

The Nurturing Parent

by Chelsea Pegues

It's not news to anyone that being a parent is a big deal. After all, it is a lifelong commitment to keeping another human being alive, healthy, and happy. Data collected by CNBC reflects that due to our ever-evolving socioeconomical climate, many individuals (1 in 5 U.S. adults, or about 20%) are choosing to have only one baby or remain childless. For those who do become parents, the experience certainly teaches us how powerful patience and empathy are; children require these virtues as they grow, learn, and absorb the world around them. Just as our kiddos evolve from infants into full-blown adults themselves, we grow as people through raising them. Throughout the challenges and demands of parenting, our skillsets expand; and we may need lots of help nurturing this version of ourselves and figuring out how to navigate this new territory safely.

Enter hosts Lisa Sigurgeirson (who identifies as “Amma” on the show, which means “mother” in Icelandic) and Sareena Mullon-Merino of *The Nurturing Parent* podcast. Based in Canada and the U.S., respectively, these inter-generational pals met online in the summer of 2021 and discovered a mutual interest in hosting a show based on their parenting ideals and methods they've found success in. Says Sareena, “I was interested in starting a podcast; my [first] daughter was one - I believe a little over one - and I was just learning how to navigate this whole life and this big change. [I was] raised with a strict dad and thought I was going to be doing that but realized quickly that it just wasn't in me to be like that, and I wanted to learn

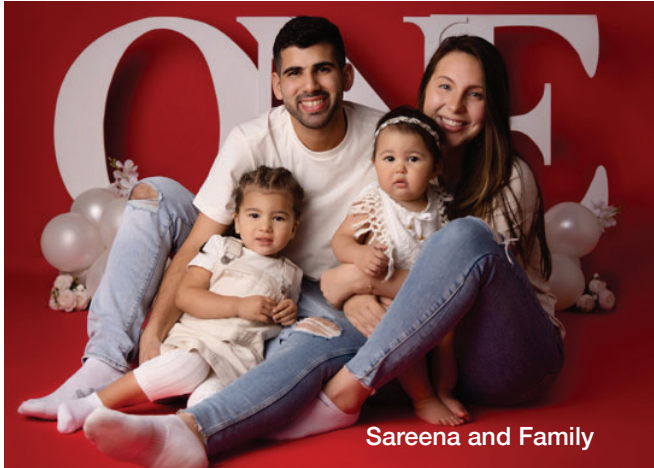


how to do better for my daughters.” Added Lisa, “Yeah, we decided to have one Zoom call together right away because for me, I was 40 years in, with a background in early childhood education, [running] my own nursery school when my daughter was a toddler...working in lots of different childcare centers, and then parenting education [so I had some] very strong ideas about what I believe and what I would prefer parents to lean towards. And I needed to know that Sareena and I were [in sync] before I said yes to jumping into a podcast with her. So, we had one meeting and we were [in such a] great alignment.” Sareena's first daughter was born during the height of the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020. While fear of the unknown and isolation was at peak, she now had the daunting task of delving into first-time parenthood. “I did feel very isolated. Um, I didn't really have my family around. I had my husband's family around. So, it's funny, [the first name for our show was] ‘We Are the Village’ because we believe it takes a village to raise [children]. We wanted to create a virtual village to help moms and kids. And then it shifted over into *The Nurturing Parent*.”

Sareena elaborated that a lot of her family “Don't really have the same beliefs as I do in parenting. It's like, why would you sleep with your baby? Don't get them used to that or don't get them used to being in your arms.” Lisa recalled hearing about the type of parent Sareena aspired to be and recognizing a kindred spirit. “For me, it was hearing that Serena was co-sleeping

with her baby, that she was breastfeeding, that she was holding her baby in her arms, so 'Attachment Parenting' [was her method]. The way that she talked about how she was doing her best to mama the way she wanted to mama, was like, 'Yes, yes, yes, yes!' So, those things were really aligned with my beliefs and what I would always encourage mamas to do. I think it was over two years ago since we had that call."

Child psychotherapist Dr. Haim Ginott (1922-1973) was an early influence on Lisa's path to being an early childhood educator, and his methodology enabled Lisa to help Sareena, in turn, find her footing. His most popular ideology for the authoritative figure was that "In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, and a child humanized or dehumanized." Sareena expanded on how she applies this principle, saying "[When I] would fight with my husband, it was hard for me to change my mood, and I would just stay upset. He taught me how to [just lighten up]. It's helped me [with my husband] and in my relationship with my daughter as well." She says that now, instead of getting frustrated when her littles are slow to transition to the next task, such as clean-up time, she makes it a game instead of a chore. "When we realize we're about to butt heads or get into a fight [and it's time to switch or move on] instead of getting into it, [I'll say] 'Did you hear that? Hurry up, let's put the Play Doh away. Daddy's coming home!' and [we'll start that], you know, playful mode instead of just being serious and doing the back and forth."



