

## Is It Time To Bin The Books On Parenting?

**DJ ACE:** Welcome to the Big Book Festival. My name is Ace. I am a broadcaster at BBC Radio One Extra. I am usually on your radio, weekday mornings between 10-1, also on Sunday nights at 10 o'clock. I am also a father of three. I know when I was 23 and I was becoming a father I wanted to read everything there was to read about becoming a parent. But that is when I found out that there was so much content to get across. There were books, there were social media posts, there were blogs, so many different things for so many different people in different demographics, it was just very difficult to navigate through. But we are going to help you today. Here to help you navigate we have three fantastic authors who have all had best-seller books in the topic of parenting. First off, we have got Candice Brathwaite, she is the author of *I am Not Your Baby Mother*, what it's like to be a black British mother. The first ever book about black British motherhood which became an instant best-seller, which was published a year ago. What's going on, Candice?

**CANDICE BRATHWAITE:** All good. Hi!

**ACE:** How are you?

**CANDICE:** Good, really good. I'm alright.

**ACE:** Thank you for joining us. We also have Matt Coyne who became a hero for dads everywhere with his books about the challenges and pitfalls of fatherhood. *Dummy* and *Man Versus Toddler*. How are you doing, Matt?

**MATT COYNE:** I'm good, mate, thank you.

**ACE:** You know what, you are hilarious by the way. We will get to that. And finally, we have got Gill Sims, the author of the very successful series of *Why Mummy Drinks*, *Why Mummy's Sloshed* and there's some more books as well, whose been entertaining us with the exploits of a fictional couple, Pete and Jane, for the last five years. How are you, Gill?

**GILL SIMS:** I'm good thank you. How are you?

**ACE:** Thank you so much for joining us. Alright so let me ask you this question first. What books did you guys read when you were about to become a parent, and did you find them helpful? Let's start with Candice.

**CANDICE:** I read a lot of a woman called Ina May Gaskin, which was like all about spiritual midwifery. To be honest I didn't find it helpful, I think it's why I ended up writing the book I did. None of the parenting literature, be that in the UK or the US was speaking to black parenthood. There were just things and conversations I knew that were going to crop up that were going to be a little bit different. And I could perhaps only find that in content written by black people. So, yeah, I really struggled to be honest, especially when my

daughter was born. Because she is going to be eight this year. I guess it would have been easier when my son was born - he just turned three - but by then, second kid in, I am like it actually doesn't matter, we will get through it. I think I can figure it out. But first time around I would say as a black British parent, the struggle was real.

**ACE:** You just couldn't find a book that was going to help you?

**CANDICE:** Yeah, yeah.

**ACE:** Matt, what about you, what did you read?

**MATT:** Absolutely nothing. I read absolutely nothing. I was terrified of the entire process really. So, I wanted to bury my head in the sand and kind of read nothing at all. I told my mum that I had made no preparation for childbirth or parenting in general. She gave me the *Good Housekeeping Guide to Parenting* which was published in 1970 or something. So, all of my information came from that. It was, I wouldn't say it was particularly useful, it was slightly outdated. I remember, you will get a kick out of this, if you have ever given birth. It specifically said about childbirth that it was, you should try and imagine how painful it was, you should put your fingers in your mouth and pull your mouth apart to get a sense of, and I quote, how much it stings. How much childbirth stings. One of the things they said was that childbirth was best imagined as like trying to pass a large piece of fruit whilst constipated.

**ACE:** Oh wow!

**MATT:** That is the only thing I remember about it. My partner was in labour for 13 hours. It doesn't sting. It does a lot more than sting. That was my sense of it. It also said actually that in the second half of childbirth the mother may become irritable. Yeah, it was not useful. I tend to get irritated if I miss a bus, I can't imagine I would feel the same way if I was trying to crap a large melon.

**ACE:** Irritable is a very generous word there. Irritable is not something I would have described my partner as being during that time, no. Gill, what about you, what books did you read?

