

**EPISODE 1526**

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:00]

**FT:** So Money Episode 1526, Post-pandemic Mom Burnout with Sara Dean, creator of The Shameless Mom Academy Podcast.

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**ANNOUNCER:** You're listening to So Money with award-winning money guru, Farnoosh Torabi. Each day, in a 30-minute dose of financial inspiration from the world's top business minds, authors, influencers, and from Farnoosh herself. Looking for ways to save on gas, or double your double coupons? Sorry, you're in the wrong place. Seeking profound ways to live a richer, happier life. Welcome to So Money.

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[0:00:57]

**FT:** Go get a massage.

[0:00:57]

**SD:** Right. Who has time? Who has money? Also, my job might be on the line, my partner's job might be on the line, but I'm going to go spend 150 bucks on a massage? No, actually, I'm not.

[0:01:06]

**FT:** Welcome to So Money, everybody. I'm Farnoosh Torabi. We are in conversation today with Sara Dean, business and leadership coach, keynote speaker, and creator of the podcast, The Shameless Mom Academy. She is a friend of the show. You might recall she came on So Money prior to the pandemic. We talked about working motherhood, stay-at-home parenthood. Fast forward to today, a lot has changed, including the economy. We've been through a pandemic. Where are our mothers now? Sara has the insights on burnout and the many ways women are socialized to be stripped of their own sense of agency and intuition.

My contribution to all of this is why I firmly believe in afternoon naps if you can sneak one in. Before we get to Sara's interview, a reminder, if you'd like a copy of Laura Belgray's new book, new book called *Tough Titties: On Living Your Best Life When You're the F-ing Worst*. Go back and listen to our episode on Monday where we talked to Laura, leave a review for that episode in the Apple podcast review section, and I'm giving away 10 copies of *Tough Titties*. Yes, I am, and I'll be announcing those winners not this Friday, but the following Friday. Now without further ado, here's the incredible Sara Dean.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:02:22]

**FT:** Sara Dean, welcome back to So Money, creator, founder, host of The Shameless Mom Academy Podcast. I have to tell you, well, the last time you're on the podcast, which was pre-pandemic before times. Not only that, I love our conversation about motherhood and money. It got us a lot of fans, and also got me some trolls. I think we were doing something right, we were hitting a nerve.

[0:02:45]

**SD:** Right. I forgot, I forgot we're so close **[inaudible 0:02:46]**

[0:02:46]

**FT:** Yes, remember? So I'm willing to take the risk again, and having you back, and having this conversation. But now, of course, we're in a different time, and place, and world. We've had a whole pandemic now as the backdrop of our conversation today, when we know that so many mothers among everybody suffered. It's great to have you back and sort of catch up and talk about the state of motherhood now. How are you doing? How are you doing today? I should say.

[0:03:14]

**SD:** Oh my gosh.

[0:03:15]

**FT:** I've learned to ask this in a more precise way. Because how you're doing versus how you're doing today are very different.

[0:03:20]

**SD:** Yes. Okay, today, I'm actually doing pretty well. But like four days ago, I spent most of the day crying. I'm not like a person that just like falls apart and cries all day, like ever. That's how I'm doing. Some days, I'm like, I think it's going to be okay. Then other days, I'm like, I really don't know and I see this happening in so many of the women in my close circle, where I'm like, a lot of us don't know if it's going to be okay. But the world seems to say, it's going to be okay, now. We haven't processed it. For three years, we weren't sure that it was going to be okay. Like, we're supposed to think it's going to be okay now and I'm unclear.

[0:04:01]

**FT:** Same. I mean, if you're looking at economic data, I don't think it's a fair assessment of how we're doing. Whether you're looking at the unemployment rate, or the inflation rate. Like, I'm sorry, the food groceries are still very expensive. The job market is not the best and I don't know how we're getting these low unemployment rates. But take this behind the scenes to your life at

least and maybe you know why you have these volatile moments, and perhaps, as a snapshot of how a lot of us are doing right now.

