insights into the world of caregiving and what that looks like and ways in which we can unpack what we do and why we do it.

And I really appreciate what you bring to the conversation because I think there's so much out there and it can feel really overwhelming and I felt like you've provided through. Your website, your podcast, your community work, it always feels like it really comes from a place of a really deep and appreciated understanding.

So I just wanna start with that.

[00:04:49] **Tracy:** I just wanna say thank you so much. That's a lovely introduction and I'm happy to, it's, it's always nice to hear that someone has appreciated what you put [00:05:00] out there. Mm-hmm. As I'm sure you know, doing this, right? Mm-hmm. You do stuff and. You never really know the impact it can have.

And so when I hear about the impact at times, it really is so reaffirming that there are people out there, especially in today's world, where it seems like parenting has gotten so polarizing. Mm-hmm. And it does things one way or the highway. Mm-hmm. And there really doesn't seem to be the space for that kind of more academic look at everything that is much more nuanced and much more.

Unclear as to what the answers might be, right? Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. I always appreciate hearing how many people there are out there that have a thirst for that kind of intellectual exploration of these issues.

[00:05:41] **Kaitlin:** Yeah. Thank you. Well, I have so many questions, but given the nature of this podcast and that we focus on early postpartum, although we're expanding that out and we're having more conversations about later, Parenting experiences as well and the intersection of creative [00:06:00] process.

I would love to hear your journey personally to the work that you do, because I do think there's clearly a creative piece to it, and I'd love to just understand what compelled you to build this entire universe of evolutionary parenting and the approach that you have.

[00:06:17] **Tracy:** I will start by saying, I laugh cuz my, my husband always tells me I'm more creative than I will give myself credit for because I'm not that traditional artsy creative, right?

Like my daughter is, my husband is. I live around kind of art people, so I'm always like, that's not me. I am the logical minded, et cetera. But yes, there is creation in all of it. The journey started when I was pregnant with my daughter, as I think so many of these do. I was looking at the books that are out there, the ideas people held around parenting, and at the time I was in the midst of my PhD in developmental psychology and although I will say psychology has a lot of ethnocentric views.

[00:07:00] Mm-hmm. I at least had been looking at the research enough, so it started with me getting very confused by, it was birth actually, that that was starting off with this birth and breastfeeding. I was, as historical context, I was born at home. As were my brother and sister, and it was a concerted decision by my mother to have a home birth with midwives and everything.

And so I grew up and my siblings are much younger than I am, so I was well aware of each of their births, have full memories of the whole whole thing. And my mom also breastfed us until we self weaned. So I watched my brother and Sister nurse till anywhere between three and four years of age, and I was told I was the same.

I don't. Have a memory of, of that really. So I have to take my mom's word for it. And so I was approaching from that lens. Like most of us, we go into parenting of what we've experienced, what we knew, and we kind of plan on repeating for better or for worse, that's how we go into it. So I had this framework of planning.[00:08:00]

I wanted a home birth. I was gonna breastfeed for as long as my kids planned to, was how my mindset went. And then you're reading the books and you're hearing the nurses when you go in for ultrasounds, talking about the irresponsibility of home birth and everything, and getting comments from others. And I just thought, okay, something's just not right.

So I started looking more into the actual research at the time, right? Was my mom's some crazy hippie out there who is shooing the system and that's it? Or is there something here and. I kept finding that all the research I could pin, especially in Canada where I am, just didn't support this narrative in birth, that this was some horribly dangerous, backwards thing.

And in fact, when I branched out from even the medical research into more. Anthropological views of things. It really hit me that this is just our, our ideas seem completely backwards about all of it, and there's really a lot to be [00:09:00] going on with home birth and, and the supportive midwives from a, a cultural perspective.

Mm-hmm. A supportive perspective, but also even medically when you started bringing that research into it, it can be associated with much better outcomes in countries that have. Supportive systems for it. Mm-hmm. So that was kind of, I was ranting on that. Then I start looking at the breastfeeding rates and what we're seeing and what we're hearing.

And again, I'm just going, what is going on here? Mm-hmm. This is all contrary. Everyone's prepping me for formula, use this and that. I went to my prenatal class, offered a breastfeeding class, and my husband and I went. And it's all these other couples. And she went around asking, how long are you gonna breastfeed for?

And everyone had an answer, three months, six months, nine months, five months this month. And they get to me and I'm like, as long as my kid keeps going. And people looked at me like I had grown five heads right then and there. And there was just a lack of, well, what does that even mean? Kind of thought, like how do you even ascertain that?

So, [00:10:00] Throughout all this, I was talking to my husband and I really kept digging into the research more and would start ranting to him. And I, I was talking about it as kind of an evolutionary parenting view and he was the one that was just, I, I kind of semi joke that he got sick of being the only one I spoke to and hearing the same thing over and over again.

So he was the one that was like, you need to start writing this down. Like that's, let's just start you a blog and we'll go from there. And so, We did, and it was after my daughter was born because then I was now in the thick of it, and I had so many rants going on about how none of this really meshed with anything I had learned and read in the research, regardless of whether it was medical, psychological, anthropological.

So I started writing under the idea that no one would care at all what I thought, and it was probably gonna be a little too. Academic for most people. Mm-hmm. And, [00:11:00] and it was like that for a lot. And then there was one piece on actually bed sharing. Cause that was another thing that obviously crept up in the postpartum.