**GILL:** On my first one, I was a bit like Matt, I was in a bit of denial, I think. I didn't read anything when I was having my first baby. But then she didn't sleep, ever, and it was quite tough. When I had my second one, I thought I am going to do better, I am going to read books, I am going to sort this, I am going to crack this, we are going to have a routine and it's all going to be perfect. So, I read that book which I think you all know the one I am talking about, about the very strict routine for your baby. I found that book amazing. It was really, really, really, helpful, especially when I threw it out the back door in a fit of rage and ran after it and stamped on it. I got a great sense of calm afterwards. So, yeah, I think the trouble with the parenting books is they would be so helpful if the children had read them first and they understood that they were meant to sleep for 12 hours a night and they go for

their nap at this time and they do this at this time. But they hadn't read the book, so they go, "meh, I am not doing it." So, you are a bit stuck really.

**ACE:** I think it's so interesting we have three best-selling authors with us right now, but you all say you didn't read any books prior to becoming parents or you didn't read the right books. But you have managed to go on to have best-selling books out there. That is amazing. Gill, what prompted you to start writing your Peter and Jane blogs and the books that they were based on. What was the prompt for that?

**GILL:** It was a few years ago. I had always been a huge oversharer on Facebook. My friends always said to me you should write a blog. I think they were just fed up with my constant drivel on Facebook and thought they could take it off, so they didn't have to be bothered with. One day my friend sent me a link to an article. It was one of these perfect parent articles. You should devote your entire life to your child, you know, if you are not baking from 5.00am to midnight you are a terrible parent. If everything in your life isn't child centric why did you even bother having children kind of things. One of those really make you feel terrible about yourself as a parent because you have those days where you just want to hide in a cupboard for them and eat all the chocolate biscuits. Which I have definitely never done, by the way. So, they came to us afterwards and said you should write that blog that we keep telling you and tell what it's really like to be a parent. About the reality of it. And so, I did. I had half an hour spare, probably because I had locked the children in a cupboard - again I never have done that - I have actually never done that I should clarify. So, I had half an hour spare I put something together, I put it on Facebook because I put everything on Facebook and my friends thought it was funny and they started sharing it with their friends. It was, at the time when there was a lot of perfect mummy blogs. There was a lot of cupcakes and glitter and it's all marvellous and look at these wonderful things we have crafted and every moment is magical with our children. A lot of the making memories blogs. We all have those moments in the day, obviously where we have a lovely time with our children, but there is a lot of moments as well where it's not so lovely. And everyone just seemed to be showing the really positive side of it. Not that I want to show a negative side of it, but a more honest side. And it seemed to strike a chord with a lot of people, who I think also were starting to feel quite demoralised by the fact that why does everyone else have these perfect lives and these perfect children. And enjoy the glitter which gets everywhere, but they seem to embrace that and not wake up in the morning going oh my God there is glitter in places I didn't know you could get glitter.

**ACE:** So frustrating, isn't it?

**GILL:** Yeah, glitter and Lego, it's like the bane of parenting. Somebody needs to write a book about that. It's just going to be glitter and Lego!

**ACE:** Who actually were Peter and Jane? Is that a couple that you based the series on? Were they people you actually knew?

**GILL:** Peter and Jane are the children. So, they were just your kind of generic children. The names were really picked from, there was an old reading Ladybird series. I don't know if any of you remember, I think I'm maybe a bit older than some of you. So, about these perfect children, Peter and Jane, Peter and Jane go to the shops with mummy. Peter and Jane are always perfect, and I hated those reading books very, very much when I was a child. So, the names kind of came from the old reading books. And it was just kind of based on generic children, things children do, some of the things my children had done, but things as well that my children would do, and I would be like why have you done that? You speak to someone else they would be like; my child has done that. Thank goodness it's not just mine. So, there is a lot I think of shared experiences in parenting that you don't really realise until you start speaking to other parents. And you realise that you are not actually alone, your child isn't the only one that licks the conveyor belt in the in the supermarket. He might be actually. Not found any others that do that. That was a very special moment, you know! "What are you doing?"