[0:04:34]

**SD:** Yes. I think, for three years, for the better part of three years, it really seemed like we were universally acknowledging, and collectively acknowledging, like we're in this really unprecedented season. And it's so hard, and it's scary, and there was so much loss, and grief, and trauma in that time. Now that we're in "not in that moment anymore," it feels like everyone is making this assumption, like everyone around us has moved on. So like the rest of us, like all of us should be moving on. But privately, we have not processed our trauma from the last three years, especially as moms. Like moms have endured some trauma. Everyone, I think everyone has endured trauma, whether big T trauma, little T trauma over the last three years. We haven't had a chance to process that collectively or personally, in most cases.

Moms I think are walking around not having processed this. I think privately, really, really suffering. 'm seeing that in ways where women are trying so hard to stay here. When I say stay here, like just literally trying to live. I know women who have opted to not make that choice. I know women who have lost their lives in my close network here in Seattle, and in my professional network, in the mom space. So it feels like society is like, we're good. Behind closed doors, we're not, we're not good. I feel like we need to acknowledge that on a more broad basis so that we can all hold each other a little bit, because I think that we need some holding.

[0:06:14]

**FT:** Yes, yes. Who's saying we're good?

[0:06:20]

**SD:** I mean, perhaps the people who are doing great and making a lot of money right now, like perhaps, the heads of companies who are bringing in billions while moms are still struggling,

and our children are having mental health crises, and struggling in school. I think that the people who are doing great right now, we're probably doing great three years ago, too.

[0:06:43]

**FT:** I think it needs to be said that while women and moms are dealing with their own trauma in the aftermath of COVID-19. That if remember too, women are often the go-tos for receiving and taking care of other people's trauma. Whether it is our children, and my heart goes out to all the kids that are right now, especially, I think the teenagers who spent so many of their development years in their adolescent years at home, not socializing during what was a very important time of their lives to be out there and socializing. You can't get a therapist right now. I can speak to that personally. There's moms dealing with that, and then of course, maybe their parents, or their network of friends. You become that, because we're givers and we're caregivers. It just is compounding for women right now. I wonder, and this might be a tangent, but I think it's juicy. This is maybe why there is –

I've been seeing this a little bit on TikTok, on social media, this trend of women saying I don't want to have it all, I don't want to have a career, and be a mother. I just want to be a stay-at-home mom, as if that's easy, right? I want to be – I want my husband or my partner to go out there and try to make all the money, because I don't think that's an attractive way to live, to try to juggle it all. To some extent, I can see that point of view, like it's not easy. It's not easy what you decide, right? Everything's hard. But there is – we now have facts that – are the way that our country is organized, and structured, our support systems do not support families. A lot of times, those mothers that are at the helm of those families to go out there, and earn a paycheck, and also be at the forefront of caregiving. It's very, very difficult. The pandemic proves that to us.

I wonder, do you see this in your own orbit and community of women second guessing their potential now? Or not wanting for things that they used to because they just think it's a lose-lose game?

[0:08:52]

**SD:** Yes, yes, yes, I see that. It's interesting, because I haven't – what I see is, rather than enthusiasm for like, I'm just going to stay home. I see this more like crumbling of, I just can't, and I don't want to. It's not this exalted, like I'm staying home. Now, that's the solution. It's more like, "God, I thought I could do it all and this sucks. Now, I don't want to do it all." But that feels, there's grieving around that. Then there's a lot of people that don't have the choice to not "go do it all."

I think when we look at how women are socialized, it's important to acknowledge that when we were told we could have everything, we weren't told the cost of that opportunity. So it was this really like big, fake gift bestowed to us. That isn't a gift, it's not an honor to do all the things when you aren't given the support to do all the things. Then to feel like a failure when you're like, "Oh well, I can't do all the things, and I think that when we see the results of that, and the long-term socialization of women. By the time you get to middle age, that the outcomes around that are that we are so wrapped up, and the examples I use come from a couple other people's work or few other people's work. But we see it show up in human givers syndrome, which Emily and Amelia Nogaski talk about in their book, *Burnout*. Where we just give, and give, and give at our own expense, and we're conditioned to do that, and we're conditioned to want to be givers, and shamelessly, and selflessly give all the time.

