

Ep #44: Balancing Safety and Sanity: A Realistic Approach To Protecting Your Baby



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Devon Clement**

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Do you feel like you're constantly overwhelmed by safety guidelines and anxiety and fear of accidents and dangers to your baby or child? Stay tuned because we're going to talk about some lesser known risks and some things that are safer than you think.

Welcome to *Parenthood Prep*, the only show that helps sleep-deprived parents and overwhelmed parents-to-be successfully navigate those all-important early years with their baby, toddler, and child. If you are ready to provide the best care for your newborn, manage those toddler tantrums and grow with your child, you're in the right place. Now here's your host, baby and parenting expert, Devon Clement.

Hello and welcome back to the Parenthood Prep Podcast. Before we get started with our topic for today, I have an exciting announcement, which is that my best friends are having a baby, which is amazing, which is great news in any circumstance, but also is like, why is she announcing this on the podcast?

Well, the extra exciting part is that they are a gay couple and the baby that they are having was created with my donated eggs. So I am going to be a genetic parent to this little girl, which is just really exciting. And as you remember from the episode where we interviewed Justine and talked about fertility, I think the world of what's possible is just so amazing and we're so grateful that it exists and we're just really looking forward to the future with her and for them to be able to become parents and just hoping that things continue in an upward direction and not a downward direction based on what happens with politics and reproductive rights and things in the next few years.

So stay tuned on our Instagram as well as my personal Instagram, although I think I'm going to change that to just my name soon. So that's going to be really exciting and I'll watch that space for updates and I'm sure I'm going to be talking about it here. She is due in July. They're using a surrogate who is someone that they know. So the four of us have really just come together to make this baby happen in wonderful ways and I'm so excited about it.

So let's get started on our topic today, which is safety, baby safety. And I know you're probably bored of hearing about this all the time, but I'm going to take a

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little bit of a different spin and talk more, you know, of course we have rules and I'm going to talk about the rules, but there's also so much that I see just anecdotally in the day-to-day with my job, with going into these families' homes, talking to parents, seeing what they're concerned about, what they're doing and not doing for safety. And there's a lot of misunderstanding, I think, of what is safe and what is not safe.

I see parents get so stressed out over things that are honestly totally fine and then do things that are so wildly unsafe. I'm like, what the fuck are you doing? And I wanna start with just saying that like, everyone makes mistakes. Everyone makes a decision that they think is going to be fine and isn't. You know, sometimes even when you're following the rules, things can happen. It's usually okay.

Any parent you know has done something that has caused their child to have an accident or get hurt. I know parents who have set their baby on the kitchen counter and the baby rolled off. I had a client a few years ago who was her third baby, you know, so you'd think she would know what she was doing by this point. And she did, but she put him in a carrier when he was very small and one of the buckles didn't clip properly and he fell out of the carrier and hit the floor and she was devastated. He was totally fine. Of course, rushed him to the hospital, rushed him to the doctor and he was totally fine. So a lot of the time when things happen, it's okay.

I'm not trying to terrify you here. You're already terrified, okay? I just want to help you understand how to assess risk a little bit more effectively because a lot of times people worry about the wrong thing.

So one of the big mistakes I see people make is thinking that just because your baby can't currently do something does not mean they're not going to choose to do it for the first time right now. So when your baby's a tiny newborn, you might put them on the changing table and walk away because you think, well, they can't roll, they can't go anywhere. I'm just going to leave them here and I'm going to go over to get a fresh package of diapers or whatever, and they're totally fine here on the changing table. Don't get into the habit of doing that because you know what? That baby is going to roll over for the first time at some

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point, and it might be when they are alone on the changing table and you've stepped away.

Keep one hand on the baby while you're doing anything around the changing table. You might put them down on your bed, like you're getting dressed, you're showering, whatever, you lay the baby down on your bed, that's fine. You know, if you're there in the room and you're watching them and you're supervising them, but if you're, you know, gonna walk away, if you're gonna leave the room thinking, well, they're not rolling yet, they're not crawling yet, they're totally fine, they haven't gone anywhere yet, that baby will choose that moment to roll over and end up face first in your comforter. So just always think at least one or two milestones ahead because it could be the first time that your baby decides to roll is when you step away from the changing table.

