

### EP 341: Navigating “Big Kid Problems” with Sarah Merrill

**Sarah:** In no way, shape or form was I recovered after that six weeks. A lot of women coming out, they have these expectations of, "I'm going to be good." And there's a whole slew of issues that are just waiting for you on the other side of those six weeks. Your hair's falling out, you've got hormone shifts, you've got all kinds of things happening. That was definitely a big surprise.

**Dr. Taz:** Hi everyone and welcome to Super Woman Wellness. I'm Dr. Taz. I've made it my mission throughout my career in integrative medicine to support women in restoring their health using a blend of eastern medical wisdom with modern science. In this show, I will guide you through different practices to find your power type and fully embody the healthiest and most passionate version of you. I'm here for you and I can't wait to get started. This is a Soulfire Production.

Welcome back everyone. Welcome back to another episode of Super Woman Wellness, where we're determined to bring you back to your superpowered self. It's been interesting in the years of having this podcast, I've talked about a lot of different things. We've had lots of great guests on, but I don't think we've done enough in the space of pregnancy, what that experience is like for women, and some of the feelings that it can bring back up from even our childhood trauma. I know that for sure, this is something I went through firsthand. But I'm bringing on the experts I have with me, Sarah Merrill Hall.

A little bit about Sarah. She grew an audience of over half a million Instagram followers by bringing humor and relatable content to everyday struggles with her mission to help followers embrace their imperfections and laugh through the hard times and live their best kid lives. Sarah has turned Big Kid Problems into a relatable and infectious brand. But her adulting content took a turn when Sarah became a new mom. Enter the next era of Big Kid Problems' Bottle Service, a new kind of pregnancy and motherhood podcast, from recounting her ultimate C-section recovery guide to being open about her failing, me too girl, her breastfeeding journey Bottle Service by Big Kid Problems is here to open up new motherhood conversations. Welcome to the show.

**Sarah:** Oh my gosh, thank you so much for having me. I'm pumped to be here.

**Dr. Taz:** Yeah, so how old then is your little one? Do you have one child, two children? Tell us kind of...

**Sarah:** I have one baby and I cannot believe it, but he just hit a year old. So I have a one-year-old. I don't know how it happened. I blinked my eyes and he is a toddler.

**Dr. Taz:** Yeah, You're in it. Mine are older now, so I have a 14 and 15 year old. But I feel like those years were tough in a different way. They're very physical years. They are the years of the unexpected. In fact, I just saw one of our nurse practitioners just had a baby a couple days ago and just brought me... I had flashbacks of what that whole timeframe was like. But what inspired you to really develop this podcast called Bottle Service and really talk about pregnancy and the experience of pregnancy? It's so funny, just even in the bio, like breastfeeding's hard, it's not easy. Nobody tells you how hard it is. And I'm sorry, I did not look good pregnant and I did not feel good pregnant and there was nothing beautiful about being pregnant in my personal experience. But all these myths and statements, you feel like something's wrong with you when you're going through it and you're just like, "Why am I not having the same experience everybody?" So anyhow, I'll let you take it from there. Tell us a little bit about you and how all this kind of came to be.

**Sarah:** Yeah. Well, first of all, right there with you with the expectations versus reality in pregnancy. I think we've all seen the movies of how beautiful and happy pregnancy looks and it looks just this beautiful time in your life. And it wasn't that way for me either. I had a truly challenging go of it. The entire time was rough. But really I wanted to do my pregnancy and motherhood podcast. My channel, Big Kid Problems, already online is something that's just it's fun, it's funny, it's a lot of memes. It's a lot of just daily jokes that I write about adult world and adulting struggles in general.

I've been doing it for over 10 years. I kind of started it as a joke in college and kept going throughout my adult life. And always throughout the last 10 years, I've written content about certain big life transitions that I've been through. So anything from changing careers to dating everybody in New York City, going on the dating apps and then finding my husband, getting engaged, getting married. That has all been content that I've covered on my platform. I knew when my husband and I were getting married, we wanted to start trying right away for kids and to have a baby. And I knew instinctively that I knew that there was going to be a lot of content there. I knew it was going to be a whole thing that I could really talk a lot about. And so I wanted to create something separate from my channel because I have a lot of people from all different walks of life that follow Big Kid Problems and I knew pregnancy was going to be such a specific topic. Yeah, I wanted to create a totally separate thing.

So I decided to do this podcast and my idea for it was I was going to take every week of pregnancy. So the day that I found out I was pregnant, I was going to start there and I was going to talk every week of pregnancy, what's going on with baby, what's going on with your own body, and then also put my own 2 cents in there, share my experience and obviously make it funny, make it entertaining.