I, I bed shared right from the start. But it was, it was something that crept up and I, I started writing on that and suddenly there was just this influx of, I guess most people that are out there bed sharing for whatever reason, That were reassured by some of the data that was actually out there as opposed to the fear mongering that was going on, and so it's just kind of evolved from there.

It was, it started there and has continued on.

[00:11:34] **Kaitlin:** As you were talking, I was thinking that what I've always appreciated about your approach is that there's so much out there in the caregiving conversation and the parenting conversation and literature that's more mainstream, I guess, in some ways, but that really just, like you said, pits people against each other or makes people feel like whatever decision they're making for their family is the wrong decision, whatever it is, whether it's sleeping or feeding or discipline or whatever.

Right. And [00:12:00] I think what I always fall back upon personally, but that I see in your work as well, is that if we can just remove ourselves in a way from the situation and look at why are we feeling this pressure, whatever it is, most likely that pressure is not coming from something that has any basis in.

Biology or individual intuition or anything, there's some societal, cultural, structural constraint that we are up against and we get angry at the mother who seems to be doing it the different way, or the parent that's doing the different whatever it looks like, and that anger comes out. Personally when I think the anger actually really needs to be structural.

I mean, I've seen data, I dunno if it was on your side or elsewhere, I'm sure you've cited this somewhere, but for example, in countries where they have longer parental leave, breastfeeding rates are higher, mothers have lower rates of postpartum mood disorders. Like there's just so much more support. So when there's support, [00:13:00] things look different.

And so I think there's some of that for me where I just feel like. My early anger is misdirected and I worry, I see it repeating in a lot of new mothers that I have in my circles and it's like, can we redirect this and refocus?

[00:13:17] **Tracy:** You are spot on. And yes, I talk about this a lot because I think it is so important for us to understand why, why we feel the way we do.

Mm-hmm. And as you said, so much of it is driven by. Elements beyond our control. It's not really about individual choice for so much of what we face as parents. There are structures that really change how we approach. Everything right there are barriers, employment, maternity leave. Mm-hmm. Just even the nuclear family, right?

Mm-hmm. I often say to families when I have worked with them on sleep, one of your greatest solutions comes from Meredith Small's work, who is incredible, [00:14:00] and I think in terms of this discussion of structure like societal structure versus biology, her book, our babies Ourselves is like my go-to recommendation for families when they're reading because she really does break down.

What is biological and what is mm-hmm. Cultural and so it's so important to see that. But she was talking about in a podcast once with one of her students working with the Mohawks up in upstate New York, and she was doing, I guess a very in-depth look. So she was staying up there and one of the mothers, they lived in the traditional long houses where you have up to, I guess it's what, 12 to 15 adults and any kids in there.

And she, her student had, one of the families had a new baby. And saw that the way that they shared the work was that someone was almost always awake. They have a fire inside tending. And so mom would go to sleep and if baby woke up in the middle of the night, whoever was up, took the baby. Mm-hmm. And then if they needed to feed, would go get mom and feed and then go back and this is [00:15:00] just how it went all night.

So mom woke up, you know, yeah, you feed a few times, you wake up. But that level of. Rest. Mm-hmm. I think most parents would die for in the early stages, right? Mm-hmm. This is exactly what we want. Mm-hmm. So, It isn't that it's impossible, but in our society, the way we structure things, that level of support isn't there.

Mm-hmm. So unless you're willing to open your house to 12 other people to come live with you mm-hmm. And share the nighttime burden, we start having to look for other alternatives. Mm-hmm. And whether it's bed sharing, which is completely normal and by, you know, just have to get that out there.

Biologically, that is our history. Look at Jim McKenna's work on breast sleeping and all of it. Or people will go towards sleep training or something else. We're responding to our cultural pressure. Mm-hmm. To somehow make it all work. Mm-hmm. Whatever individual choices we make, and respond to those pressures and pit us against each other cuz we want everyone to do the same [00:16:00] thing we do.

Mm-hmm. Because we're in such a minefield of parenting. We want the support in numbers, I think is what it is, right? And I remember hearing someone say once, I wish I could remember who, but that parenting today in our society is so much harder than in a lot of other societies because for good or bad, when there's really one style of parenting that everyone follows, you do it and you just go along.

So whatever it is, everyone can relate. Everyone supports you. It's all there. In ours, there's so many different options everyone can pick. They're all in response to a society that is not supportive in everything. Mm-hmm. But then we present all these options and so everyone wants everyone else to pick the same things because I mean, from an evolutionary framework, we want to belong.

Right. That is so crucial, and it's one of the things I've brought up in other talks, in other courses, but you cannot ignore that need to belong with others because when we belong, we feel like they will support us through it. Now the reality is you could [00:17:00] pick the same choice as 20 other people in our society, and they're still not gonna support you.

So you're still better off picking what's best for you and your family. Mm-hmm. But that is part of what goes through to this, is that we want to belong. We have all these options, and as you said, they're all in response to just suboptimal circumstances otherwise. Mm-hmm. And we do need to realize that. I don't know how we get everyone to quite see it and then fight the system, but I do believe.

That a lot of parenting choices when we're going against the grain in our society are in a sense, a form of rebellion to mm-hmm. The structural things that are impeding the structural barriers to, to parenting in a way that I think is a bit more sane for everyone.

