

Patrescence - How a man changes when he becomes a father & how this affects his relationship | Episode 4

Hey everyone, welcome back to our podcast where we take a deep dive into the world of parenting, not just from the outside, but from the core of our experiences and emotions.

Today we're talking about a topic that is not often talked about, patrescence. That's right. Today, it's all about the dads. Patrescence, similar to matrescence for moms that we discussed in episode one, is about the emotional and psychological journey that fathers go through when they enter parenthood. It's a huge shift, and guys, it's just as transformative as any other major life change. So whether you're a new dad, a seasoned pro, or a partner to one, this episode is going to shed some light on what patrescence is all about and why it is that understanding it really matters, not just for dads, but for their partners as well. So if you're a mom listening to this, don't tune out.

This is going to help you as well and the children. So are you ready? Let's go!

What exactly is patrescence? It's a process of becoming a father and the journey into and throughout fatherhood and everything that comes along with this: the changes in identity, the shifts in the relationship and a whole new set of responsibilities.

It isn't about how many diapers you can change in a day or how little sleep you can function on. These are small aspects of what it means to be a parent. But what it really is about is how you view yourself and the world around you as you become a parent.

Studies and experts suggest that many new dads experience shifts in their values and priorities.

Suddenly, there's this little person who not only depends on you, but also looks up to you. And that can really make us rethink what's important in life. It's not just philosophical. This is quite emotional too.

Dads often feel this array of emotions and because as a society we're not used to, still unfortunately, to men having a vast set of emotions it is very difficult to acknowledge that fathers too experience a rollercoaster of joy, but also fear and pride, but also sometimes great isolation as they try to navigate the new role.

And so why does this matter? Well, because understanding these changes is crucial for both our personal growth and for nurturing the family dynamics. It helps dads embrace their new identity and make the transition smoother for everyone involved.

Becoming a father isn't just about adding that little title, 'dad,' onto the resume. It's fundamental in how it changes how a man sees himself and often how he has to operate in the day-to-day.

First, comes the identity shift. And you know I'm all about that.

For a lot of guys, their identity pre-parenthood was really tied to things like career, hobbies, social life.

When a baby comes along these aspects don't disappear, but there's a new powerful layer that is added above them. Just like we talked about matrescence, this is not just an extra thing that's added beside the career and the hobbies and the social life. This is truly a layer that comes above all of this. You are not just a friend, an employee, or a partner anymore. You're a father and that role comes with its own set of expectations and pressures and it influences all the other roles that are below it. It can feel like you're

expected to be this pillar of strength wisdom and patience, all while figuring out what it is that you're doing as you go.

Then there's this emotional journey that comes along with patrescence.

As we touched upon before, society hasn't always encouraged men to openly discuss their feelings. But here is where things get interesting. Parenthood can crack all of that wide open. Dads might find themselves feeling more vulnerable or emotional than ever before. There's immense joy when your little one smiles for the first time or says 'dada.'

But there can also be a lot of anxiety and fear about whether you're doing things right. And guess what? This emotional upheaval can sometimes lead to feeling isolated or left out, especially if you're not sure of how to express what it is that you're going through, if it's okay to express what you're going through, because you're supposed to be strong, right?

And so expressing that there's this whirlwind of emotion might feel like a failure on your part, a failure to be strong, to be the pillar for the family.

But also because it's a lot to handle, and without the right support, it can really be overwhelming. It can seem like these don't go hand in hand. In general, as a society, we have not been taught to really consider emotions as intertwined. We think that we feel one emotion at a time, when what's really happening is that we feel several emotions simultaneously and a lot of times these emotions can be quite contradictory with one another.

But because we're not accustomed to this and because there's this expectation that as a parent, we're supposed to feel utterly joyful, it also becomes very shameful to describe those set of emotions that include fear or maybe even regret or loss about the life that has changed and all the things that now we find ourselves having to adjust to.

As we think about this, it's also important to consider that these transformations aren't just personal. They ripple out and affect all the relationships that we have with others, especially with our partner. It becomes quite problematic when we fail to understand that this really is a period of adjustment.