Think like a baby, which I think can be difficult because we don't know what those little buggers are thinking. But if I decided to roll, where would I go? What around here is interesting to me to grab? If there's like a safe baby toy and like an electrical plug, they're going to choose the electrical plug. So what is your baby going to be interested in in this area?

Stuff over the crib. This drives me crazy and the biggest culprits are like the, you know, furniture companies and the design companies that have these ads. I shared an ad a few years ago on social media for restoration hardware with a baby's room that, just looking at it, you could see 10 plus huge safety risks.

So when you're a baby and you're thinking, wow, I'm alone in my crib. I'm chilling out. Maybe I'm 10 months old and I'm pulling up to standing. And there's buttons attached to the wall. I'm going to pull one of those buttons off, and I'm going to put it in my mouth because it looks delicious.

In this ad, the wall was like tufted, you know, which is like on a couch or a headboard when you have those fabric covered buttons that are like pushed in to create a textured effect. They're just attached with string, basically. They come off so easily, and your baby's gonna figure that out after a while. So, you know, what kind of things can they reach? What can they grab? What can they

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put in their mouth and could potentially be a choking hazard. I feel like choking was something we were really concerned about.

Like when I was young, my mother still to this day, like hovers around me if I'm eating grapes or a hot dog or a choking risk food. And I don't hear quite as much about it anymore. I guess because it's just gotten so deep into the cultural consciousness that we're not gonna give a baby a whole grape that's not been cut or like had the skin broken.

But think about choking hazards that are around. What can your baby put in their mouth? What can your baby grab and pull down on top of themselves? Cords. Okay, this is my bugaboo.

I had a family I sleep trained for years ago. The dad was annoying in a lot of ways. But the baby was a little on the older side, like eight or nine months. And I asked the parents if they had been using any kind of lovey or like a little blanket or a little something for the baby to hold.

Generally, safety guidelines from the AAP say nothing in the crib until they're a year, but sometimes when they're on the older side and they have like a small comfort object and the parents are okay with using it and the pediatrician says it's okay, we go ahead and we still use that. You know, nothing major, but anyway, I asked the parents if they had been using anything and the dad was like, oh no, absolutely not. That's so unsafe. And I was like, okay, sure, fine, no problem.

Then I go into the baby's room and I see the crib. And there were probably six things around the edge of the crib that had cords. They had two cameras for the baby monitor because, you know, why not watch your baby from two different angles in the crib? I'm being sarcastic, I hate that. The sound machine, I don't know, the wipes warmer, like there were just all these cords hanging down the side of the crib.

And this baby was old enough to be able to grab these cords and wrap them around his neck or stick the end of them in his mouth and get electrocuted, like just so many issues. And it just boggled my mind how the dad was so concerned

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about safety when it came to, you know, a little lovey or a blanket, but did not realize how hazardous it was to have all these cords.

So immediately I'm like, all these things are moving away from the crib. And this wasn't a teeny tiny baby. This baby was, you know, sitting, rolling, about to start pulling up to standing, all that stuff.

So then I'm on a follow-up call with the mom like a week later because we always check in to see how, you know, things are going with the baby after sleep training. And she said that the dad had put one of the cameras back and taped the cord to the wall. And she went in in the morning and the baby had pulled the cord out of the tape, because it was probably just used like painter's tape or something, and she walked in and the baby had the cord wrapped around his neck.

Thank God he was okay. He didn't strangle or anything like that, but it's a real hazard. Like when they first started having video baby monitors, people were putting the cameras in the crib and there were a couple of big, bad situations, bad accidents, babies being severely hurt or even killed because they were wrapping these cords around their neck.

