

**Ep #93: How to Make Bath Time Fun, Safe,
& Actually Useful**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Devon Clement

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Put them in the tub. You need to supervise them, but you don't need to entertain them. They will entertain themselves in the bath for so long.

Welcome to *Parenthood Prep*, the only show that helps sleep-deprived parents and overwhelmed parents-to-be to 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, hello. Welcome back to *Parenthood Prep*, the podcast. As always, I love to talk about the weather. It is a hot one this week, and I am thrilled. I have been down at our house in New Jersey getting everything ready for the summer. We have the pool open, so I've been taking a dip when it gets too hot. Is there anything better than being in the water on a hot day? I say no. Is there anything better than being in the water full stop? No, I don't think so.

Which leads us right into our topic for today, which is bath time. You know, there's a lot of stages of bathing your kids and a lot of different things to think about along the way. But the main thing that I want everybody to just really internalize is that bath time is the best time of the day for them, for you, for everyone. It is fun. It is enjoyable. It can be peaceful. It really can be a reset for them. It is not just a chore, just a thing that you need to do in the interminable slog to bedtime at the end of the day. And if you have the mindset that bath time is great and you love it and it's a huge part of your fun that day, you're going to have a great time with it.

So, let's go by age, starting with newborns. A lot of people will say, "Oh, they hate the bath. Oh, you know, they cry the whole time. I just try to do it as quickly as possible." And I think there's a couple of reasons for that. Number one, everyone is afraid of boiling their baby with water that's too hot, so they make the water too cold. And they think it's good because it's like just warm enough, but then they don't put enough in the tub. So the baby is sort of half in, half out. They're naked, they're wet, the room is too cold. You know so they're miserable.

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You know how when you get a little bit wet and then you've got like a breeze blowing on you? It's the worst feeling.

So let's get that water nice and warm. If you touch it with the inside of your wrist, which is the most sensitive skin on your body, you touch that water and you don't go, "Ow," the water is fine. And trust me, if your baby is really sensitive, as soon as their butt starts to touch water that's too hot, they're going to go, "Wah." They are not going to be happy with half their body in water that's too cold. So you want to make sure it's nice and full with nice, warm water.

The other thing is basic physics, and I am not a physicist. In fact, physics is one of the subjects I never studied. My fiancé, however, went to physics camp as a teenager, which I never tire of bringing up, asking him about, teasing him about. You know, so anytime I have a physics question, I'm like, "Didn't they teach you that at physics camp?" So I don't think they taught this at physics camp, but what I know is that the amount of water in that tub in a chilly bathroom is going to cool off really quickly.

So if you think it's the perfect temperature to start, it's going to get cold really fast. So we want to be ideally like refreshing that water with some nice warm water out of the faucet. I like to really have like the faucet running into the tub while I'm bathing the baby, depending on what kind of baby tub you have, and we'll get into this. You know, you may or may not be able to do that, but I always like to be thinking about how we're keeping the water warm enough.

People say, "Oh, just cover them with a wet washcloth," but if that wet washcloth is also cold with chilly water, they're not going to like it. So give them a bath that you would like, one that's nice and full, where their body is up to the chest submerged. And you're still, obviously you've got a hand on them at all times, so they're not going to drown. You can fill the water up nice and high. And you can get it nice and warm. Like I said, if it doesn't feel like it's burning you, you are not going to boil your baby. They just spent nine months floating around in 98.6-degree fluid. Like they are fine with water that is a few degrees warmer than that.

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You know, usually, you're bathing your baby in the baby bath either in the kitchen or in the bathroom. Make sure that the room is warm. You know, especially in the wintertime, or actually even in the summer because you've got the air conditioning going, if you keep your house on the colder side, and a lot of times people who've just had a baby are very hot, so they keep their house on the colder side, use a little space heater, like get that room warmed up, or pick a room that is warm. Or bathe your baby right after you take a shower and the bathroom's all steamed up and warmed up from your shower. You know, make it warm, make it really comfortable in there. Make it a nice experience for them.

Does that mean that you need the fancy-schmancy tubs that have like the sprayers and stuff like that? No. You just need a little cup, a little plastic cup, or a little pitcher to pour water over their head, rinse their hair, get a little water on them, get a little water on their face. Don't be precious about getting water on their face. Like yeah, you probably don't want to dump soap into their eyes. But once you've rinsed, you know, the shampoo out and they're down their back, pour a little water on the top of their head and let it run down their face.

Don't be precious about it, because you want a baby who's going to be used to having water on their face and isn't going to be so sensitive as they get older that they can never get their face wet. And I think a lot of people in the interest of being gentle and loving, and like you wouldn't want water dumped on your head, but you're in the bathtub. So just imagine that you're like in the pool and you don't care if your hair gets wet and somebody like dumps a bucket of water on you. It's not the worst thing that ever happened to you.