**ACE:** How did you go from putting a blog on Facebook to getting published? What was the process there?

**GILL:** There was a day in the summer holidays in 2016, it was a really long day, I think most parents have had these really, really long days. Especially if one of you is working at home with the kids or at home with the kids and the other parent is working outside the house. In the days when people worked outside the house, going back now two years. It was a very long day, and I wrote a blog post about the long day and, you know, everything that had happened. All of which was quite mundane, but one of those days where you don't stop, but there is nothing really to show for what you've done at the end of the day. Then your partner comes home at the end of the day and goes "Ooh, have you had a nice relaxing day off then?" You know, it's the BBC I should choose my words carefully, your thoughts kind of turn to shallow graves in the woods and things! So, I put that up and obviously a lot of other people had had days like that as well and that got shared, I can't remember how many times and everything kind of took off from there. Then, Harper Colins came to me and said "we think this has potential to be turned into a book, would you like to do that?" And I was like, "yes, of course I would, fantastic, no problem, 100,000 words I can totally do that." And then I cried for several months. 100,000 words is a lot! My son came home from school going I have to write 100 words about something, I was like I have to write 100,000! So that was the first book which did fantastically well, beyond anything anyone would have thought. My husband made the mistake of saying if you can sell 10,000 more books then you can get another dog. So, he owes me quite a lot of dogs now. I got one more, but he owes me a few more! Yeah, so it kind of all went from there.

**ACE:** That is an amazing story. Matt, Gill has touched on the perfect parenting issues, was that part of catalyst behind *Dummy*?

**MATT:** Mines a very - I just wanted to share my wisdom! To be honest mine is a very, very similar story to Gills really. I was basically just cathartically writing something on Facebook. Just single quotes, my little boy was about three months old at the time, and he had closed

his eyes for the first time since he'd opened them three months before, so I had five minutes to write something. I wrote 1500 words on my phone. And then I posted that on Facebook and then the following day 20 people had liked it. I thought oh, I've hit on something here, because nobody ordinarily listens to a word I say about anything. So, 20 likes was quite a big deal! And then sort of by the end of the week it was thousands and it got bigger and bigger, this one post. As a consequence of that I was on telly and stuff. It was agents seeing me on TV with people reading kind of excerpts from the post. It was just one of those kinds of good timings, Gill had done really well in the year previous, or the couple of years previous. So, your mum had come out with her books and *Hurrah for Gin*, I think, and I think publishers were fishing around for a dad version and I kind of fit that, just at the right time. So, I thought I am in there, I thought I am doing a job I hate, so I am going to try and do this for a while. And it worked out. It's a really sort of similar story to Gill's really.

**ACE:** Candice, you were prompted by something much more serious, a near-death experience giving birth to your daughter. Can you tell us what happened and why it made you decide to start writing about your experiences?

**CANDICE:** After I had an emergency C-section after 19 hours of induced labour. That's so intense. Three days later I started to feel unwell, and all the midwives were like, "you are overthinking it, stay off those parenting blogs and forums." Long story short, really exhausted, I fell asleep with Esme on my chest, and she must have wriggled down. A really horrible smell woke up the whole house. Thought it was her, it was actually me. The weight of her baby body had made an infected sap which was sitting below my c-section wound explode. Rush back to hospital, 70% septic. People leaning over you going "it really is like touch and go", you know, and I was just like "well I did say I wasn't feeling well." Long story short I think it was five weeks in hospital. So, I then come back out to my daughter. At the time I don't think, I didn't think anything of it, it was just too traumatic to work through. Back end of 2018 a report comes out called Embrace which says that black women in the UK are five times more times more likely to die in childbirth or the postpartum period compared to white, Asian, whoever. Black women are most likely to die in that time. And that is when I really started to think about the bias that is also behind childbirth. Because it's really easy to start to understand racism in the workplace, or we were all present for what happened to George Floyd last year, but I don't think we understand the crevices into which these biases can creep into and how it's costing women their lives. I will be frank; I didn't want to write a book about motherhood. There are so many, I don't feel like I can bring anything new to the table until I started to write, and I was like, actually, Candice you can bring something new to the table because there is so many things discussed in, *I Am Not Your Baby Mother* that you are not going to find anywhere else. And black and white people alike are just like, their jaws drop at the kind of information that is in there and it's also ended up being on the recommended reading list for British midwives. So, if you want to sit your exam you have to read that book. I think that is mind-blowing to be fair.