I don't know why babies love to accessorize. You know, who doesn't? So cords, just be so, so, so careful with stuff like that. And then, you know, sometimes moms will be like, this bookshelf on the other side of the room, like, might fall down on the crib. I'm like, it's probably not going to spontaneously do that. So don't worry about that. But let's worry about cords that are within reach of the baby. They are so much trickier than we really understand or give them credit for when you have not spent a ton of time with a baby.

Another big crib issue that I see is people keeping the crib mattress too high beyond the point that it's developmentally appropriate and safe for the baby. Like, yes, when the baby is very small, the crib mattress can be on the highest setting because you're going to be transferring the baby to the crib. You don't want to have to reach down really far to pick up your tiny newborn, that's fine. But people don't realize how quickly babies are going to learn to roll or scoot around a little bit.

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Very often when I go to a sleep training of, say, a five-month-old or a six-month-old, they still have the crib on the highest setting, and that's just so dangerous. And I know when you're used to running in the minute your baby makes a peep, you don't have an awareness of what they could possibly do if they're in this crib with only six inches of rail on either side of them. But the thing about a baby's body is that they're very top heavy. So their heads are so much heavier than an adult's. You know, your head only grows a small percentage over the course of your life, and your body doubles and triples and whatever in size.

So when you're six months old and you lean over the side of a crib, your head is going to take you down just because of gravity and your body is going to follow. As adults, we can lean over something and our head is not going to propel us forward the way that a baby's is. So just think about moving that crib lower well before you think you need to, because again, that one night that the baby's in there and they wake up quietly and they roll over, they're gonna fall out of the crib.

Babies fall out of the crib. It happens. They try to climb out. They land on the floor. Generally, they're totally fine. But why risk it if you don't have to? So lower that crib down.

I worked with a friend years ago, sleep training her two and a half year old, who she had been nursing to sleep and then putting in the crib. And what I didn't realize was that we were working remotely, I wasn't with her in person. She is so short that she had the crib on the highest setting because it was nearly impossible for her to put her toddler all the way down low into the crib asleep without waking her up. So when she told me that, I was like, oh my God, the first thing we have to do is lower this crib all the way down so that now that we're putting your daughter in awake, she's not going to be able to get out and fall out of the crib. So always, always, always lower that mattress before you think you need to. And if it's a problem for you to be like reaching all the way in, then you want to be able to put your baby in and out awake. So this is a way that sleep training I think really contributes to safety.

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Another way that sleep training can really contribute to safety is just having the baby being able to sleep comfortably in the crib. Going back to talking about adult beds, you know of course it's not safe to have your baby in the bed with you, but a bunch of years ago, they actually changed the recommendation because they were saying no adult beds.

And what was happening was that parents were exhausted. The baby wasn't sleeping. The only way the baby would sleep was like being held or being on the parents chest. And so they would take the baby out to the couch. And then you are exhausted, you doze off, the baby slides down in between you and the couch or you're in a recliner or a chair and the baby gets wedged.

And they were actually having more accidents and more issues with the baby being on a couch or whatever. You know, a lot of these recommendations need to be taken with a little bit of a grain of salt because in an ideal circumstance, Yes, babies would be flat on their back in the crib all the time, but a lot of babies just don't want to sleep like that.

So if you're so exhausted, you don't think you're going to be able to stay awake and you shouldn't have to. There are guidelines for how to have the baby in the bed with you, keep all the blankets and comforters away from them, keep the pillows away from them, put them on the outside of the parent's side who is caring for the baby, not in the middle.

Obviously, if you're under the influence of any medications or drugs or alcohol or anything like that, you don't wanna have the baby in the bed with you. But they actually did come out with some guidelines for how to do that safely because they saw that it was just impossible to not have any recourse when your baby absolutely won't sleep and you're losing your mind.

But again, don't leave a baby alone in an adult bed. Some parents are choosing to co-sleep, to bed share, you do you, whatever, I'm not going to tell you whether that's okay or not.

But a big reason I like helping people with sleep training when they've been bed sharing is because you really can't leave your baby alone in an adult bed. So you'd get the baby to sleep, you'd, you know, feed to sleep, rock to sleep, nurse



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to sleep, whatever, and then great, we're going to go eat dinner, we're going to go watch TV in the other room, blah, blah, blah. And then the baby gets under the covers or they get stuck or they fall off the bed or whatever. So just don't leave your baby alone in an adult bed.