I used to babysit for a little girl, and she was little. She was like 10 months, a year. Like I babysat for them for a long time. She loved having like buckets of water dumped over her head. She thought it was the funniest thing. You would just fill up a bucket in the bathtub and literally dump it over her head, and she would be like, and then she would be cracking up like you have never heard in your life. It was her favorite thing. So, you know I'm not saying that wasn't just a personality trait of hers that we developed that, but when you're not precious about getting a little water, even the soap is very gentle. You know, getting a little

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water on their face, getting a little soap on their face, it's not the worst thing that ever happened. And you should get them used to that.

When you do a baby swim class, like at a swim school or at the YMCA, they have you pouring water over the baby's head so that they get used to water being on their head. So why not do that at bath time too? You're not going to pour it directly into their mouth. You're not going to waterboard them. They can get some water on their face. Certainly, you know, you want to clean them really well. You want to clean in all those cracks and crevices. You want to get their hands. You want to get their hands out of those little balled-up, scrunchy fists they always want to make and get that fuzz and that grossness out of their hands.

You want to really get into their neck, especially if they're fat and they have those like neck rolls, those delicious, yummy neck rolls. You want to get in there and you want to really clean those out, and then you want to kind of fan them. I'm like doing this to myself while I'm recording, like, "Oh, this is so nice. I'm fanning my neck." You want to get in there and dry it with the towel because moisture trapped in rolls and creases and crevices is going to lead to issues. It's going to lead to rashes. It's going to lead to yeast. It's going to lead to all kinds of problems. So not only do we want to really clean in those rolls, we want to dry them really well as well. Get in the diaper area, the creases of the legs, the thigh rolls, all that good stuff.

As they get older and they're crawling around and they're into everything, handwashing is super important too. You want to do that multiple times a day, but especially in the bath. And then, you know, the poopy area, you kind of want to clean that last because you don't want to use the washcloth that you just used to clean their butt to then clean their face. So try to remember to do that last. If you get into a routine, it's usually pretty easy. Then I really like to drain out the tub and do a clean rinse. So that's how you bathe a little baby. It's not super hard. You can get into a routine.

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When you take them out of the bath, those stupid little, like paper-thin baby hooded towels are terrible. They work for like three weeks, and then they're too small and they're too thin and they're not cozy. So as your baby gets bigger, you can use a regular bath towel, just a regular grown-up, nice, fluffy bath towel on them. They will love that. Now, is it nice if it has a little hood? Of course it is. One of my go-to gifts for people that have a baby or a toddler, maybe it's their first Christmas when they're six months old or their one-year-old or their first birthday or whatever, I love to give a gift that is like a handmade, not a handmade towel, but there's a lot of people on Etsy and on the internet who do this.

They get a nice bath towel, they take a washcloth, they sew it as a hood, and then they like embroider some little trim on it. Maybe it has the baby's name, maybe it has the baby's initials. It is the best gift, and everyone that I have given this to has used it like basically nonstop for many, many years of that child's life. And you don't need to wash the towel every single time. You're just using it to like dry them off when they're already clean. So you just hang it on the back of the shower and wash it every few days or every few baths, and you're golden. Get two, and you'll never need any more than that.

Literally, I saw a client the other day with her, gosh, they're going to be 13-year-old twins that I took care of, that I was their overnight doula when they were first born. And for Christmas, when they were six months old, I was still working with them, you know, helping her out during the day and stuff like that. I got them these towels. She told me they're almost 13. She's like, "Devon, when I tell you we threw those towels out like two years ago, we had them forever, and they used them forever." Get a nice, big, normal, fluffy towel and just use that. Those crummy little baby towels, even the really like plushy ones, they're too small. Would you want to get out of the bath and wrap up in a towel that's not even the size of your body, and now you're cold again because the water, you know, is on your skin? No. So get a nice, big, fluffy towel.

Baby tubs. I got to say, there's not really one on the market right now that I adore. The Frida Grow with Me tub is pretty good. The Primo is really good, but it's kind of big, so it's hard to use for a newborn. It's better when they're small.

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The Fisher-Price blue tub was my favorite for years, like the whole early 2000s, everybody had the little Fisher-Price blue tub. It has a sling, like a mesh sling that you're supposed to use when their baby is teeny tiny. And I find that people use it far too long. You do not need to keep using it once they are big enough to like be up with their head to be up out of the water. If you're still using that sling and your baby is three months old or five months old or six months old, they're just up out of the water and it's not comfortable for anybody.

I did a sleep training years ago, and she knows, you know, we became good friends, she knows that I just laughed at this. You know, they were first-time parents. They didn't know anything. They had this whole bath routine. He was like six months old where they were still using the sling, but he was like popping out of the tub. So the dad would get in the tub with him to like hold him in place while the mom bathed him.

And I was like, "What if we just took the sling out and put him directly in the tub?" And they were like, "Oh my god, that changes everything. That makes it so much better." But you don't know what you don't know. So you think you're supposed to use that sling until they're sitting up on their own or whatever. You are not. That is only for a couple of weeks. Don't use that. So I think Fisher-Price has a new version of the blue tub that's like pretty good. They're all pretty stupid.