When a man becomes a father, it's not uncommon for his relationship with his partner to undergo some stress testing. Suddenly, there's this whole new dimension to negotiate. How do you share responsibilities? How do you avoid the comparison game? Who's more tired? Who is doing a more significant job? How do you support each other when both of you are feeling stretched thin and potentially feeling like the other person cannot possibly understand your situation - which is true because, well, they're not living it! It's a major adjustment and without open and deep supportive communication and listening, misunderstandings can easily creep in.

For example, it is quite common that new dads will throw themselves into work, even more so than before, to provide for the family, thinking that they're doing what's best. That's a natural tendency, as a rite of passage into fatherhood, to want to provide and to want to ensure that there is more than enough always so that the father and partner can be the beacon of safety for the family. Meanwhile, however, his partner might be feeling abandoned or very overwhelmed by handling the day to day parenting herself. A lot of mothers express this feeling of being in a partnership- a marriage- but really feeling like they're single parenting.

And that, of course, feels quite disheartening or even offensive, for fathers who are very emotionally invested in being parents hearing or sensing that they are considered as absent.

So you can see how a lot of resentment can build up if this is not all addressed openly. Both partners struggle but might not know how to express their feelings effectively.

And that's where supportive communication comes in. This is more so about listening and really hearing what your partner is experiencing, and then offering empathy. But in order to do that, it's really important, like we said in the previous episode, to take ourselves out of the situation. We really have to be able to not take things personally, so that we do not get triggered, so that we don't go into defense, which is what usually happens.

We all know that communication is key, and so with couples that I work with, I can actually tell you, and this is very positive, that they do talk to each other. They do have discussions. They will make sure to talk about the session after it's done. They don't just walk away and hope that next week's session will make everything better.

But how are they talking to one another and how much are they invested in listening to the other person without being in it to defend themselves and to get their own point across? That is the difference. Couples can benefit hugely from setting time aside to check in with each other, not just about the logistics of parenting, but about their feelings and their experiences in this new chapter, and to be able to really hear each other out.

And so here's a note for the moms or partners listening. Understanding patrescence can be a game changer. By recognizing the profound changes that your partner is going through, you can foster empathy and support for each other's experiences.

If we understand, for instance, that our partner will most likely due to a process that is expected to happen to all fathers to some extent experience this fear and this fear is going to trigger a need for them to go out and provide, then if we truly believe this -and we don't consider it an excuse- we can talk about what's really happening. Why is my husband staying an extra two or three hours in the office ever since we had a child? Does he not want to spend time with his daughter?

Does he really think it's easy and that I don't need support? Is he avoiding his parental responsibilities because it's just easier to be in the office? You can imagine how if I think this way, this will cause a lot of arguments and a lot of discontent. But if I understand what's driving him to stay longer, then we can start the conversation from a different level.

Maybe -most probably- this doesn't change the fact that I want him to be coming home earlier- at the time that he used to. Coming from a different place doesn't mean you're going to change what it is that you want of him. But it is going to change the way that you talk to him about it. Because in the scenario where you think that he's doing it on purpose, because he doesn't want to support you, because he's avoiding his responsibilities, because he doesn't think this is important, because "he gets to put his career first, and I don't," you're going to come off very differently than if you were thinking that,

"Hey, you know, he's got this fear and it's led to him consciously or subconsciously deciding to go more into work. I need to have a discussion with him, recognize how he's feeling, validate this fear, understand him, embrace him in it, and then we can both sit together and consider how it is that we can appease the fear in a way that he can also, show up for me the way that I want them to. Or we can find a

middle ground." Do you see the difference? Validating these experiences is crucial and it sets the stage for mutual growth and deeper connection.

Closing the loop of the relationship and going back to dads, I would like to turn my focus back onto how patrescence affects fathers, and one way is that it will amplify the very masculine related instinct to fix things. And this can dominate the response to family challenges. It stems from this long standing expectation that we have as a society for men to be problem solvers.

And it really also stems from this very innate need to tinker with things. I'm reading this very interesting book, and I will not reference it now, but I will be definitely devoting an episode to it that talks about the male brain. What I want to highlight from it is that, aside from conditioning, because it is true that many men from a very young age are conditioned to value action over expression and solutions over empathy, it's also part of the male brain -and when I say brain, I mean the hormones that are most prominent in males than in females- that men will want to fix things. Even from a young age, when a problem arises- the traditional masculine response is to find a fix.