**ACE:** That is amazing. Congratulations. Continued success for the book. Gill, you published your first book only four years ago and now the books are phenomenally killing it, massive

success, what do you think that is down to, what do you think people are drawn to in regard to your books, Gill?

**GILL:** In brutal honesty, I think the title helps. I think you are going round the supermarket with a screaming child, and you see a book called *Why Mummy Drinks* and you go oh hell, yeah! I think that helped a lot. I think a lot of it is people just recognise their own experiences in it. I get lots of messages going I don't feel so alone. I thought it was just me. I don't feel so alone. That is so great to read. There is my most recent book, *Why Mummy's Sloshed*, has a whole passage in it which deals with a very spirited toddler. And there has been so many people who have said I thought I was the only one who just sometimes wanted to shut the door and run away because it is the relentlessness of parenting a toddler is unlike any other sort of stage of parenting. Even the newborn you can put a newborn in their cot and go to the loo, if you need to. You can't do that with a toddler, because you will come out and the house will be in bits around you. So, I think the success is really just down to people recognising a lot of their own experiences in there. And it giving them some hope they are not the only ones going through this, they are not the only ones feeling like this. And that everybody - however much they project the perfect image - is actually underneath just having a bad day sometimes. When I first started the blog, the thing that really surprised me is I would write these long posts about, you know, ranting about this, that and the other. The first parents who would come up to me and say "I read your blog last night. I so relate to that"; were the ones I had always perceived as the really, really perfect parents. The ones who had it all together. The ones who brought the healthy snacks to the gate for their children and were just, the children would come out of school clean. Mine would go in clean and come out looking like they rolled in the dirt. "Are you a puppy? Why did you roll in mud?" These people held it together on the surface and they were the first ones to go "I feel like that too." Wow, so everyone must really have these days and feel like that. I think that is kind of why people relate to the books so much.

**ACE:** Definitely. Definitely. Something I really related to, Matt, was your analysis of toddlers. I am sure you get, I loved how you compared toddlers to old drunk men or to being drunk which I thought was really funny. You have also been called a hero to dads everywhere. How do you feel about that statement?

**MATT:** Complete nonsense. There is no useful information in my books at all. Absolutely nothing. But to pick up on what Gill said, I think when it comes to being a parent having a sense of humour is the greatest armour you could ever have. It's the only thing you have going for you at times. I was reading the other day about a guy, the last guy who was hanged for treason. He made a joke as he walked to be hanged to the executioner. He looked at the trap door and he said to the executioner, "are you sure this is safe?" And I read that, and I thought, that is the point at which you need your humour. The point at which things are at their worst and things are at their most stressful. I thought that is a really good analogy for the way that you are as a parent. When things are at their worst, if you can pick something up and have a laugh about it, or you can have a laugh with your partner about the state of the house. And something that someone has crayoned on a radiator, you are doing all right, I think. I think humour books tend to in general be looked

down on quite a lot by the 'litterati'. That is not necessarily fair I don't think. I mean I would say that. But I think, certainly as a parent you need a good sense of humour. You can catch it on a couple of pages there is nothing wrong with that.

**ACE:** Do you think humour is the reason for the success of your book? Do you feel that humour makes it much more palatable and that is why the books have gone on to do so well?

**MATT:** I think so, when we were first pitching for publishers to write a funny book about parenting. I think they were kind of expecting, joke, joke, jokes, just constantly. I didn't want to write that. I wanted to write something that would make you think as well and kind of make you realise that it's absolutely terrible and it's okay to complain about parenting and that there are really bad days. But, by the same token that doesn't diminish your love for your children. I wanted to get that across as much as I could. So, I tried to write it in a way that wasn't just gag a minute kind of thing. The publisher's kind of looked at me to as if to say, what are you talking about? Just write a funny book. As it turned out I think between me and the edit assistants we got the balance right. I think we were trying to lure it in by being funny but try and make a point along the way. I sometimes succeed and sometimes fail. It's the good thing about social media, people let you know straight away.