Then we see it come in the form of imposter syndrome, which Ruchika Tulshyan and Jodi-Ann Burey talked about in their groundbreaking Harvard Business Review article, where they talked about human giver syndrome. I'm sorry, they talked about impostor syndrome as a product of the patriarchy, not as an actual condition that women have. Then, we have perfectionism, and women's striving to do it all, hold it all, be at all, and look a certain way, and look like they're doing it with ease, and grace. These are all social constructs. When we look at these as social constructs versus issues that we're struggling with, then we can see, "Oh, wait. I was never set up to be successful." Instead, I was told that I shouldn't desire to be perfect, and I should feel like I'm an imposter. I should feel like I want to give all the time.

When we can flip those social constructs on their head, then I think there can be a little bit of freedom and being like, "Oh, this is total BS. So then maybe, that's like the people you're seeing on TikTok, where they're like, "I'm just going to stay home, like screw it all." In my community – go ahead.

[0:11:40]

**FT:** Yes, it does feel a little bit like a protest, a protest. But also, I can't help but think like it's a step backwards, and this is not what we want. Well, of course, we want people to do what they want. If not working out in the traditional sense, a nine to five job, you would rather be a full-time caregiver at home, that's your choice. We've talked about this. I respect that, I just hope you have a financial plan to back that up, and to sustain your financial independence. Or if you choose to do that, and work, or just – you know, whatever you design for your life is your choice. But we never want women and we don't want really men either. We don't want anyone to feel as though they were backed into a corner to do this. We did have that happen in the pandemic where women were forced, they were ejected from the job market, from the employment world. It wasn't their desire.

Now, I think that transitioning back has got to be hard. What are you hearing from women who maybe took time off during the pandemic, out of necessity, who are now interested, and have the capacity once again to go back into the market, whether from home or going to an office? What's it like for them? Because I think this might be a silent struggle, we're not hearing about this.

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**SD:** I think that we're seeing that women are incredibly tired and incredibly burned out, although I don't know that they're labeling it as such. Really overwhelmed. Then to be like, "Well, here's some tools. Like here's some self-care tips." That just seems like kind of a slap in the face to be like, "Here's three things you can do to take better care of yourself."

[0:13:16]

**FT:** Go get a massage.

[0:13:18]

**SD:** Right. Who has time? Who has money? Also, my job might be on the line, my partner's job might be on the line, but I'm going to go spend 150 bucks on a massage? No, actually, I'm not. I think that those pieces, I think, just – I think that women feel really tired without a lot of solutions and without – I don't feel like there's – I think there's cases of hopelessness. But I also think that not just – not so much hopelessness as less hopefulness. So – and I just had this conversation with my husband the other day, where I'm like, I don't feel hopeless, but I have the lowest level of hopefulness that I've had in a long time. That's a really different feel to me, and I don't like that feeling. It's really kind of caught me off guard. I'm like, "Gosh, I thought I was like optimistic, and grateful, and resilient." I was like, "God, I thought it was more resilient than this." It's hard when you can't uphold a certain level of hopefulness to find that sense of resiliency, and to keep finding the light every day to be like, "So I'm going to wake up and be resilient again today."

[0:14:31]

**FT:** Right. We've done episodes on how that word is just so overused, it has sort of diminished, it lost its value. What I'm hearing from you Sara is, really like this – the advice for women. Not that we want to put more on your plate. Actually, the advices to do less, and actually to abandon some of these cultural expectations that have been put upon us, whether it is perfectionism, whether it is not voicing your struggles, because that is also a sign of not having resilience, which you've been told to always be. It's almost like, you can have a good day and you can also cry. Those two things can coexist, and that's okay, and we should talk about both of those things equally.

