

Ep #72: Parenthood Is Basically Burning Man

# PARENTHOOD PREP

with

*Devon Clement*



**Full Episode Transcript**

With Your Host

**Devon Clement**

## Ep #72: Parenthood Is Basically Burning Man

Today on the show, I'm going to ask you guys to indulge me a little bit in a silly little thing I want to talk about, which is going to Burning Man and how it's similar to having a baby. So stay tuned. And if you don't know what Burning Man is, don't worry I will explain it. And if you don't know what having a baby is, then I'll explain that too. Stay tuned.

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.

While you are listening to this podcast, if you're listening to it the day or the week it comes out, I will be in the Nevada desert at Burning Man. Which I know seems crazy, and a lot of people have a lot of thoughts and opinions about it. Trust me, I do too.

And today I really want to talk about something that I realized last year, and it's a very niche topic so it's a little bit of a departure from what we normally talk about, but indulge me; it's August, everybody's in summer vacation mode. Which is how going to Burning Man is a real lot like having a baby, or more specifically, how having a baby is a lot like going to Burning Man.

What is Burning Man? A lot of people will say a lot of things about it. It's basically this giant event in the middle of the Nevada desert. And when I say the desert, I mean it is basically the surface of the moon. There is no plant life. There is no water. There are no bugs. There is nothing.

And 80,000 people go out there, we build a city, and we live in that city for about 10 days. We go to parties and we go to events and we take classes and workshops and we listen to music and we ride our bicycles all over the place. I didn't even really fully understand what it was until I went there.

And the best way I could describe it, after being there for all of 12 hours, was it's like a carnival on the moon. The only thing that is provided is oxygen and the

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rest you have to deal with yourself. Actually, that's not true, there's also porta-potties, which they keep extremely clean; which I will get into.

So people call it a festival, and then people who go will be like, "It's not a festival." I know it's so annoying, but it's really not a festival. Festivals are organized by a larger organization that takes care of things like trash removal and you have to pay for stuff. You don't have to pay for anything at Burning Man. Obviously you pay to go, and everybody at the camp chips in to pre-buy all your food and stuff like that.

But you go around to these camps that have events and parties and classes and workshops and all these things, and you don't need money at all. Which I guess is a way that it's very different from having a baby, because having a baby, it's very expensive.

But also, going to Burning Man is very expensive in the lead-up. You have to get all your camping equipment, your fancy tent, your clothes, your outfits, and chip in for your camp dues, and you have to fly to Nevada and you have to rent a car.

Anyway, if you're familiar with Burning Man, you may be familiar with the fact that last year it famously rained. It was our first year going, and then it started raining. The Nevada desert is not really well equipped for rain. The ground itself, we called it "mud" but it was actually like pottery clay. It got really stuck on your shoes, you couldn't bike in it, you couldn't drive in it. So sometimes shit goes wrong, you know? I'm going to talk about that, too.

How is having a baby like going to Burning Man? First of all, everyone is way too focused on their cute outfits. The cute outfits are amazing. Everybody at Burning Man wears these very cool costumes and exciting, expressive things. Everybody gets these cute dresses and socks and pants, and all these things for their babies, and they focus on that instead of focusing on what is truly important.

So everyone is very focused on decorating their nursery, getting all the cute outfits for the baby. Even your friends and family gift you clothes and embroidered sweaters and all this stuff. And these things are all great, I'm not

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saying you shouldn't have them, but they are really not what's important. People end up with far too many clothes for the tiniest newborn size that the baby grows out of in two weeks. Meanwhile, they've been wearing these onesies and footed sleepers the whole time.

Focusing on the outward aesthetic is, of course, an important piece of the puzzle, but it's not the whole puzzle. And when you're too focused on that, you really tend to miss out on some of the more important things. Which brings me to both Burning Man and having a baby.

When you're doing it for the first time, the things that you think are going to be difficult are not necessarily so, and the things that you don't think are going to be difficult are much more challenging than you expected. Something I talk about a lot with babies, a joke I like to make, is that everybody's worried about how to take care of the umbilical cord.