**ACE:** They do, they let you know instantly. Candice, you have written quite a serious book, but it does have some humour in it, and you are so full of life. But did humour help you through some of the darkest days of parenting?

**CANDICE:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Humour has helped me like all the way through, to be honest. Nothing about it was humorous, but right up until *I Am Not Your Baby Mother* was published, I was like "this is so rubbish, no one is going to read this, don't chat to me, I don't want to talk about it." Then two weeks later at my publishing house everyone is like and I like, I don't know. The serious aspect of that was no one could predict the timing. So, *I Am Not Your Baby Mother* came out one week and then the murder of George Floyd went viral the week after. So, all of a sudden there was this hunger for black literature and for book that helped people deconstruct their biases and learn and all of that. And as deeply sad as that was and still is, I was in my house on this new thing called lockdown. We were still in the first lockdown, I am like "brother, am I living in the twilight light zone. I can't even go out to meet people, what do you mean Sunday Times best-seller, this doesn't even make sense." Also, it's the type of book had no blueprint. I couldn't predict what that would or wouldn't do, because thus far no publishing house had taken a chance on a black woman writing about parenthood. Do you know how mind-blowing that is? We could not walk into the British Library and say a book about black British parenthood please. They wouldn't have had it prior to this time next year. To me that is humorous, I find it well funny I get to be part of that moment. You have to laugh, if not your ego could get you. And as a writer there is nothing worse than thinking that you own the stage or the moment. So, I am constantly having to check myself and be like you better just laugh babe because no one could have imagined.

**ACE:** Obviously you wrote a parenting book, but you touch on so many different things from knife crime, slavery, sexual assault, mortality. All of these different things. Did you set out to write something that was going to be so political?

**CANDICE:** No, and I was really fearful. I am putting all of the blame on Kano.

**ACE:** One of the best MCs out the UK.

**CANDICE:** When I was writing that book, Kano had just dropped *Hoodies All Summer*. And that album was just on constant repeat in my house. I remembered writing and saying, "if this book doesn't make me feel the way his music made me feel at this time then I am not interested." The reality is everyone saying we need humour books; the reality is there was nothing to judge this against. And I felt the pressure. I was like you are going to be the only black face in the parenting literature space. So, I don't have time to like do this halfway. I don't have words to waste. How much information can I cram into 70,000 words? That was going to be the takeaway. And I wanted the cover to be bright and inviting and I wanted the title to be cheeky, but I literally wanted that book to lick you on the side of the head and for you to put it down and be like, "that is not what I was expecting" and for you to always hold that book in high regard. And I think we did that, but it's not what I set out to do. Again, because if I set out to do that, that would be ego. I just set out to tell a little bit of the black parenting truth, which to many is shocking. Because we have never had it on a platform before.

**ACE:** Were there things you had left out of the book that you wish you had put in?

**CANDICE:** No, there are things that made it into the book that made it by the skin of its teeth because I was so fearful. There is something about, being a black writer from a very vocal black community, where you are going to be a bit shook, you are going to be a bit scared. It's like me telling these truths actually highlights some of the problems within my own community. I could end up being a pariah. Is it worth it? And to the very end there were some elements especially about sexual assault that I was like, "don't do it." Then again, I had to come back and say "this might be the only book you get to write. What are you going to do, do you want to look back at this and say I wish I had written that?" So, no. It was edited heavily, but there are more books coming up. So those words will be somewhere else.