[00:17:55] **Kaitlin:** What always saddens me is that these cultural constraints then put [00:18:00] the pressure on the children as problems, whether it's a behavioral problem or a sleep problem, or a nursing problem, when so many of those problems don't exist. When the structures are there to support the scapegoat becomes the child or the mother.

I mean, really, that's it, right? It becomes the child and the mother when the problem is neither of those. So I just, my anger now is just at that system and also just trying to, in my personal work, like in friendships or whatever it looks like to say like the way your child is behaving is normal, what's abnormal is our expectations of the child in that setting.

I don't think I had that perspective earlier on, and it wasn't the framework that I had, but I just wish more people could see that because I think it would bring us together more than splitting us into these parenting wars around, oh, well if you don't attachment parent, or if you don't breastfeed for this [00:19:00] long, or don't do this for that long, and instead of it saying, oh, I wasn't successful at the, just even the terminology, it's like terrible binary terminology.

And then this expectation of what happens as a result in terms of your child and who they become in the world.

[00:19:17] **Tracy:** We've turned it into, if you don't do X, Y, Z, you name it, your kids living under a bridge by the time they're 30 with no hope of anything. I mean, the amount of times I heard that from parental choices.

Mm. Like the fact that I did let my children self wean. Oh my goodness. You'd think I just doomed them to a life of misery. This is exactly what you're saying. The burden falls on the mother and the child. Mm-hmm. And that is, Very clearly the sign of a patriarchal culture though. Mm-hmm. Right? Mm-hmm. That is exactly what we do there, is we look at everything that they provide and, and offer as invaluable, and because of that, [00:20:00] That is what we end up fighting against is thinking that they're the problem and that's what needs to be fixed, because goodness knows it can't possibly be that in a capitalist society the problem is, with something else like structure of work, the value that we put on caring or allowing children to develop into their own people as opposed to getting prepared for. Being part of a, another kind of societal machine. And it is so hard to get people on board because not only because they're pitting us against each other, we're pitting our choices against each other.

Mm-hmm. But I think what you really nailed it as is without even trying to pit us, it's that language of being successful or what is successful. Mm-hmm. And you look at so many things we talk about with respect to children in the early years. And you're seven years in, I'm [00:21:00] 12 years into my individual, like my kids.

But I also have my bonus son who is turning 21 this year. Mm-hmm. So I've been there since he was three. Right. And you look at all this, and I can tell you parenting reminds me of, I think it's a, it's an old Daoist philosophy, but it could be Buddhist and I apologize which one it is. I can't remember. But it's that story.

They start with the story. If something good happens, everyone's happy, then that good thing leads to something bad that happens and everyone's sad, then it's good again, and then it's bad again. And to try and look at something at the beginning as a defining characteristic for a child's life, there are things, abuse, neglect, all of this.

Of course, those are, we're not talking about out of the realm of what I think we would call evolutionarily normal. And that's really important. That goes back to some of the orchid terminology. When we talk about good and bad environments. All children will struggle in really [00:22:00] negative environments.

Mm-hmm. Some might make it out. Okay. But we're not talking about that. We're talking within the realm of really normal here. Those things are just good, bad, ugly. Great. Wonderful. Okay. Fair. And then back down again, it is a rollercoaster and when people start looking at their successes in young ages or what defines success?

Mm-hmm. I think that's where we're getting really off track, because if success is your child sleeping through the night, okay, that might be, and it is for a lot of people. But is that successful because it helps the parent, or is it successful because it helps your child, a child who doesn't have tantrums?

And this is a big one in discipline, especially with younger years. I hear parents think they're so successful because they have basically terrified their child into not. Speaking up. I don't see that as successful, but yet our culture and our society would say, [00:23:00] oh, what a well-behaved child. Oh my goodness.

Mm-hmm. Look at them, they're, that's good parenting until down the line. Because kids will respond to those. They may respond out of fear, but suddenly they're not afraid anymore. And then what happens? And so all these things go up and down, up and down. And if we're only looking at success in the moment, We're losing track of what that means in the future.

And I think that's where we get caught up, is that we're always thinking about how can we be successful now as opposed to, what does it look like to have a 25 year old successful child? What do you wanna instill? And when you think about that, it's a very different set of skills than what we're talking about success with younger children.

Mm-hmm. Yeah,

[00:23:44] **Kaitlin:** no, you're right. When I think about that for my own child, I think it looks nothing like what anything in this society would expect it to look like. Obviously, yes, I want them to be healthy, but I don't even know if happy cuz I don't even know what happy [00:24:00] means. That's its own other subject matter.

Mm-hmm. Which hopefully, I assume there's a lot of research on, but I think ultimately I want them. To be approaching life from this grounded sense of self and confidence. You can't discipline your way into confidence. Right? And there's so much modeling that one has to do as an individual, as an adult, right?

To say, this is how we are and therefore this is how I hope that you can be. I'm not saying you have to be the perfect person, but I'm saying the imperfection, the range of emotions that we have as humans. Happens as adults, just as it does as children. There's no difference there. I always get really frustrated when I think of the standards that we hold for children in this society that we don't hold for anyone else.

Once they're

[00:24:45] **Tracy:** kids are held to a much higher standard than we are, they're not allowed to have a bad day. They have a bad day and we get mad at them if I have a bad day and come up and rant. Everyone's like, oh, excuse her. She's had a bad day. That's what's happened. And we get it. No, it really is an interesting [00:25:00] phenomenon and, and on top of not just saying what do we want them to look like when they're 25?