If you're on Instagram, or TikTok, that's a problem too, because I don't think that's helping. I don't think that's making us feel better about our lives. Can we talk about that a little bit? We talked about social media and its impact on young people and teens. But let's also be honest about how it impacts women of all ages and mothers.

[0:15:36]

**SD:** Yes, I struggle a lot with social media, because I do think it's so shiny. I think that's so harmful when we only see other people's shiny parts. I try to be someone who doesn't only show these shiny parts. But then oftentimes, I'm like –



[0:15:51]

**FT:** I think that's why we like each other.

[0:15:54]

**SD:** Right, right. But then sometimes it feels like an overshare. I'm like, do people want to know that I cried all day? I don't know. But I think it's important to not only show the shiny parts. Because I think what we see when we step back, and we have this, you know, bird's eye view of what's happening. When we only see each other shiny parts, it just makes us all feel less than. If we show the real parts, or just don't show anything at all for that matter. Like I think showing nothing at all is better than just showing the shiny parts. Then I think that we have the opportunity for people to see where there is still collective struggle that we're all managing in private ways. I think that that part is really, really important. Whether it's that you're bringing light, and levity, which you're so great at doing, bringing levity to something, a mundane moment in motherhood. Or you're really out there saying like, "I'm having a hard time right now. I think just those contrasts to like, "Look at this beautiful moment" I think are really, really significant.

I encourage people that – I encourage you. I was in the fitness industry for years, and I used to say like, "If you're on social media, and you're following someone who you think has this incredible body, and every day you see their body on Instagram, and it makes you feel like crap about your own. That is a sign to unfollow that person. That is not a healthy relationship. I would say the same thing now. When you see someone who's built a life, that every day you see it on social media, and it makes you feel worse about your life, that person should not be someone that you're exposed to. That is not healthy or helpful. It's harmful to you. That person might be a great person, they might even be a great friend of yours.

I've unfollowed and muted friends of mine, close friends of mine. Because I'm like, in this season, I can't see that. I can't do my best work for other people when I'm seeing that. This is just not healthy for me, objectively speaking. It's not because I don't value that person, I don't love them, I don't want to be friends with them. It's just that, for where I'm at right now, this does not work for me. I think that level of discernment, I think can be really, really critical.

[0:18:05]

**FT:** You said it. I would just add that in the beginning, when I would do that, it made me feel bad that I was doing something out of my jealousy or my envy. You know, it's like, is it a problem me? It's not that we're trying to say the problem is them or us. It's just that this as you eloquently say, like in your season of your life, this is not what you want to be exposed to. That person is not doing anything wrong. You're not doing anything wrong. But just because this person is your friend, or this person seems to have this aspirational profile, and you don't want a part of it. It's fine. Like if something in you doesn't feel unsettled by what you're experiencing, you need to honor that feeling and not judge yourself. Or think it's a weakness because you feel that way.

[0:18:53]

**SD:** Right.

[0:18:53]

**FT:** Period. I think that's just something we have to accept and move on. Then. I mean, just today, I unfollowed or I muted some people. Because I got tired, I got tired of just all the – it was actually a mom on Instagram whose whole platform is about mom hood and I just got tired. It was like too much, too much about her dancing in her kitchen. You know, I got into dancing. I'm good with the content, I'm good. I don't need any more of this.

[0:19:25]

**SD:** Just yesterday, there's a woman in the internet marketing space, and I was like, it's too much dancing in her living room. I was literally like, I can't with the – like the first few times, it was cute. The third time it was like kind of funny. Fourth time, I was like, "I got it, I got it. You're great at dancing in your living room."

[0:19:38]

**FT:** I think all moms should dance in their kitchen at one point on Instagram. I did this a couple of weeks ago. It got a lot of likes. But if that's every other day, as is the case with this one person I was following. At least it felt that way, I was like, "I'm good. I got it. I got the message."