It's not to discuss the feelings or to explore the emotional nuances that are taking place in that moment. Combining this with the fact that we still equate men expressing emotional openness to vulnerability or weakness, in this context of patrescence, where the father might already be feeling insecure about his role, the fear of appearing incompetent or unprepared can really intensify.

This fear can prevent fathers from openly discussing their struggles, as they might believe -many of them do believe- that they need to uphold an image of control and power and strength. Functioning from this perspective, looking at things their whole lives, really, from this lens of emotions, being a hindrance to finding a solution, and linking their value with providing solutions, then it becomes quite difficult to relate to a partner who's going through the motions and needs to be validated, needs to be heard in her experience.

You can understand that when operating from this perspective, when looking at things from this lens -that emotions get in the way of solutions- it becomes quite difficult to just switch that off and then be able to listen to my partner who wants to be just express her emotions sometimes. She's not looking for a solution. When she wants to talk about her feelings of exhaustion and loneliness or frustration, the dad's immediate response might be to offer some kind of a solution, rather than to simply provide the support that is given by being there and listening. This fix-it approach inadvertently dismisses the partner's need to be heard and understood. It rather feels like she is being corrected. And so dad, if you're listening, when the mother of your child is expressing her emotions,

A. She is just talking about her emotions and she's not looking for a solution. Keep that in mind. Remind yourself consciously every single time.
And

2. She is not doing it to invalidate you. And if you believe that that's the case, it's important that you ask. It's also the case that I've seen that a lot of times the mother will talk about feeling exhausted and the father will get visibly upset, or will even comment on this in an argumentative tone, because what happens there is that he takes it personally, believing that she's insinuating he's not helping enough when that's not what she said. She was talking about her experience.

So it's really important to remember these two things. Write them on a post if you have to, remind them to yourself every single day before you set off for work and after you come back home that the feelings

she's expressing are not necessarily about you and if they are allow her to say it or ask, simply ask, narrate what you are feeling and say that,

"You know what? I am hearing you. I understand that you're exhausted. I would be too if I were in your shoes."

Please, as a side note, refrain from explaining how exhausted you are in that moment because then you are the one who is encouraging the comparison in that moment and that will not be helpful to the situation. And then continue by saying that,

"I know that this is probably not your intention, but as you say this, it sometimes triggers an insecurity of mine. I feel like you're suggesting that I'm not contributing enough. If this is the case, I would like you to openly tell me if there's something more you would like me to do. Let's discuss if it's practically feasible. And if that's not what you mean to say, I would really appreciate to know that because my mind goes there and I want to make sure that I avoid it because then I don't want resentment to build." Something along those lines, right?

If you are one of those dads that does this, your default mode is to engage with problems in a very practical and solution focused way. While this has its merits and it definitely serves a purpose, in this case it really can feel like overlooking the emotional aspect that your partner needs to express.

You giving her the room to express these emotions out loud without taking them personally, without trying to fix it, without assigning meaning to it or guilt tripping her like, "oh," for example, "I would have loved to be home with the children. For me, it's easy. I would have loved to be doing what you're doing," which you might be saying as a way to encourage her, because you feel like you are missing out, as a way to help her see her experience from a different perspective - if she feels gratitude for getting a chance to have more time with the children than you do, maybe the things that exhaust her or upset her can go away.

But that's not how it's read. It's read as " You don't appreciate what you have. You shouldn't feel exhausted. I don't think this is tough and I would have done a better job."

I say this having worked with several fathers individually. It is really genuine that you as the dad, and as the partner, are trying hard to reframe the situation in a positive way to relieve your partner. For a lot of men, what's actually come up quite often is that when they see their partner struggling emotionally, they get triggered and they become so heavily affected by this sadness that they really, really need to do something about it, not solely based on the fact that they really love their partner, but also because now they are upset. They are very upset.