However, you should probably use one, especially when your baby is tiny. Please do not bathe them in the kitchen sink. Kitchen sinks are so disgusting. I'm not a germaphobe. The kitchen sink is the grossest place in your house. It's grosser than the toilet in terms of germs and things that you'll find in there. Plus, you know, you don't want to have to clear your dishes all out every time you want to bathe the baby. So get a baby tub, use it for a little while. You can even use like a bucket or something if you want to. Or you can take them in the bath with you, which is really, really nice. I do that when we have my niece with us.

We didn't have like a baby tub for her in our apartment, so I would just either take her with me into the shower or into a bath. I would only do the bath with her if my fiancé was there to help because I just didn't want to manage like getting

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out of the tub wet while holding her. I was just too worried I was going to like slip and fall. But if he's right there, he can take her and dry her off and get her all ready, and then I can like finish my bath, rinse off in the shower and dry off, and then come out and meet them when they're already PJ'd up. It's beautiful. So that is a great way to bathe a baby, especially if you're staying in a rented house or staying with friends or family and you don't have a baby tub. Just get in the bath with them. Just have a good time, you know?

And then as they get older, the bath just becomes such a fun part of the day. And then once they're sitting up on their own, which Audrey's doing now, it's the freaking best. They love to be in the water. They love to be in the bath. We do the trick now where we put a laundry basket in the tub, fill it up with water, and then she sits in the laundry basket with her little cups and her little floaties. And the basket kind of keeps her stable. This way, if she slips a little bit, she doesn't like fall completely down under the water. And it keeps the toys from getting too far away, so she's not trying to reach for them and falling into the water. It's like ideal. So for a little while, that's a great solution. And then once they're bigger, like 15 months or 18 months or whatever, they can just go in the bathtub.

Again, we want to fill it up pretty decent, like maybe waist-high if they're sitting or a little higher. And really like, bath time can be your time. I worked for a mom years ago. She was actually a good friend, and she got hurt, so she needed some help. So I moved in with her for a couple of months and helped her with her two-year-old and her baby. And every evening, I would give the two-year-old a bath for like an hour. And she was like, "How do you do it? How do you have the patience for that? Because I have no patience for giving him a bath for that long." I said, "Girl, I read a magazine. He plays. I read a book. I knit."

This was so long ago, I didn't have a smartphone. This kid is like painting my bedroom right now, but I used to give him baths in his little, in the bathtub. So, yeah, put them in the tub, stay there with them, obviously. You need to supervise them, but you don't need to entertain them. They will entertain themselves in the bath for so long. And don't do it so close to bedtime that you're in a real rush to get them to bedtime. If you want to have a nice, leisurely bath, do it earlier. Give

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them an hour. Like, oh my god, when I babysat, I would just stick them in the tub and just, that's your time.

Obviously, again, supervise. As they get older, they can be older, older, like six, seven, they can be left alone a little bit longer, but six, seven years, not months, you know I mean that. Supervise them in the tub. Make sure they don't try to climb out. Make sure they don't drown. That's your time. Read a book, play on your phone, do a craft, bring a basket of laundry into the bathroom and fold a basket of laundry. Like use that time as your time. You do not need to entertain them during that time.

Also like, sometimes in the middle of the day, if you're just like, "You kids are driving me crazy, I'm tired of you making a mess," give them a second bath. Give them a shower. Just put them in the tub and just get to sit still and not be chasing them all over the place. I'm telling you, it is amazing. And honestly, it's kind of a miracle for their mood, for their, you know, attitude. If they're cranky, at any age, put them in water. It will calm them down. It is absolutely the thing that fixes them.

You don't need a ton of toys. I actually think it's really kind of disgusting when people have those squirty toys and they get all full of mildew and there's no way to clean them. There's definitely more now that are easy to clean and not, don't get so disgusting, but that's gross. Just give them cups, plastic cups. Like they are thrilled with that. Or even just some normal toys, like a couple of little balls or something. Whatever, they are so, so happy with that. Or those like foam letters that stick on the wall. You don't need me to tell you about bath toys.

The point is, you can give them literally anything. I had Audrey in the tub probably for 45 minutes the other day in the laundry basket, in the tub with three plastic cups, and she was happy as a clam the entire time. They also have those like supported bath seats that you can use when they get older, which are great, if you don't want to give up a laundry basket, just use that. Again, don't leave them unsupervised.

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Even as they get older, when I was two years old, my mother left me in the bathroom, which was right off of our kitchen. Like she could hear me, she knew that I was playing, I wasn't drowning, but I climbed out of the tub by myself and I slipped and fell and I hit, I knocked out my two front teeth, and I had two fake teeth in the front until my adult teeth came in when I was like six or seven. So, keep your eyes on them so you can see if they're trying to climb out of the tub, so you don't end up like that. I will also say that I have told that story to a lot of little kids and it put the fear of God into them. They will never climb out of the tub after hearing that. Not that I'm recommending scaring them.

Anyway, bath time, it's great. Love it. Keep the water warm, let them have fun. You do not have to entertain them. You can just sit there and do whatever you want. Yeah, enjoy.

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