Let's talk a little bit about what you have going on, and what you're excited to talk about in this season of your life. Last time, when you were on, which was pre-COVID, I believe, I think. Was that my – am I dating myself –

[0:20:09]

**SD:** I think it was.

[0:20:10]

**FT:** It was, right? I can tell you right now. Yes, it was before – in the before times. I'll put that link in our episode notes, so people can go back and hear more about our conversation then, which was, let's just say, it was a reverend, and got us some fans, and some very few unhappy people. But that's okay.

[0:20:28]

**SD:** You came on The Shameless Mom Academy around the same time, and we have some – and within The Shameless Mom Academy, there was like some – it was just all a lot of drama. Like, I don't feel like we're dramatic people. But I mean, I was kind of proud of us. We just checked in the drama for a minute.

[0:20:42]

**FT:** Right. Right. I mean, I learned a lot too from that that experience, just in terms of my own messaging around this very fiery opinion that I have, and that it really just comes from a very honest to goodness place. Like I want all women to win. Because I am so financially focused, and I care so much about people's financial independence. I cannot untie this concept of like being a "stay-at-home parent," or as we call them now, uncompensated caregiver with a

financial independence. Like I want – oh, maybe I'm too idealistic to think that there is a world you can create for yourself where you can have those two things coexist. In the absence of financial independence, I worry for women. Unless you have a plan, I worry for you. That's really all it is. I'm not judging you. I'm just I'm worried.

Because I've often seen how it can work, it can backfire in my own life, and other people's lives. People share with me a lot of the time, "I wish I had had my own money. I wish I had had my own savings account. I wish I hadn't completely opted out of the workforce without a plan. I should have known that my partner didn't have life insurance." That's all I'll say about that. Go check out that episode. Back then when we were talking a lot about financial independence, motherhood. These days, I believe you're really keen on, and we've kind of touched on this, this idea of burnout, the perfectionism myth, and impostor syndrome.

What is your advice for women, as they are struggling with all of these things? Don't get a massage, that's not what we're saying, but you have other important things that we need to address.

[0:22:21]

**SD:** A lot of the work I'm doing now, so I do – the work I do inside The Shameless Mom Academy with our podcasts, with our community is all around supporting moms and helping them cultivate self-trust, and build courage, and confidence. That's been really at the crux of what we've been doing for seven years. But since the pandemic, and it kind of started during the pandemic, but it's become a bigger part of the business, is being able to go into organizations, and corporations, and be able to talk to groups of whether it's groups of women, groups of gender minorities, groups of other marginalized communities, and be able to talk to them about how their self-trust has been eroded over time. Then give them tools to start to be able to listen to their intuition, and tap into their intuition, and really be able to listen inward to figure out what they need.

We are so constantly chronically inundated with people telling us what we need, people telling us to go get the massage, that it becomes really hard to listen inward, and recognize what do I need in this moment, and how can I nurture my needs in a way that feels delicious to me. I think

those words are really important, nurturer and delicious. It's not like how can I add more to do items to my self-care checklist, which sounds torturous, and obnoxious. But it's how can I like nurture my needs, and use – do that via delicious routines.

I'll give an example of like my day of crying last, last Friday. First of all, I had to go into my husband's office and tell him I was having a really hard time. My husband and I share an office wall. In my mind, he could hear me crying in my office for a long time. I'm like, "Does he not hear me sniffing? Is he not going to come in here? At a certain point, I was like, "Apparently, he's not he doesn't notice. So I go into his office, and he's like, "What is wrong?" He sees my face. He's like, "What's going on?" "Didn't you hear me crying next door?" He's like, "No." I had to go in and just say, "I'm not doing very well."