And I think just going to your happiness, someone once used, instead of happiness, I want them to be content. Mm-hmm. And content just speaks so much more to this. I don't have to be happy. Mm-hmm. But overall I'm content with how things are going. Mm-hmm. Just feels like a much better. Worker for. That's what I've been starting using with when I think about my kids, well, how do we get there?

And that's the other thing I think we do in our society, is to get there somehow. Again, if my kid doesn't do this, this, this early, they live under a bridge. Mm-hmm. We're not, again, taking this long-term view is what does it mean to build a foundation for. Those later traits, you want your children to be independent enough, right, to be self-sufficient.

It doesn't mean you force a three month old baby to be wholly independent. They can't be. That's not even how it works. And you know, our research on regulation, you have to co-regulate before someone can learn to regulate. So we have to have a better understanding about these developmental stages and what they mean [00:26:00] to this growth as a person.

So that I think when people go in, going back to this first period right after birth, you can feel confident in making decisions that reflect those desires down the line, but that are grounded in the biology of, sorry, your child is still a mammal, a primate. A human, there are certain restrictions to that because they're not robots.

You can't just program something and have it stick, and you have to respect those limitations to be able to work with them going forward.

[00:26:42] **Kaitlin:** This actually came up in a conversation recently with a friend, which was, let's say you come to pregnancy and postpartum as someone who has mental health challenges there, you know that I need to sleep, and I know that infants don't sleep biologically. I know that. How do you build that support for [00:27:00] yourself and the infant at the same time when the system isn't built for that, when maybe you can't afford it?

What would you say? From your perspective, because I think that there are a lot of, especially people who are creative, you know, are trying to balance so many demands on their work and their time. How do you live in that

[00:27:18] **Tracy:** realistically? Let me first say two things. One is that one of the things I always talk to families about is it's okay to struggle in a society that doesn't support you.

It's okay to be like, this doesn't work and I have to get some stuff done. The question is then how do you approach those changes that you have to make with your family in mind and while considering everyone? So it's also looking at your child and saying, yep, this may not be the ideal. It may not be what I want it to be, but how do I do it?

Knowing what's most important to my child as a young child, responsiveness. We know responsiveness is absolutely crucial to their developmental wellbeing. So how do we work that in, even if we're not [00:28:00] doing. Exactly what we might wanna do, right? So we look at it from a certain perspective, specifically with sleep.

I can give you several examples of cases I've worked on where there's been severe sleep stuff going on where people need to work. So the first thing I always say is one of the things our society has ingrained in us is this idea of all or none. Like you said, we have these binary options. You're either not sleeping at all because you're attending to every little whim as they put it.

And I put that in strong quotation marks because it's not whims, but, or you leave them to cry and then they eventually fall asleep and you go get your sleep. So really there's this black and white view. There is a huge amount of gray in between. So my first thing is always talking to families is, okay, so what does it mean to get enough sleep for you?

What does this look like? Right? Is this. Something. Do you need half a night? Do you need one night a week, two nights a week where you can get solid sleep? Like where does that land? And people are often surprised when they really dig deep, [00:29:00] they can almost figure it out. And there are some examples where people may have a medical condition that requires much more sleep.

But I can tell you I've worked with families where mom has had epilepsy that sleep is a massive issue, still managed to be responsive. There was certain changes that had to make and certain supports that luckily even within a family need to be made. But at no point did it totally contraindicate any level of responsiveness, right?

Mm-hmm. That was not there. But you start to look at what is it that I need? Hmm. And when you start to hone in on what you need through a grayish lens as opposed to the black and white. You can start to see how things work. So some families I know do mom takes one or two nights a week and sleeps alone in another spot and gets fully caught up while someone else attends to the baby.

Mm-hmm. And now that assumes a two-parent household, which is not always the case for everyone. Right. But if you do have that. Some will sleep in in the day or take breaks during the day to nap. If there are people [00:30:00] that can nap well and rely upon friends or extended families, say on weekends where they can say, okay, you're gonna come over at 7:00 AM.

Kids tend to do better once they're awake with other people, which also then facilitates a bit more and they will sleep in for three, four hours. Mm-hmm. And feel like they're catching up doing that multiple times. Mm-hmm. During the week, and then they feel like they're on there. Some have decided, forget it.

Dishes all that will handle another time. I don't care if I run the dishwasher five times in a row, I'm going to bed at seven o'clock with my kid. Mm-hmm. Right? Mm-hmm. When it comes to sleep, one of the oddest things we have in our society that really counters for people is that we think babies need to go to bed really early.

Hmm. And then we stay awake separate from them. And yet from a biological perspective, a lot of other cultures, I wanna say most, but I can't quantify it, so I won't quite go there, but babies go to sleep with their parents. Mm-hmm. Right. Bedtime is later. And there's really good biological reasons for that, is that at the [00:31:00] beginning of the night, that is some of our deepest sleep, even for babies.

And when we go to bed after that period, they're in their deepest stage. Mm-hmm. We don't get that deep sleep. We then go to bed later and we're now trying to get that deep stage sleep when babies are waking more regularly. Cause they've moved into those lighter stages of sleep. Mm-hmm. So we're. Not only harming our own sleep, but we're just, we're making that mismatch even greater than it needs to be.