Nobody's worried about how to get time for a shower. You think, "Oh well, I'll just put the baby down and I'll get to do whatever I want," and that's not always the case. So you have this baby, and you're like, "Actually, the umbilical cord is super easy to take care of. That's great. All I have to do is leave it alone until it falls off. No problem."

"But wait, how am I going to manage my time? How am I going to find time for myself to eat? How am I going to manage my relationship with my partner, my friends, my family, my other kids?" Those are the things you don't really think about.

The bathrooms, as I mentioned earlier, are porta-potties. I thought, "Oh, porta-potties at a festival, gross! Disgusting! They're going to be horrible. I'm just going to have to hold my nose and deal with it." Actually, the porta-potties at Burning Man are kind of amazing. They're beautifully clean. They pump them out multiple, multiple times a day. The worst one I went into was barely filled to the top.

I feel like when you go to a big event the porta-potties are overflowing and people leave their garbage in there. Nobody leaves garbage anywhere at

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Burning Man. Everybody picks up their garbage and takes it with them. You don't have to worry about being out of toilet paper because everybody actually brings their own toilet paper with them. And of course, that goes into the porta-potty. But they're so wonderful and clean, and I was so pleasantly surprised by how great the porta-potties were.

But what I was also surprised by and didn't realize, was that they were kind of far from our camp. So when you wanted to go to the bathroom, especially at night in the dark, you had to take a little bit of a journey. You had to put your headlamp on, you had to put your lights on your body or your light-up jacket or whatever, so that people could see you in the dark.

Because it's not just about seeing where you're going, it's also about people being able to see you. And it is pitch black at night. Of course, the camps and the spaces have lights, but they don't light the place like giant floodlights do. They just light the immediate area. Again, pleasantly surprised by how nice the porta-potties were, and also a little annoyed at how far they were from our camp.

It's the same thing with having a baby. You think you're going to be so stressed out about changing diapers, turns out that's really easy and what you're actually stressed about is how to get the baby calm when they're crying too much. Pro tip, listen to my podcast episode about it. But you know what? I mean, it's all these things that you sort of don't think about that take you by surprise, or affect you in a way that you would not have anticipated them to affect you.

There's so much advice... There's so much advice out there. There are a million first-time "burner" guides. There are websites, there are subreddits. There's your camp. There are your friends that are going. Everybody's asking questions and answering questions and giving you all this advice. But you don't actually know what advice you're going to need until you do it.

Some stuff we followed to the letter and we were like, "Oh, actually, this was not that important." And then some stuff became an issue and I was like, "Oh crap, somebody told me about that," but I didn't... Like having enough lights on your jacket. I just could not conceptualize, until I was in the moment, how many lights

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I needed to have on my jacket. I was like, “Oh, I’ll get these light-up armbands. That’ll be great.” No, your entire jacket should look like a Christmas tree because it’s so dark at night.

But there are things that you don’t know until you do it. And a lot of times, veterans... I mean myself now, being a one-year veteran, I look at my friends who are going for the first time and I’m like, “No, really, do this. Really do this.” But I think some stuff you just need to kind of learn the hard way the first time. Because we did, and you just can’t solve that problem for everyone.

Everyone does have an opinion. People who go, aka people who are already parents who have babies, will tell you their best advice for what to do. People who don’t go will tell you what they think of it and what they think of you. Don’t listen to those people, because they don’t actually know what they’re talking about. Don’t listen to people who have not ever taken care of a baby.

Now notice, I didn’t say ‘people who don’t have kids.’ I don’t have kids. You should listen to me when it comes to talking about how to take care of a baby. I don’t think you can experience Burning Man in the same way that I have experienced raising a child though. So anyway, don’t listen to people who haven’t been there.

But there’s so much advice, and you can’t figure out what applies to you, what you need, what you don’t need. There’s conflicting advice. What should you listen to? What should you not? So you have to juggle those opinions with what can really be helpful and useful to us, and what do we need to discard?

You need to buy so much stuff, and not just cute outfits. I mean, that’s part of it. Of course, the cute outfits are the icing on the cake. But you also need a really good tent. You really need a really good mattress to sleep on. You need a really good coat for nighttime.