This was kind of this like buildup of over a few months of me just like having hard days, but then be like, "Oh, that's fine" and not saying anything in my own household. Just being like, I don't have the energy to get into it. I don't feel like digging – but I had to go in and be like, I'm not fine. I feel like I'm not fine, I feel like there's all these hard things happening around me, around us in the world, whatever. That was really hard, as like a perfectionist who likes to be in control of everything. Even to my partner. I don't want to look or seem like I don't have it all together. That was the first thing I did, like listening to them, or to be like, "You need to let someone else know that you feel horrible right now."

The second thing I did was after, like throughout the day, trying to think through, again, like I don't feel hopeless, but I'm feeling like less hopeful. I thought it's Friday. What can I do on a raging Friday night as a mom of a 10-year-old? It was like, doesn't have any date night plans? What can I do that would feel good tonight? I went and got my son from school, he's home, my husband's wrapping up work stuff. I'm like, "Okay, I'm going to walk up to the bookstore, which is like a block from our house." I'm going to walk up to the bookstore and get a puzzle. My husband was like, "That's exactly what you should do" I go up there, and I get a puzzle, and I'm like, "I'm just going to work on a puzzle tonight." Now, for some people, that's not nourishment.

But for me, to be able to control tiny little interlocking pieces in really perfect ways is like, it is the most medicinal therapeutic thing for my Type A mind that can help me get out of my own brain.

So I went and got my puzzle. I know, 99% of the world is like, "That's not what I want to do on Friday."

[0:25:51]

**FT:** I'm with you. I'm there with you, Sara. Next time, call me. I love a good puzzle. My daughter and I will sit and do a puzzle for two hours.

[0:25:58]

**SD:** I love it. I love it. I think it's finding the things for you. Some of that is like listening inward, and some of it's having the courage to also tell someone else. I feel like crap. But then also recognizing like, maybe the thing you need is a nap, maybe the thing you need is drinks with a girlfriend, maybe the thing you need is a puzzle, maybe the thing you need is cuddles with your dog. Maybe it's going to target. It can be a million different things. But really recognizing like that's the thing I need, versus looking on Instagram to be like, "Well, what are other people doing? Are they having spa days? They're having spa days at that really expensive spa that I can't afford?" No, don't look at that.

[0:26:33]

**FT:** Right. Or there's something wrong with me. That's the thing that we think too. Like, I'm not being smart with my time. I'm not organizing my priorities correctly. I'm not getting up early enough. I'm not getting enough sleep. Listen, whoever is getting like 10 hours of sleep a night? I don't know. I don't know. They're waking up at 5am, like, I don't know. I'm up till midnight.

I've always been a night owl, and my kids, I can see it in them too. I actually think it's hereditary. I remember being a kid and I would hear the HBO music coming on in the living room because my parents, they thought I was asleep, and now the HBO – that HBO tune like – they don't play it anymore, but it takes me back. [Humming]

[0:27:23]

**SD:** We never had HBO, so I don't know. I don't know the HBO music.

[0:27:24]

**FT:** Oh, well, for those of you listening. I just took us back like 30 years, 40 years.

[0:27:29]

**SD:** I know the Netflix opening sound and the Hulu opening sound.

[0:27:34]

**FT:** Okay. Tell me you're 43 without telling me you're 43. All this to say that, I take naps. That's what I do. That's how I get my me time, and that's how I probably process some of the daily grievances that I have. I just sleep it off at two o'clock in the afternoon. But let me have my 10 pm to myself awake doing mindless things. Sara Dean, thank you so much for coming on the show once again, and giving us the permission to unapologetically be who we are with some guardrails. We need those guardrails. We need those boundaries for ourselves to protect our freedoms and our health. I'll have you back anytime. Thank you so much.

[0:28:22]

**SD:** Thank you so much, Farnoosh.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:28:26]

**FT:** Thanks so much to Sara Dean for joining us. Check out The Shameless Mom Academy Podcast at [shamelessmom.com](http://shamelessmom.com). Learn more about Sara at [saradean.com](http://saradean.com). I'll see you back here on Friday for Ask Farnoosh. In the meantime, I hope your day is so money.

[END]