And so when we start looking at sleep from this perspective, you can start to see a lot of little things that I find people can make. And usually with enough smaller changes, the families I've worked with have felt like, okay, we're actually in a good state now. It's getting there and doing it. Single parenting, a still two parent household, but without other support.

The hardest, I will say has always been for me. Families in the US where you're back at full-time work at six weeks of postpartum and that is just horrifying to [00:32:00] most of the rest of the world. I'll be quite honest. That is something that we just cannot quite fathom and grasp because that's inhumane in my perspective.

There's the needs of a child and someone once put it really well is that our babies, cause I'm really talking about babies here. We talk about their resilience and everything, but what about us? We're the grownups in the situation at some point? The reason I say look at that gray is that we have to show some resilience ourselves to things if we want to.

Again, when we look going forward to what do we want for our kids, if responsiveness is key to so much of it, right, like responsiveness is the bedrock for attachment and everything, then we need to be able to do it. And for some people it means I've had families that planned on separate rooms sleeping with their baby that found, you know what?

We're bed sharing because I get more sleep or we're co-sleeping in the same room because I get more sleep. So there's all these things that you can look at one-on-one, and it's hard because there isn't one prescriptive [00:33:00] answer. It's what works for a family. And I always have to look and say, okay, how do we look at the biology of what kids need and everyone needs?

And then how do we modify that to work best within a given situation? And that's probably the hardest work. And I always remind families it's okay to not be able to do that yourself. And we have to give ourselves that grace for not being able to have the answer to every solution. That sometimes we do need to look outside and talk to people because again, unsupportive society, you cannot do it all and have every answer on the ready.

Yeah.

[00:33:35] **Kaitlin:** As you're talking, I was thinking about. I mean, I know, and I've mentioned this on this podcast, that my personal experience of parenting has been so informed by the support that I've been privileged to have. And my guest thankfully reminded me that it is not a privilege. If we call it a privilege, then we're saying that's something that is only afforded to the [00:34:00] few, and it should be afforded to everyone.

And that is a hundred percent true. And in fact, as you were talking about, Non-American perspectives on our family leave. I've had a lot of conversations even with our social media manager on the show who is in the uk, her face, when she found out that we have no federal leave for caregivers,

[00:34:21] **Tracy:** I would say, you know, I don't wanna say that the US all their woes are caused by a lack of parental leave because goodness knows, I live in Canada.

We have horrible racism, especially towards indigenous populations. There are elements that don't all line up. But I think where we do start to see a lot of that shift is this combination of the belief, but what really goes into it is that supportive society, right? That values children, parents, et cetera, that kind of view it that, that circular view of if you put a child in the middle and the parents and family around and then others around it sense, and you keep going out in the circle.

Everyone's looking out for who's internal. [00:35:00] Mm-hmm. And we don't have that in a lot of societies. Even if we offer leave, it's still a very solitary, your unit is your child and the parents around it. And then really maybe some social safety nets that go around. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. But there isn't this extended view of support.

[00:35:21] **Kaitlin:** Tracy and I clearly share some opinions, though the lack of federally mandated family leave the inability to pass a federal caregiver act in the United States. All of this impacts not just individual families, but society as a whole without the support in these integral early stages. How our children receive the responsive care needed to grow and to secure individuals and how our parents also receive enough support to be mentally and physically healthy in these challenging moments of transition.

[00:35:52] **Tracy:** There is research on the nuclear family and it's really fascinating so people have written up and also just opinion pieces on it that have come up from, from [00:36:00] scholars that are opining on what might have gone wrong, but. If you do think about what you said is, so you take away the nuclear family and you go back to larger groups, say even just the extended families that used to live together, you now have okay, grandparents supporting parents, sometimes aunts and uncles that are supporting.

Which means that as say, breadwinners at a certain period, parents get to focus on work. Children get exposure to a variety of perspectives and views because we know intergenerationally, even what our parents, you know, experience their stories, their everything are different. So our kids actually broaden their horizon and how they think about the world from having others sharing.

But we take those people outta the workforce. If grandparents are. In caring for family, they're going to stop working at an earlier age. Mm-hmm. They're going to be the ones taking part in this, in this child rearing or caring [00:37:00] for a house or whatever it looks like, and they are going to have a place there instead, a capitalist model.

What happens is they're working till their death. We're now utilizing systems that we're paying someone to make money off daycare, et cetera, and mm-hmm. For profit, old age homes, elder care that go in, because we're now losing it on both ends, right? Mm-hmm. We're actually harming. On both sides. Mm-hmm. The our elders and our children, because we're not valuing how they go together.

Right. So when we see even cultures where they have, I'm thinking a lot of Scandinavian countries, and there's other socioeconomic arguments for this, it's not as clear as this, but the value they place on people means children can stay home with their parents up to a certain point. Parents can get up to three years off work.

And guaranteed their job. Mm-hmm. And along with payments, if they don't send their child to a state daycare, and I hate seeing state cause it sounds like [00:38:00] something run by the mafia or something, but it's not. It's, they're very wonderful. They're better daycares than anything we have in North America. But if they don't, parents can get a stipend for taking care of their own child's early education.

Mm-hmm. So they're actually valuing that contribution that the parent plays as well. Mm-hmm. Children are very likely to take care of their elders. They're going to take care of them. The homes there that even that they have are of much higher quality, even if they go in and they're also often covered by the government down the line.