Even when I've worked with clients who, or friends or colleagues or whatever, who want to continue bed sharing, I always recommend starting the night out in the crib when the baby is going to be alone because it's just a safer place for them to be. And it doesn't have to be a crib. It can be a pack and play, just something that is safe and recommended for their age and is age appropriate.

Another issue that I think people are not really aware of, of course we're aware of suffocation, you're not gonna put anything over your baby's face, you're not gonna put them on something super soft where they can get their face sort of stuck and smother, but we think, oh, once they can lift their heads pretty comfortably, they're a lot safer in that regard. And they are, but another thing that a lot of people don't think about or don't know about is something called re-breathing.

So even if their face is not being smothered by a blanket, if they can still breathe, they need airflow of fresh air. So a bunch of years ago, there was a baby carrier that was recalled because it basically enclosed the baby in this like fabric space, and it was really hard for them to get that fresh airflow. And when you're in an enclosed space, breathing the same air over and over, you're inhaling all that oxygen and exhaling carbon dioxide, and eventually there's not enough oxygen for you to continue to breathe.

And the problem with that, like if somebody starts suffocating, even a baby, if they start suffocating, they're gonna fight, they're gonna struggle.

But with something like that, when you're just breathing a little bit more carbon dioxide every time, unfortunately, you're not gonna realize that it's a problem until it's too late. So make sure that if you have your baby in a carrier, I love a carrier, I love them, but make sure that there's airflow around their face. If you have them, you know, in the car seat and or in the stroller and you throw a blanket over it, that's fine. Just make sure that there's some way for air to get in,

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even through just small spaces on the sides and you're not trapping, enclosing your baby in this bubble that's gonna become not safe for them to breathe.

Also, overheating can be a big issue when you're covering up the car seat. Like in the winter, yes, it's cold. You wanna bring the baby in the house, maybe they fell asleep. It's not really recommended to let them sleep in the car seat, but I understand why people wanna do it sometimes. I've lifted these blankets off of these car seats and it's like a blast furnace in there. The babies are so hot, so just make sure that they're not overheating in their car seat.

Of course, they're incredibly safe. They're the safest place for your baby to be essentially in a moving vehicle, but you want to make sure it's tight enough. I highly recommend getting your car seat installed by a car seat safety technician. A lot of hospitals, fire stations, police stations will do it for free and go back after you have the baby and have them show you how to put the baby in the car seat appropriately as well.

Because, you know, it's natural to want your baby to be comfortable, to worry that if the straps are too tight they're not gonna be able to breathe. It would be really difficult to strap them in so tightly that they are having trouble breathing. They might be uncomfortable and that's okay because if the car seat straps are tightened appropriately, that baby is not moving. They're not going anywhere.

You can see videos online, like parents who are safety technicians or know what they're doing. They'll put the baby in a car seat and they'll throw it around just to demonstrate how safe it is. Babies in properly used car seats can get thrown, the whole thing gets thrown from the car and they're totally, totally fine.

But if it's too loose and they can move around in an impact situation, their spine is gonna snap, their neck is gonna snap, they're gonna slide out of the car seat and end up in a really bad situation. So use things safely and as they're recommended, even if you feel like the baby is not that comfortable, it really doesn't matter, they will get used to it, We want them to be safe. And this is something I'm always teaching parents about because I get it. You want your baby to be comfortable.

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Now, that being said, if you're just using the car seat on the stroller and going for a walk, it does not have to be perfect. Like we're talking about high impact, you know, going 20, 30, 60 miles an hour with the baby in the car. If you're just pushing the baby on a walk down the street and the car seat straps are a little loose, it's not the end of the world. That's totally fine. I mean, yes, if the stroller falls over or something, the baby might slide out. That's concerning, but not nearly as concerning as if they're in a car.