Therefore, finding balance between fixing and feeling is very crucial. Dads will benefit from recognizing that sometimes the best support they can offer is not a solution, but a listening ear and an open heart that can process these emotions, that can create room for them.

Holding these emotions is the solution. This shift can lead to meaningful exchanges between partners where both of you feel seen and supported.

But I would also encourage you as the dad to express your own vulnerabilities so that you can foster this balance even better. This can break down the barriers of traditional masculinity and show that true strength lies in emotional openness. Mutual support. This not only helps your partner feel more supported, but it will model healthy emotional behaviors for your children, too.

As we wrap up our discussion on patrescence, it's really important to consider why it's very beneficial for you as the father to understand the process and to really reflect on your emotions, to acknowledge all these societally unaccepted emotions that you are feeling anyway, and to pause and let them be because the more you ignore them, the more you see them as weakness, the more they control you, the more they have power over you subconsciously.

You lose your right to see them and so you have no overview of how they are affecting your day to day life, your day to day interactions with others, especially your partner.

And then for you as the mom to understand what's happening isn't just about easing tension or avoiding misunderstandings, it's also about using matrescence and patrescence as a stepping stone to a deeper connection within the family and to foster an environment where everyone feels supported and valued. This process, this big change, these rollercoaster of emotions that are going on within each of you do not necessarily result in bad communication, in misunderstandings, in drifting apart. They can actually do the quite opposite, just as well, if we take the opportunity to really address what is happening, how we're changing, and how these changes can be positive.

Acknowledging the emotional and psychological shifts in fatherhood can help you and your partner see beyond the surface-level frustrations. For instance, if you as a new dad seem to be withdrawn or stressed, understanding that this could be a sign of struggling with your identity change or with feelings of inadequacy can lead to both you feeling more compassion toward yourself, giving yourself grace, and also allowing yourself room to express this to your partner. And then in turn, it can help your partner understand you better and break the circle of frustration and reaction so that your interactions can transform into opportunities for support and connection - into feeling held. Moreover, when we understand these pressures, when we are deeply aware of our experience, then we can effectively communicate what we need from our partner. We can foster a two-way communication so that we can maintain a healthy relationship. And honestly, foster communication with ourselves. We can look deep inside - at our needs and how we're changing. Like we talked about in the last episode, having children triggers our own inner child and it's own needs. And so when we're able to understand how patrescence will activate all of this, then we can give ourselves the permission to look within and see what our inner child needs and work on ourselves. When we bypass this whole process, when we act as if patrescence doesn't exist, when dad is supposed to go back to work as usual, and we fail to see that work now carries a bigger burden, not only because of the responsibility to provide, but because it also takes me away from my children, then this lack of compassion, this lack of consideration leads to feeling isolated, misunderstood.

It creates less space to express myself, and then it creates less space for me to feel like what I am experiencing is valid. If we take the partner, the mother aside for a second, if I don't feel that this experience is valid, then there is no space for me to look deep within and address what's happening because it's not supposed to be happening.

So instead of spending my energy looking at "what is this bringing up for me? How can I evolve from this?" I'm spending my energy avoiding these feelings, avoiding these thoughts, pretending they don't exist.

So let's engage in conversations about patrescence. Get your partner to learn about matrescence. Make sure you also learn about matrescence. Listen to episode one so that both of you can get together and talk about what's happening, what's changing. Develop mutual understanding.

Discuss how each of you is adapting- how you might miss the pre parenthood life, both personally and in the way that you guys used to be together. And what you cherish in your new role- what you appreciate ever since you became a parent. What you recognize as evolution in you, in the relationship. This doesn't just reduce the anger and the resentment. It helps the partnership grow and to really become a partnership. So whether you're a dad going through these changes or a partner who is witnessing them, I would like for you to take a moment this week to reflect on this journey.

Go back to your journal and consider the shifts and the challenges and the growth that you've encountered since becoming a parent. Talk about it- take what you've written and share your feelings with with your partner so that you can see that you're really not alone in this. Each step, each gesture you make to offer support to yourself, your inner child, and your partner is a step toward a happier and healthier personal and family life.

Thanks for tuning in. I really appreciate it, and I hope to see you here next Sunday. Bye bye!

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