You need a bike. You need clothes to wear that are going to be useful for riding a bike and experiencing wild temperature swings of hot to colds, and this and that. You need lights, so many lights, like I mentioned. You need a camelback, water bottles, backpacks, all that stuff.

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Same thing with a baby. You need baby furniture. Crib, bassinet, stroller, car seat, high chair, onesies, diapers, formula bottles. So you need to buy all that stuff.

They're both really, really hard. You are doing something you've never done before. You do not have the resources you're used to having at your disposal. Like if you have a problem at work, you have a team that you can consult with, you have mentors. If you're the boss, then you can hire a coach or you can hire a consultant or you can get one of your employees to figure it out for you. When you are at Burning Man, you have to figure all that stuff out for yourself.

If you have a problem at work, you can put it off until tomorrow or the next day or next week. You can't do that when you have a brand-new baby. There's no one that's going to take care of it for you, unless you have a postpartum doula. You can't do that for Burning Man, so that is one definite advantage that having a baby has over going to Burning Man.

It's just really challenging, but also at the same time, you have this sense of wonder about everything you see, everything you do. You watch your baby find her hand and put it in her mouth for the first time and your brain explodes. Because you're like, "This is a person who yesterday could not consciously get their hand in their mouth. They just flailed it around and hit themselves in the face. And I just watched her learn how to consciously put her hand in her mouth." You're just blown away by that. It's so incredible.

Babies learn so much in the first year, the first couple of years, the first couple months. Sometimes you're biking around, you're in the middle of the desert, and this beautiful piece of art just rises up before you. And you're like, "Oh, my God, I cannot believe that you built this in under a week, in the middle of the desert, with having to bring in your own electricity, your own water, your own food, your own tools, your own everything. And you managed to make this work."

So just this sense of wonder at everything that's happening around you is incredible. Of course, watching a baby learn how to put their hand in the mouth for the first time is about the most amazing thing you can possibly experience. But this is pretty cool, too.

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As hard as it is, it's actually really fun. And having a baby is the same way. You think to yourself, "Why did I do this to myself? This is crazy." A lot of times, when you're pregnant it's like the lead-up to going on the trip.

We are leaving in two days; you're listening to this after we're already there. But as I'm recording this, we're leaving in two days. And I am like, "What if we just didn't go? What if we just stayed home instead? I'm exhausted already, and we haven't even gotten there yet."

Speaking of Burning Man and having a brand-new baby, you do not get enough sleep at all. "Why are we doing this? Can I change my mind? Can I go back?" And it happens, and you're like, "Okay, this is why I did it. I understand." Sure, you still have your moments of, "Oh my God, can I just teleport to a hotel room?"

But same thing with a baby. "Can I just go back to my life before this beautiful creature came into it?" But there's also so much fun and so much joy and so many really positive moments. And I think a major similarity in the difficulty, but also in the beauty of it, is that in that time period, however long it is... Burning Man, it's like 10 days with a baby. It might be the first month, the first three months, it kind of just depends how things are going...

You, this person that spends your day doing a job and helping people in some way at your job, and solving problems and doing things that other people can't do, and using your super smart brains and figuring stuff out, and just enjoying your life, you get boiled down to your most essential biological needs.

If you're in the middle of... It's called the "deep playa". Way out in the desert. If you're in the middle of the desert and you run out of water, or a dust storm kicks up, and you don't have your goggles or dusk mask, you're screwed. So all the cleverness in the world, all the money in the world... There's no phone service at all... None of that is going to help you if you haven't taken care of your own biological needs.

If you're hungry, you need to figure out how to get food for yourself. Whether that means packing it yourself from your camp or from your tent, or whatever, or finding the places that have it, that you can get it. You just become so focused

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on your biological needs at any given time. And I think that does so much for us as people. It reminds us that no, it's not important who's texting us, what's going on Reddit or Facebook or Instagram or whatever.