Another place I think people go too loose because they're worried about comfort or they're worried about the wrong thing when it comes to safety is a swaddle. So swaddles are great for small babies before they're able to roll. We wanna start transitioning them out by eight weeks. But when you have your newborn in a swaddle, you don't want it to be too loose because they can wiggle around, they can get that blanket up over their face, and then we end up with this re-breathing issue again.

So again, it would be so hard to swaddle your baby so tightly that they couldn't breathe. And if that were the case, you would know, especially if the material is kind of stretchy. Like swaddle yourself, take a blanket or something really tight and, you know, wrap it around and around and see how hard it would be to make it so that you can't breathe. There's way more issues of babies, like especially when we were still using inclined sleepers, babies sliding down into the swaddle, but even on a flat surface, they can slide down in there or if there's like a loose end or something, or you just throw a blanket over the baby or something like that, that blanket can get up over their face and then we can have these re-breathing issues and things like that. So be super, super careful with that.

Sleep sacks are great once the baby's older and they can actually really contribute to safety, but you wanna make sure it fits, it's not too big so that they're not like sliding down into it. Sleep sacks are great in the crib for when they get older and they're standing in the crib or they want to try to climb out of the crib. It really restricts their movement just enough so that they can't do that. But again, you want to make sure it fits okay.

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A lot of products get recalled. As I mentioned, the incline sleepers, the rock and play, the nap nanny, it's not recommended that babies sleep in swings or in the car seat if it's not in the base or attached to the car or the stroller because then the angle is bad. The biggest thing with incline is you wanna make sure that their airway is open, that their chin is up. If the chin presses down to the chest, I like doing it as I'm talking, which is why my voice sounds weird, just do this right now, like pressure turned down to your chest. Like it's a lot harder to breathe. So you definitely don't want them in a position where that's going to be happening a lot of the products that got recalled I'm still kind of annoyed about years later because in a lot of cases it was because they were being used improperly and people were not following the guidelines, they were using them too late or they were using them in unsafe situations, there was this great thing called the nap nanny and it was like a firm foam, just like, I don't know how to describe it, But like it was a bed for babies to sleep in that was just a little bit of an incline and put them in a little bit of a more comfortable position and you were supposed to use it on the floor out in the living room during the day while you're supervising the baby. You were not supposed to use it in the crib and you were not supposed to use it once the baby was rolling or strong enough for getting past a certain age and people were using them in the crib and with their like eight month old baby who was then like flipping it over and suffocating or rebreathing and there were some bad issues there. So whenever there's a product that you're using, even if it's on the market, follow the guidelines, follow the recommendations.

I don't know why the Dockatot is still on the market because it's basically a giant pillow for babies to sleep in. That thing seems so unsafe to me, but if parents are using it, I recommend that they only use it supervised. Don't put it in your bed with you. Don't put it in the crib. Don't put it on the couch because the baby can roll out and then get stuck or smushed alongside of that.

I am not a worrywart. I am not an anxious person. I know I sound like there's just like a million ways for babies to die and they're never safe, but it's actually not true. Babies are generally very safe. It's just these little things that can make such a big difference when you are aware of what the actual hazards are. Like, you can leave your baby in the middle of the floor. It's totally fine. I'm not concerned about that. But if there's a cord within reach, don't do that.

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The bumbo seat almost got recalled a few years ago and then they had to add in a safety strap. I don't know why there wasn't one to begin with. And like the tray, that's that thing where babies like to sit up and their legs stick out because it was just a thing to sit your baby in and people were putting them on the kitchen counter and the baby was like pitching forward and falling off the counter. Like, don't do that. Don't do that. Put it on the floor where they can't fall very far.

Don't put your baby in a seat on the kitchen counter and walk away or on the table and walk away. If you, you know, have the baby in the car seat in the house and they're awake, you're not really supposed to let them sleep like that. Make sure they're still strapped in safely. There was a horror story in my hometown a few years ago.