**ACE:** More books. Matt, did you learn anything from Candice's book?

**MATT:** It was a complete revelation to me, Candice's book. I think it's amazingly well-written. I knew it would be well-written because her posts are incredibly lyrical. I think she's got incredible writing. Candice. Yeah, some really simple things like about, talking about her daughter and having to deal with her being treated with racial bias at school and stuff like that. I found that quite upsetting because I read it in the same week that Charlie started school in September. And it was things that never ever occurred to me. I think that is the

point. And I think, you know, Candice has created a book which does, I will not say lick you outside the head, but it definitely gave me a slap!

**ACE:** Hard-hitting.

**MATT:** It does do a great job about giving people a slap about their privilege - that's not the only thing it does - I would recommend it to anybody. I would. I didn't think it was for me. As I said, I never read any parenting books before. I deliberately avoid reading parenting books for all kinds of reasons. Not least because I sometimes feel that they would be better than mine! And then that will destroy my confidence in writing altogether. The problem is that Candice's is better than mine. So that is annoying. But at the same I would definitely recommend it to anyone. I was going to qualify that with whose and some qualified statement, there isn't one, read it, I would recommend it to anyone. Well done, Candice.

**ACE:** There you go. Gill, was it as hard-hitting for you as well?

**GILL:** Yeah, I think you can read statistics about anything and they are just numbers on a page. And you know, you read them, and you go, "oh, that is terrible." Until you kind of read someone's own personal experience of it and description of it, it doesn't really bring it home what the numbers really, really mean. So, the black women being five times more likely to die in childbirth, I kind of knew that statistic, but it is so much more shocking when you read how it can happen. How, you know, Candice was treated, or not treated rather, ignored and left to almost die just because no one would listen to her opinion, not her opinions, how she was actually feeling and dismiss how ill she was. So, I think like I said somebody writing so rawly and personally about how these things happen is very different to reading the lists of statistics, the sort of faceless reports in the paper and everything else. It really makes it - it sounds silly to say I know - but it makes it so much more real. It really brings it home how these things happen. But there was also a lot in it, I know Candice spoke specifically about black motherhood, but I think it resonates with me, it resonates with all parents, you spoke about not being able to leave the house for five months after your daughter was born. Which obviously in your case was a lot down to the trauma you had after she was born. But when my first child was born, I was the same. I had postnatal depression, I couldn't go out, we lived in a basement flat. I would watch all these people with their prams, and I thought how are they out? Obviously coming to that place from different experiences and reasons, I think there is a lot of shared end places that we get to. When you are a parent. So, yeah, it was really good. Like I said it really made a lot of things real, but also the fact that across, I think, everybody there is a lot of shared stuff that all parents go through, that is not, that just happens to those people, or that just happens to those people. It's a really tough thing, I think for a lot of people, but I think a lot of people, who aren't parents dismiss, or you forget, actually, you know, when my children are older now and even just the descriptions of the first days with a new-born, I was like, oh, yeah. So, no, it was great.

**ACE:** Candice, how do we make parenting more diverse and inclusive?

**CANDICE:** We just give the mic to more people, you know. We put more pressure on places like publishing houses to make it their duty to make sure that everyone is having a chance to tell their story, you know, because yeah, we could say there are more books being written by dads, but it would be nice to hear from single dad or men in same-sex relationships, or men who have chosen to adopt by themselves. There is not just one version of parenting. We all have a responsibility, be it in our personal lives or if we have a public profile to be like how can we ensure that we are making sure that everyone gets a chance to tell their story? Because like Gill was just saying as much as my book says black British mother, there are so many intersections just about being a parent. I understand that the foggy haze of the newborn days, like my friends come back and say “do you remember saying this?” I am horrified. I am like “I never said that, I would never say that. I would never do that.” They are like pulling up text message, they’re like “yeah, yeah, you did.” If it happened before 18 months it wasn't real, it was an imposter, that wasn't me, because I had not slept in a bit and I think even though those are the intersections, we just have to get better at making sure other people are supported in telling their stories to be fair.

**ACE:** Candice, just touched on the fact that there aren't that many books about fatherhood. Obviously, Matt, you have written a successful book on fatherhood. Do you feel like that is why your books have touched such a chord because there aren't loads of fatherhood books out there?