Sareena and Family

"Change your mood" isn't a technique that applies only to parenting and our most intimate dynamics. For many of us, our dreams of successfully running a podcast may seem futile to many in our inner circle, and we end up defending our goals more than we'd like to admit. It's incredible to find and maintain a successful and supportive dynamic with your co-host, as Lisa pointed out. "For me, the fact that we are together as a duo has me show up. I have said to Sareena a few times, if I was doing this on my own, I don't know if I'd still be here after two years. You know, it's

so good to have each other. And Although Serena and I have not yet met in real life, she feels like a daughter to me. Her children call me Amma, which means grandmother. And I send them parcels...even Sareena's husband loves "Amma parcels" when they arrive. We have grown to love each other like family; it's just incredible. We live, you know, thousands of miles apart in two different countries."

When it comes to their show's sustainability, Lisa and Sareena started using self-starter services like Buzzsprout ads in an effort to monetize - and have found some success in doing so. Another great way to network and grow your podcast's audience is to provide a service or course. Recently, the duo offered an online parenting workshop, sharing advice, tips, and resources. Noted Sareena, "It was a free workshop because we wanted to collect more data on the people who are really engaged with us. [However] we just announced that we will be starting a membership in January." Lisa expanded on this, noting "That's a key piece. We [can only] come together twice a week. We're putting in only about 10 hours each right now because we're both working on outside things as well to keep our lives going. We haven't been able to [put those hours into researching] how do we find a sponsor? We haven't even really pursued that yet, and I think [in the first year] we were [under the impression] 'Okay, we're going to get to a certain number of downloads and then the sponsors are going to come to us.' She

goes on, “So that’s been a bit of a disappointment and our bubble got burst a few different times along there. But we are just starting this membership, and the other thing that I notice about us is we’re not [consistently] letting our listeners know what we have available. So, I do offer one-on-one coaching and we have had a little bit of response to that.” There are so many ways to use the skills you’re bringing into your show to support your endeavor, and you should. Be confident in what you can offer; if there is passion in what you’re doing, and you apply a sense of professionalism and organization, your efforts can only help your show grow. Get a notebook or open a blank spreadsheet and start jotting down ideas. If you’re time-restricted, like this pair are, focus on the ones you’re most excited about and can apply sooner-than-later. Longer term goals or larger-scale ideas are great, but maybe they need a little more time before they’re ready to launch. That’s okay, too! Consistency is key, as Lisa mentioned - if you offer a service or class of any kind, mention it at the top of every episode, as well as right before you sign off. Lisa and Sareena genuinely want their podcast to turn into an amazing go-to parenting experience and supportive space. “If I had all the time and all the money in the world, *The Nurturing Parent* would have [a website with] its own line of wooden puzzles, activities for kids, a subscription box, like a page of everything we recommend, [the podcast and a blog] and it would just be an amazing resource [for parents],” said Sareena. The pair are also especially proud of their “Birthing Series,” which yielded great feedback and spans episodes 23 through 29. Lisa added, “[Myself and my friend,] Sharon, who was our guest midwife for that series, [are] available for private consulting [online, via Zoom].”



The duo keeps their episodes conversational (no script), although Lisa does make notes about their chosen topic to help her stay on-track. And their symbiosis is truly the driving force behind the environment they’ve created. “I love how, how like Sareena, you know, in the beginning was feeling like she wasn’t bringing a lot to it. And I’m like, ‘No, no, no, you are the mama with your feet on the ground. You’re the one that they relate to.’ It’s the dynamic between us that I think really makes this work. We had a beautiful review recently that said something about, ‘I’ve been looking through all the parenting podcasts and this is the best one I found.’ And I love that [between Sareena and I] there’s the mama and the Amma and that together works so well, you know, so it’s beautiful to get that kind of feedback, too.”

Lisa and Sareena’s warmth, collective knowledge, and passion for what they do exudes from every episode. They encourage each other, and their audience, to keep showing up and just doing their best. It’s simple, sound advice- which hasn’t failed them yet. With these two at the helm, this show is sure to grow into a juggernaut of the parenting-podcast landscape in no time!



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