The parent brought the baby in in the car seat, loosened up the straps so they would be more comfortable. The baby was in the car seat on the table, I guess still sleeping, and then the baby woke up, pitched forward out of the straps, and unfortunately was killed. So just worry more about safety than comfort. That's all I'm saying. Don't become a crazy person. I know it's really hard to do, but just be aware of these things that are actual problems and not the things that are not actual problems.

Like I don't know that there's ever truly been a story of a baby who suffocated from being strapped into a car seat too tightly. There's a great book I read a few years ago called Free Range Parenting, which is mostly about older kids, but they really address a lot of the things that we think we're afraid of, like checking your kids' Halloween candy. There's not really incidents of people poisoning Halloween candy or kids dying from vandalized Halloween candy. There are issues of kids getting hit by cars in their Halloween costumes because it's too dark. They're wearing a dark costume and there's no reflectors and people can't see them. So, like, be aware of what the issues actually are when you're going to do that.

Older kids, I want them to be able to play and explore and do things. And maybe, yeah, maybe fall down, maybe get hurt a little bit. Don't panic that your baby's gonna fall in the natural course of learning how to walk or learning how to

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run or playing on the playground or whatever. But do worry about things that are actual concerns.

I had clients a few years ago, I was sleep training their toddler and they had, I think, a pretty good overall perspective on parenting. Again, it was another one of these know-it-all dads that drove me crazy. And the daughter was on the small side and they wanted to make sure she was eating enough. So they were basically letting her get up in the middle of the night and eat snacks or drink milk, which is fine, but it was really disturbing everyone's sleep. And they were concerned that she wasn't gonna be able to have that. So I was like, let's brainstorm some ideas. You know, she's two and a half.

There's some stuff she could probably just snack on herself in the middle of the night without you having to get up and feed her or whatever. And the mom was like, oh yeah, that's a great idea. Like, how about nuts? I was like, no, nuts are a huge choking hazard. I'm not giving a two and a half year old nuts alone in her room in the middle of the night. We don't want to do that. So think of something that you feel comfortable with that's not a choking hazard. A sippy cup of water or something is totally fine for kids to have by themselves in the middle of the night. I'm not worried about that. But nuts are definitely not safe.

Or like the little girl got up from the table and she was jumping around and she was dancing and I was like, that's great, whatever. Let them do that. Kids need to get their energy out. They're not going to sit like executives at a board meeting. And trust me, I'm sure a lot of those executives at board meetings want to get up and jump and dance around too. But in this particular incident, she was holding metal chopsticks and she was jumping up and down holding these chopsticks and I was eating dinner with the family while I was there sleep training and I was like, can we please put the chopsticks down?

And the dad scoffed out loud. He's like, we trust her. I was like, I trust her too. She's safe to get up from the table. But how easy would it be for her to trip while she's jumping and dancing and one of these chopsticks goes right in her eye or right in her mouth or just be aware of what's actually dangerous and what's not. Jumping around, she might fall. Who cares? Jumping around, she might fall and impale herself with a metal chopstick. It's not worth the risk.

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My mom tells the story of my cousin when he was a kid, he's older than me, playing with an American flag. And, you know, they have that like a pointy end and he put it in his mouth and he stabbed himself in the roof of the mouth and the doctor at the hospital said if it had been, you know, an inch further back in his soft palate, he could be dead.

So, you know, sharp objects, just be so careful with them, things like that. So just be aware of what the risks are. And now that I have thoroughly scared and horrified everyone, that's the end. Just be aware that just because your baby can't do something now doesn't mean they won't be able to go down the road.

Be aware of what safety risks actually are versus what are things that are maybe less dangerous. Understand that re-breathing is a risk, so even if they're not smothering or suffocating, it can still be dangerous.

Pay attention to the guidelines when you're using your baby products. Make sure you're using them safely, effectively, that they're the right size, that the babies are not too old to be using it or too young to be using it. Make sure they're in that window for size and safety, and you'll be totally fine.

If things do happen, accidents do happen, don't beat yourself up, don't hate yourself forever. And if something happens to your partner or someone else that's one of your other caregivers, don't give them too hard of a time either because next time it could just as easily be you.

Have a great day.

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