What's really, truly important is how can I take care of myself and my body to get through this day? What do I truly, truly need? Nothing else. And when you have a brand-new baby, you can be... I don't care if you're the president of the country. I don't care if you're an astronaut, a CEO, a lawyer, a teacher, a firefighter, any of those things. A doctor, you're saving lives in the OR every day. You come home to that baby, and you are boiled down to your and her biological needs only. "I have to feed the baby. I can't just not do it."

You don't want to respond to an email? Don't do it. You don't want to fill your water bottle before you go out biking for the day? Too bad, you have to do it. You don't want to feed the baby because you're tired and it's two in the morning? Too bad, you have to feed the baby. Again, side note, listen to my podcast episodes, because you don't always have to feed the baby. But you get the gist.

The gist is that you get boiled down to your most basic biological needs, and you have to tend to them. Which reminds you that you are essentially, at the end of the day, just a sack of meat with a wet pile of electrified bacon in between your ears. Which is actually, basically, what your brain is. And we've managed to come this far as a society, which is so amazing to me.

So people talk and don't make any sense. That's another thing that happens when you have a baby. You're delirious from the lack of sleep and slight dehydration. You don't shower very often; another similarity to having a baby. Oh, another problem... and this is just an interesting Burning Man tidbit... another problem that I thought would be a big deal and actually wasn't, is that it's very dusty.

We say dust, it's not like dust in your house. It's not even like dust of powdery sand or something like that. I can't explain it. I was so worried about it. And I was worried I was going to feel dirty all the time, so I brought all these wipes to clean myself and all this stuff.

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And it's actually like, this is going to sound crazy, but it's such a clean dust. It just sort of gets on your skin and in your hair. And your hair turns into Polly Pocket hair, like totally plastic, and it's fine. It's kind of great because you don't have to think about what it looks like. You're like, "Nope, looks the same as it did yesterday because I have Polly Pocket hair." There's no humidity whatsoever. The air is like completely dry.

You might be going into having a baby thinking, "Oh, I'm going to be so disgusted by the smell of a dirty diaper." And then it's breast milk poop, or formula poop, and it's not that stinky in those early days, before they start eating solid food. Baby poop is really not that bad. And in some ways it's kind of cute.

And if you get a little on your hand, which you will, you just go to the sink and wash your hands and you're fine. Or you wipe it off with a baby wipe and put on some hand sanitizer until you can get the baby situated so that you can go wash your hands in the sink. The things that you think are going to really bother you from a sensory perspective, don't. It's also really loud at night.

And then, the last thing I'm going to say, is that the situation that we're in right now is that we're going for the second time. It's our second time around. We think, "We've got it all figured out. It's going to be so easy." The whole time we were doing it the first time, we were like, "Next year, we're going to be so great at this. It's going to be so easy." And the second time around, it has a whole bunch of brand-new challenges.

So you have that first baby. You don't know what you're doing with a newborn. You're clueless. Maybe you have help, maybe you don't. But it's just like you're feeling overwhelmed, and you think, "Okay, if I do this again, I'm going to know what to do with a newborn. I learned so much." And you do, you have that next baby, and sure, you know how to change a diaper, you know how to take care of the umbilical cord, and you know some tricks for soothing and getting them to sleep.

But guess what? Now you have a two-year-old, now you have a four-year-old, now you have a one-year-old now, you have an eight-year-old, and you have to figure out how to manage both of those kids, which you never had to do before.

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You have to figure out how to get enough sleep at night so that you can be on for your older kids during the day.

So there's a whole... Yes, you know how to take care of a baby, but there's a whole set of new challenges that comes the second time around. But at the end of the day, you find yourself wondering, "What the fuck did I do?" And you can't wait to do it again.

I will see you guys when I get back. And I hope you're having a wonderful... we won't call it end of the summer, because it's not. We have a month left... wonderful late/middle of the summer. And I can't wait to hear if you guys have any thoughts about this. Comment on our Instagram @happyfamilyafter, and I'll talk to you soon.

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Thanks for listening to this week's episode of *Parenthood Prep*. If you want to learn more about the services Devon offers, as well as access her free monthly newborn care webinars, head on over to [www.HappyFamilyAfter.com](http://www.HappyFamilyAfter.com).