Mm-hmm. So it's not families working in, so you can go in there. They were also some of the first to integrate daycares that they do run into old age homes where you're now seeing a lot more of that blending. So the kids go in and play with the elderly. Everyone wins. There's just this. View as to how do we make the experience better for everyone?

Mm-hmm. Even within kind of a capitalist work because they value everyone and that's what we're missing I think in ours, is we just don't value it is about contributing in this economic model, so [00:39:00] therefore we can disperse of those who don't contribute, which are children in the elderly. Mm-hmm.

[00:39:05] **Kaitlin:** Okay.

Given all of these structural constraints we're talking about and all of the nuance that you've introduced in this conversation so far, Let's take a hypothetical. I'm a studio artist. I have worked up until my time of becoming a parent in creative work. I likely don't get paid a lot for it. It's my life's passion and livelihood, and I feel like it does have value in the world.

Now I'm dealing with all of these things, right? I'm a new parent. How do I continue to. Privilege that. And what does that look like to you? Because I know you work with a lot of parents of Sure. Have a variety of professional roles and interests. How do you balance that when you don't have a support system in place to really, again, I'm using the word privilege, which it shouldn't be, but to privilege that identity in your life.

[00:39:56] **Tracy:** I always start with filmings. I think [00:40:00] carving out space for what is most important to you is essential. It's something that I think requires often talking to other people to figure out how it works. Mm-hmm. Because I know I have this conversation, it's actually in my sleep course. One of the big bits I put is I hate the term self-care because again, it sounds so proofy and like, I wanna go to a spa.

Which if you do great, but. That's not the kind of essence to ourselves self-care that I, I really think about with this. So I think the first thing is often reminding ourselves that you could have it all just not all at once, and some can't even have it all, let's be honest. But when it comes to what we want, there may be gaps in what we are able to do for periods of time.

But it's up to us to evaluate, okay, is this gap going on unintentionally or is this an intentional, okay, I've got a newborn baby. Yeah, for the first three months, we're just gonna. Get acclimatized [00:41:00] to one another. Mm-hmm. We're gonna figure things out. And yes, I love my art, but it does have to take a three month hiatus because this is a life-changing event that requires a bit more concentrated focus.

But I always urge people when you take that break, set a timeline. To go back. This isn't an indefinite, that's where people get lost is, oh, I can't do it right now. I'll get back to it later. Mm-hmm. That is conducive to, oh, I'll get back to it later. No, you're never gonna have the perfect time to get back to it.

So you have to set that timeline and then reevaluate. Put it in your calendar. I am a big fan of writing things down. Mm-hmm. Put a reminder in your phone to pop up, Hey, it's time to talk about art again. And you may hit that stage where you say, actually, it's not right now. Maybe my child has a health issue that is cropping up and I've gotta focus on medical appointments and this and that.

Okay, we're gonna look at it in a month from now. That's where we're at with the timeline. Then when you start to prioritize it, it's figuring out first, what is that [00:42:00] small bit to get back into it. You're not looking at the newborn stage going, oh my God, it's gonna be like this forever. Mm-hmm. You get past that to get to, okay, what?

What does happen here? And maybe it's okay, I'm going to engage in my art while they're napping and that's gonna be great. And then you're gonna hear all the voices, I should do the dishes. I should clean, I should focus on work, I should do this, I should do that. And so it's setting aside that time, it's being able to be effortful and focused enough to say, actually, you know what?

On Tuesdays at nap for an hour, I'm doing my art. Maybe I'll just do that. And then the rest of the week, there's enough time for everything else. Mm-hmm. And carving out that. Just start with that tiny bit to get back into it. Because a lot of people, and I have worked with a lot of artists, where this does come up is once you get back in even a tiny bit, it starts to, at least you feel the benefits of it enough to be able to value it more then, pardon the language here, but the other shit that you're not thinking you should be doing that [00:43:00] really do the dishes matter in that moment?

That much can they be done later? So you do have to start thinking, but you have to be. Really effortful about it. So you start to go back into it in little bits, and then eventually, hopefully when you have support, and again, this all requires support, which is why support should not be nothing, but it doesn't need to be a partner.

You can do it solo if you have friends, aunts, uncles, grandparents, you can live away from everyone If you have a good friend that's willing to help out as well. Brilliant. And I know people start to take two, three hours on a weekend. Their child goes to someone else who is responsive and caring, and then they get that time to be like, I get to be me, whatever.

That is it. It may be artistic, it may be social. Some people need that adult social time separate from others, but whatever that is, that kind of makes you tick. They use that time for that and they're able to make it work and then it gives you that. I look forward to it every week. So when, and you start to [00:44:00] make it part of a routine, right?

I always find as hard as it is with kids, but the more structured you make that time, the easier it is to keep it. Thereby the harder it is to break it. And so you really focus on how you make sure you get that every week and during the week. It gives you something to look forward to as you're heading to it.

And then as your kids get older and as life changes, there's more time, sometimes there'll be bouts of no time. And if you find that it's heading again to a time of, it's getting harder and harder to do, I always recommend a concerted break of, okay, this isn't working right now because of X, Y, and Z. We're gonna call it for this month, but I'm revisiting at the end of that month.