That was the idea. What I didn't know was when I started the show was just how miserable I was going to be literally the entire time. I had many episodes that I recorded from the bathroom floor sitting there all day or just feeling so exhausted, feeling so terrible. I recorded the first 14 episodes without putting anything out there because I wanted to be careful, wanted to keep it safe before I announced the pregnancy to the world. And I sat there after I hit 14 weeks and I was like, "Should I even publish this?"

**Dr. Taz:** Right.

**Sarah:** "Should I even press send on these podcasts?" But I did. What I think has resonated with people is just how honest and transparent it is. It really is going week through week of pregnancy with me and I don't hold back. It's very real. And I think people appreciate it. I know other women going through pregnancy where it doesn't look perfect and it doesn't look super pretty can relate and feel like they're not going through it alone. So that's been really fun. And I think it's really great to have conversations like this where we're opening it up and we're speaking the truth because more women need to know what they're getting into.

**Dr. Taz:** Pretty much. I mean, what did you learn in the journey of pregnant... I mean, you're right, I could do a whole book on this too, but what did you learn in the journey of getting pregnant, being pregnant and then walking through those weeks? I mean, I can start the conversation by telling you I'm 5'2 and a half, somewhere between 5'2 and 5'3, and I gained 78 pounds in my first pregnancy because I was so nauseated and sick and it was early in this whole nutrition and integrated wellness journey of mine. And so all I wanted to eat was Chick-fil-A waffle fries, and that's all I ate.

And so 78 pounds later, I remember after delivering... My delivery was traumatic as well, but after delivering and coming home, I don't know what I thought. I'm a doctor, but I don't know what I was thinking. I think I thought somewhere that 20 would come out just by having the baby, but it didn't. And so it was a long arduous struggle to get back to my original self, which is closer to 115, 120, somewhere in there. So I mean, that's just one example of how pregnancy takes over. But what have you learned from some of the guests you probably had on too?

**Sarah:** Oh my God, so many things. How much time do we have on this podcast.

**Dr. Taz:** Right.

**Sarah:** Right? Oh, man. I mean similar to you. The recovery was so much longer than I thought in all aspects. I mean physically, mentally, emotionally. I think one of the

things I thought coming out of pregnancy, and one of the things I heard from my doctor was, your follow-up's going to be at the six-week mark. At that point, you'll be able to resume life as normal. And I think I kind of took that as like, "Okay, it's going to be bad for six weeks and then we're going to be back to our-

**Dr. Taz:** Be good.

**Sarah:** Right.

**Dr. Taz:** ...ourselves.

**Sarah:** We're going to be good. No, that is not the case. I really now after going through the experience, I'm like, "Wow, six weeks was the jumping off point of when I could actually start recovering because those first six weeks were just ground zero of getting..." I ended up having a C-section, so recovering from surgery, just learning how to take care of a little human. I was in the trenches those first six weeks, but in no way, shape or form was I recovered after that six weeks. And I think that was really, really surprising to me. And I think a lot of women coming out, they have these expectations of, "I'm going to be good." And there's a whole slew of issues that are just waiting for you on the other side of those six weeks. Your hair's falling out, you've got hormone shifts, you've got all kinds of things happening. So I mean, that was definitely a big surprise, I would say. One of many.

**Dr. Taz:** And for women who were out there, because I was in this position too, my husband was in school, so I was kind of the breadwinner, so I also had this financial gun kind of on my head, right? So it was like, "Oh, I'm going to..." The first one I took three months. The second one I took six weeks. But even at three months I wasn't really ready to go back. It was just like there's still a lot to do with the baby and all that other stuff. So I think that's so hard.

One thing I love about Chinese medicine, it talks a lot about preconception and prepping the mom and the family to have the baby, to be pregnant, what it's going to look like afterwards. I don't feel like we do a good job of that in our Western medical model.

Hi there. It's Dr. Taz here, thrilled to bring you my line of nutraceutical products and lifestyle products the EastWest Way. This line was really born out of a need, my own personal need to find products that worked, combining the best of Eastern and western medicine and also finding that in practice many of these products don't exist. I remember the early years of practice where I was just trying to find the right B formula for patients and couldn't find it, and that began the journey of the EastWest Way. Boost, my methylated B, was the first product. It's

now a hero product. So many people depend on Boost for energy, mood and so much more. But from there, each formula has been curated by me to really answer the problems that we are facing, but still merging the best of eastern and western medicine together.