**MATT:** It's a strange one because the vast majority of my followers are mums not dads. Something like 98% are mums rather than dads. I suspect it's the same in terms of the demographic buying the books. I don't know whether it's because mums are more interested in that insight into what dads are thinking or the way they process some of the stuff that they are dealing with. I honestly don't know. I think it's true to say, just picking up on something Candice said. I think sometimes publishing houses have a problem with thinking that whoever is writing the book, that will reflect the audience. So basically, if I am a white middle class dad then white middle class dads will buy my book. Nobody else will, do you know what I mean? In the same way I suspect when Candice was talking about a single dad or same-sex couple dads, whatever I suspect a publisher will look at that and think there is not that many single dads, there's not that many same-sex dads so where is the audience for it? The audience is everyone. Candice has demonstrated that with her book. The audience with that is everyone. It's not black British mothers in the same way that my book is not necessarily just for white dads who happen to be in a heterosexual relationship. And I think publishers maybe made to look sort of outside that. Unless my publishers are watching, who are absolutely fantastic. And I can't fault them at all.

**ACE:** Gill, how important do you feel like it is for dads to be picking up these books and reading as well and getting involved in all of the books we are talking about today?

**GILL:** I think it's probably more important for them to get involved in parenting rather than reading the book.

**ACE:** There is a problem of that as well.

**GILL:** No, I think all the books, probably especially my book and Candice's book for fathers to read from a mother's point of view are maybe quite important. They kind of maybe already know where they are coming from with Matt book. I think it's probably really great for them to be able to read that and say like mothers reading our books. Yes, I am not the only one. You know and feel that there is some solidarity. I think for them to be able to see maybe, read someone else's experience of it and see why their wife gets cross with them sometimes is probably quite helpful. But I think probably their wives or partners or whoever would appreciate them actually getting sort of more involved than sitting reading a book going, "no, darling look I am helping really I am reading this." And actually just get out and take the kids to the park and get them out from under her feet for half an hour. But no, I think it probably is useful because, you know, sometimes you do have these conversations with your partner and you just keep having them and they don't necessarily listen. They don't see why this upsets you. It seems such a small thing that they make a sandwich and leave crumbs all over the counter and walk away and leave it. And they can't understand why this infuriates you so much. But it's the fact that it's every day and they don't see it. I think the fact if they read someone else saying that is annoying. I never realised. Just as a minor example and obviously there is are bigger ones as well. But, yeah, from, I think just seeing your own partner's perspective told by someone else is probably quite helpful.

**ACE:** Candice, you were brought up by your grandpa. And you have married Papa B, who is very involved in parenting. How important do you think it is to get men on board and do you think this will be any more challenging in the black community?

**CANDICE:** I do think it will be slightly more challenging in the black community just because of how dense that wall of masculinity is. And how much further black men need to feel safe in exploring their emotions. I happen to be raised by a granddad who wore his heart on his sleeve and didn't see anything about his masculinity being diminished by staying at home and ironing and raising his granddaughter. And I think, across any race there needs to be an adjustment, a public adjustment, of what defines masculinity and what men should and shouldn't be doing to be valued as a father. Or you know, maybe the best thing in certain people's households is not for the men to go out to work, but maybe for them to stay home with the kids because maybe the mother is a little bit ahead, or his partner is a bit ahead in being the bread winner. Why would you not, why would you choose having less money coming into your household just so the man can go out to work and do the masculine thing, you know? I think black fatherhood still needs place to grow and be explored. And I just found it really important to share the fact that I was raised by a black man and that I have married a really great black man because black fatherhood is definitely something we don't see enough. Be it on TV or movies and in books. I can talk about the erasure of black motherhood all day, but black fatherhood, positive black fatherhood, doesn't exist, the only show I remember was a show called *Desmond's*, which I think you can catch on reruns now. But think how long ago that was, that was a long time ago. I think we have gone backwards with that kind of stereotype. I would like to see black fatherhood uplifted in a positive manner. Social media is helping: The display of black fatherhood has come so far since I had my first kid. And I see so many black British dads using social media in the way that I have seen white British dads use it for ages. But we do have more of way to go to be fair.