So you get to give your brain that time to focus on whatever is impeding on it naturally. And by being aware of that and focusing on it, You're able to then avoid the pitfalls of it becoming an indefinite loss. Mm-hmm. Right? Mm-hmm. That you really feel like you're losing yourself. Does that make sense?

Yeah. I

[00:44:58] **Kaitlin:** mean, I think we tend [00:45:00] to, I don't know what the psychology is behind this, but I feel like we tend to hyperbolize the immediate, like this is always going to be. Like this. Exactly. Whatever this is. And I think that giving ourselves that grace of this is a really hard time for me, whatever that looks like, and taking that pressure off of, like you said, the dishes, for me, it's lunch for my kids.

I've never liked making lunch for my kids. I'm n I know in myself. I'm never gonna be the parent that makes the cool, cute. Lunches that my kids love. So we got an O pair this year and it's actually been going well, and I'm like, you do the lunches. You know what that means? That means that in the morning I'm sitting down with my kids at breakfast instead of making their lunches, and it is like the biggest gift I've given to my, like that one thing.

Yeah. As a parent, as a person, as a creative, whatever it is, I'm just like, oh my gosh. I just get to like, Sit and have a fun breakfast with my kids, cuz I'm not like running around packing their lunch boxes. Yeah. And again, I have the space in my home. I don't wanna get into the [00:46:00] privileges that are there for the out pair, but if you have a parent, a friend that could do that like two days a week, even someone else locally.

But would that kind of brought up to me though, was on from a cultural perspective, I just don't feel like we live in a moment where we feel like it's okay to ask for that. Even though I wonder if we did ask for it more. Whatever it looks like, whether we aren't parents, but we need help with elder care.

I have to help my parent with this and so can you watch my dog? Or just that communal sense of responsibility for one another. I'm wondering if, because we're not asking or are we expecting then, I don't know. I could go on a, like a separate diatribe on this, but I'm curious. I do feel like it's integral to what we're talking about

[00:46:44] **Tracy:** here.

It's so integral because it is hard. It's hard to ask people in a culture where everyone's overburdened and stressed out and feeling the crunch of everything. I think the best I've heard, and I actually don't know all the research, but well, there is a [00:47:00] lot of research on helping others. Mm-hmm. And that's Dr.

Lara Acton is, is wonderful. Looking at that, we did our PhDs together and she does a lot of work on what makes us happy and it's often generosity. That goes into helping. So you can pitch it that way of I'm gonna make you happier by offering you this. Hmm. But someone might not listen. It's, I think though, it's about offering, picking people where there might be a chance to reciprocate.

Hmm. So when you pick a mom, say it's another mom's, and Can you take my kids or my, or you pick a dog lover, would you watch my dog for a little bit and maybe I'll take yours another, you know what I mean? Another day. So I think a lot of people find if they can find something that works because it also then no one feels like they're being taken advantage of.

Mm-hmm. They're less likely to bail on it at any given time because they're getting something out of it too. It's unfortunately still somewhat selfish in this, that we have to do it because I'm getting something out of it, but, When we're pressed for time and everything like this [00:48:00] goes on, it is hard to, to take on more.

Mm-hmm. If we can't do it. So I think if you do have to ask, that's the way to look at it if you can. And, and it may be starting by just asking, Hey, could you help me out? Mm-hmm. And if you start with just the one time helping out with something, people can see how it goes and you go from there. But if we don't ask, we're never gonna know what happens.

And that's the hardest thing is we've gotten trained to think that asking is bad. And yet I will say a lot of people I know that have asked have been surprised at how helpful and wonderful the outpouring of support was when people actually asked, and I think it has that knock over effect, right? Is if someone asked me for help.

And I give it, I might be a bit more likely to ask for it myself the next time I need it. Right? Mm-hmm. And then it becomes more and more normalized. So when we talk about like societal shifts, because it is a societal shift away from asking. Mm-hmm. We've been demonized to ask, but the more we all do [00:49:00] it and feel okay about it, And start helping out others.

I think it becomes more normative again. And I will say, I think for whatever reason, generation, is it Zed, sorry, you guys say Z. Z, generation Zed. They are really paving a path forward that's very different and I am, I have the utmost respect for what I'm seeing from them. They are focusing on work-life balance.

They're going the work to live, not live to work attitude. They seem much more focused on supporting one another. So I think we hit a tipping point where we went so far in one direction that we now have a generation saying, forget this. This is not the way to live. I do not wanna be a part of it. And I am excited to see how that continues forward.

Because I mean, goodness knows corporations are seeing the difference in terms of people no longer accepting crazy work hours or worse work conditions. They're figuring it out on their own. And hopefully with the support of their, their family, who [00:50:00] also are just done with it all. So I think that's the best way to start, is to just ask and if you can, I always say if you're able to offer someone help with something without them even asking or just saying, you know, if you see a new mom saying, oh, you know, if you ever need me to come over and, you know, bring a meal or fold laundry for half an hour for a visit.

If you go to visit a new mom with a baby, Offer to fold a little laundry. Mm-hmm. You can sit and chat while you're doing it, and trust me, it means the world and the more that happens, the easier it becomes for that mom to actually ask for help down the line. Mm-hmm.

[00:50:34] **Kaitlin:** It's coming full circle for me because at least in this conversation as you're talking, I was thinking about vulnerability and how we are.

Conditioned, and I'm sure we could unpack this again, all of the systemic constraints to not expose our vulnerabilities, especially in early parenting. And I was thinking about how doing that and also doing that, that then behooves us sharing economy, if you will. Again, we still put it in capitalist terms.

[00:51:00] Mm-hmm. But I think that it, it is so revolutionary, I think, to your point about generation Z slash ed pushing against these norms. Is what actually chips away at the structure, right? That we're not going to be able to set up a wholly new system immediately. Like I think there's obviously so much that's entrenched in our daily lives, but how do we continue to, as a practice, in our parenting, in our personal lives, in our creative lives, how do we continue to do that daily work that might not feel as.

Revolutionary and groundbreaking, but is shifting the culture, right? Like is shifting this perspective and the way we talk about things, the way we look at things. It is revolutionary, right? Whether it's a conversation that you have with a fellow artist, parent, or like you said, reaching out and saying, I'm here, or really reaching out and saying, Hey, I need someone to pick up my kid every Thursday at three.

Who can do that? And [00:52:00] let's talk about how I can help you too. Like we both need help. Yeah, I know we're both in vulnerable situations right now. I, I think that's really important and I don't know what we're coming out of in terms of generationally, but I think that there was this sense to me in the work that I've been.

Reading that, I don't know when you were born, but for me at the feminist moment that I feel like I inherited was one that was very much the model of women as equal to men. And I think that when we start to break that down to, okay, it's not about women should be the same as men, it's so much more complex and nuanced than that.

And that if we look at the intrinsic powers and capabilities that we have as bodies that can care for other young bodies, young human, if we really just wanna make it really simplistic, right, that we can start to see a new form of structure and of equality that looks somewhat different and I understand why historically, why.

The [00:53:00] path is such that it is, and I'm really grateful that now, like you said, that there are generations to come that are like, Hey, you all weren't doing this well either. Let me tell you why you need to do this differently and what it looks like. And I think that, yeah, we're really lucky that that is hopefully the way that we can progress as a civilization and as humans.

I know that you've looked at the long, long span of things. So to that end, this is like a big, big picture question, but where we are now in humanity, like having. This sense of this evolutionary practice, what is your

[00:53:31] **Tracy:** takeaway? I actually gave a talk at a conference on this very issue. We're playing on the men's playground.

We need to break down the entire playground and build something new. It's not about letting us out there, but evolutionarily it's, it's fascinating cuz we're so far away from where we started. So there's great work from Katie Hein and colleagues on how did we get where we are. And how did humans kind of thrive?

Right? To the point where we got away from little [00:54:00] tribal groups and we actually created societies and everything. How do we get there and the best evidence looking back, so obviously we aren't there back, we can't go back. So the best evidence is that we had cooperative structures of predominantly women helping women, and that has allowed this society that we have to come into existence.

Because women worked cooperatively in, in groups to share childcare, to share, not chores cuz they were survival, but all the work that was done was shared. And that enabled us to get where we are. And now we're moving far away from that. It's like we got up to a point, everyone forgot that's what happened.

Capitalism, patriarchy, et cetera took over. And now we're, we're separating people from that. We're becoming that independent and moving away. And we see the, the younger generation changing it. But I hope it changes back towards that idea of, no, we have to get back towards that working together, that this idea of independence [00:55:00] being the crucial piece to everything doesn't actually fit with, with our world and, and how we thrive.

And so it's a really complex and interesting, fascinating topic to go through, but. I just don't know. I would love to predict what the future brings. I love thinking that the younger generation is gonna be, be better at this Generation Z is there at the right time to say We've seen the burnout, we've seen the mental struggles that everyone faces.

We've seen the health effects and heart attacks and this and that. The cancer rates going up, everything. This can't be the best there is. And that is, I think, hopefully where we start to shift towards a bit more of the supportive environment and why, as you said, parenting is such a crucial place to start.

And how we parent our kids can be an act of rebellion when we are going against a society that has put all the [00:56:00] barriers in our way to the best of our capacity. Or it can be an act of acquiescence if we decide that, okay, I'm gonna let society tell me what to do, even if it counters what I feel is best myself.

Mm-hmm. Because I know people, they can't do all that they want, but they find their own way to make these little things work for them, whatever changes they need to make. And that is a huge act of rebellion that I think will result in our society hopefully getting back on track.

[00:56:29] **Kaitlin:** As you heard, Tracy Castle's work is able to take the long and wider view, one that's often critical to removing the individual onus. We feel as caregivers and helps to redirect our gaze on the systemic challenges, whether due to patriarchal culture, the need for revised political legislation, or the overarching cultural shifts when it comes to examining the pressures nuclear families face under capitalism.

You can find more links to her work and the books and authors that she mentions in our show notes, and we always welcome your questions and comments. [00:57:00] Please shoot us a note to hello@postpartumproduction.com, where we always welcome your feedback, your suggestions or questions, or even just how a particular episode hit you on a particular day.

Thanks so much for listening.

I am your host, Kaitiln Salini, and this is the Postpartum Production Podcast. If you like what you've heard today, please subscribe wherever you get your podcast and give us a rating which will help us reach more listeners like you. For regular updates, visit our website, www.postpartumproduction.com.

Follow us on Instagram at Postpartum Production podcast and subscribe to our CK newsletter. Thank you for listening today and being a valuable part of this community of caregivers and artists who are redefining the work that we do. [00:58:00] And pushing forward with a new system in which art and caregiving are increasingly valued and supported.