**ACE:** Matt, in Scandinavia, they promote this much more 50/50 approach to parenting. Do you feel we need to be led more towards that way of thinking?

**MATT:** Scandinavians do everything better don't they, apart from flat pack. I mean definitely. I mean I am something of an outlier, I was a stay-at-home dad, and my partner went back to work and stuff. And I think the stats are something like 7% and that's the grown to 7% over the years, it's not very much, where dads are the stay at home, rather than a stay-at-home mum in those couples. So, yeah, we sort of need to move towards that. I wrote a chapter in the last book. I think it's called how to be a dad or something like that. I should know that really! I think it's an entire, you see it in every single day that you go about things, that you are not the expected parent. Now that is something not to moan about as a dad. You get away with stuff because you are the spare. You are not expected to do the hard stuff. That is not something to moan about. But it is something this directly effects mum and women and gender in the workplace and all that sort of stuff. I used to take Charlie along to tiny tots or baby yoga and baby swimming and all that sort of stuff. Whereas everyone around me would be feeling guilty about something. Because mum guilt is obviously a really pervasive thing. I never felt guilty for a second. And part of the reason was from the outside I was regarded as doing a great job because I turned up and I was holding him the right way up and he was dressed. And it was like, "wow, look at this great dad, he has turned up for baby yoga." I am surrounded by 12 mums, but I was the guy who was doing the great job because I was the guy in the room, because I happen to have a penis. That is obviously an issue. But it's also reinforced by everything you do every day. I remember going to, pulling into a parent and baby space. And two or three times someone had a go at me for pulling into a baby and parent space while I have Charlie in the back of the car. This woman said, I finally lost my temper about this. I pulled into a space and she said, "you know these spaces are for parent and baby." I literally had to go, "what is that? A cast." I had to demonstrate that there was a baby in the car. That is kind of, all of that reinforces the idea that the dad is a spare. He is not, he is the guy who looks after the kid if a woman can't go to work, or she has to have a day in bed ill. It's not defined as 50/50 in any way. Whether it's TV, films, books, whatever, it's always that the dad is the spare. I am not a spare. I try to do my best. I try to be as 50/50 as I can be and sometimes more than that, because I am the guy at home in terms of the parenting. But that doesn't mean that Lynn does less parenting, or I do more parenting. The entire conversation needs to shift a little bit.

**ACE:** I agree.

**MATT:** It doesn't help that when you open books from day one as a dad, even in antenatal, you are the guy who holds the coats really while everything else is done. We need to make a better effort to involve from day one. That way you can't get away with this rubbish about not changing nappies when they come along. You are not being treated like the spare all along.



**ACE:** We are going to have to wrap this out. This has been a wicked conversation. Before we do, Candice, can we just get, like you have 30 seconds, can you give us like three bits of advice that you would like to give parents?

**CANDICE:** I can only give you one.

**ACE:** One is fine!

**CANDICE:** Don't take anyone else's advice. When things go wrong in parenthood, it's because you are listening to too many opinions. You and your partner know what is right and wrong.

**ACE:** Gill, have you got something to add to that. A piece of advice before you leave us.

**GILL:** I think what Candice said, you know yourself best. Don't beat yourself up, don't have massively high expectations. As long as your baby is warm and fed and loved, that is everything you need, and you are doing your best.

**ACE:** Awesome. Matt have you got a little five-second piece of advice.

**MATT:** I want to say the second you find out you are expecting, work out who amongst your friends and family, are likely to babysit. Everybody else is dead to you.

**ACE:** This has been an absolute pleasure, man, I have really enjoyed this. Thank you very much to my guests. Candice Brathwaite, the author of *I Am Not Your Baby Mother* go check that out. Matt Coyne, the author of *Dummy* and *Man Versus Toddler*, two very funny books and Gill Sims, the author of *Why Mummy Drinks* and *Why Mummy's Sloshed*. Thank you guys, so much.