What does that mean? It means you might have a nutrient merged with an herb, or you might have something from an Ayurvedic formula combined with a very western way of thinking. These products work. I use them in practice, and I'm incredibly proud of them. I have personally developed each one of them as an answer to something I needed or one of my patients needed. Now, I want you to be able to experience all the products as well. The EastWest Way is something that I am so thrilled to continue to grow and develop.

And for all of you, my Super Woman listeners, love this community so much, I'm offering each of you a discount on any of the products on [theeastwestway.com](http://theeastwestway.com). Again, that's [theeastwestway.com](http://theeastwestway.com). You have a special code just for my listeners, it's 30% off, and that code is going to be SWW30 to get 30% off at checkout. If you rate and review any of the podcast episodes, by the way, I'm going to pick a winner every month and you'll get a free EastWest Boost supplement. Just email me at [hello@drtaaz.com](mailto:hello@drtaaz.com). I hope you enjoy these products as much as my patients have. I live by this line as well. I use at least three or four of the products on a daily basis, and I'm thrilled for each of you to try them as well.

You talk a little bit about birth trauma. I definitely want to make sure we don't lose time and not touch upon that. What are you referring to when you talk about birth trauma and birth trauma awareness?

**Sarah:** Oh my gosh, yes. I mean, one thing that you just mentioned, the prepping prenatal, how people do that in Eastern medicine, I really think that we miss out on that and we miss out on preparing for birth in a practical way here too. I think I walked into my birth pretty blind to the possibilities of things that could happen.

And what happened in my birth, my birth was a relatively straightforward C-section. I had a breach baby. We knew a couple weeks before going into birth that I was going to need to deliver via C-section. It was scheduled, it was on the calendar. I don't think my doctor batted an eye. Everything went pretty smoothly or pretty routinely. There was just a couple things that happened in birth that I think are pretty normal for doctors who have seen this happen a million times. Me who came in blind, it was my first baby, was shocked by and really, really rocked by.

One of those things was my baby, which I've now I now understand is pretty common for births like mine that are planned C-sections, births that where the

woman doesn't go into labor is that my son was born and he had trouble breathing. He didn't push through the birth canal and he had trouble transitioning to oxygen outside of amniotic fluid, which apparently happens. And so my son was born, he wasn't really screaming or crying, and I waited minutes. My initial birth plan, my doctor had said, "He'll be on your chest in one to two minutes." Well, there's a big red clock next to me on the table. I remember them calling out. His birth time was nine o'clock on the dot. I watched the clock next to me. "9:01. Okay, another minute. 9:02. Okay, he's still not here. 9:04. What's going on?" 9:06. 9:08 rolls in and nobody has told me anything. And I just completely went into a panic.

Eventually, the nurse came over and said, "We're going to have to take him out of the room. He's having trouble breathing." And I remember him being taken out of the room and just every cell in my body reacting in a very extreme way, being like, "No, I need to get him. That is my child that they're taking out of here." This happens in hospitals every single day. Babies have to go to the NICU, this happened. But what I didn't understand with birth trauma is that it affects your brain. I like to say it changed my brain chemistry because something happened within me where I could not process what happened. And two hours later, he was brought to me, he was put on my chest and everything was okay. In that moment, I was so relieved.

**Dr. Taz:** Oh, that feels. Yeah.

**Sarah:** Yeah. And he started breathing. They were like, "He's still having trouble breathing." I'm like, "I don't care. Bring him to me." They put him on my chest. He started breathing normally. I started breathing normally, we were okay. But I left the hospital. And again, those six weeks go by where you're just kind of running on adrenaline. I'm getting through everything, trying to learn how to breastfeed, trying to get him sleeping, all of that stuff.

And some time went by and I realized there were some things that didn't seem normal with my recovery, where I was talking to my other mom friends and they weren't experiencing the same things I was, which was I was having these really intense flashbacks of the day he was born. And reliving it, not just as a memory, but reliving it in a way where it felt like I was in it. Experiencing my heart rate rise. I was watching him getting taken out of the room, and it felt like it was happening all over again.

I probably relive my birth. People say that's a once in a lifetime experience. I lived it a hundred times, over a hundred times. It was happening to me all the time. I was having trouble sleeping, whereas any new parent can appreciate. You kind of really look forward to getting into your bed at the end of that long day.

You're so exhausted. And I would start to get ready for bed and I would start to feel this just anxiety bubbling in me. I'm like, I know I'm going to relive that day all over again when I lay my head on the pillow.

So having some anxiety there and just kind of feeling really disoriented. That's kind of the word I would use. It was an experience that I really had a hard time articulating to anybody, even to my husband who I would really try and sit down and be like, "I'm going through something and I don't know how to explain it to you." I have such a mix of emotions where one moment I'm so happy I'm holding my baby, I'm in a bliss bubble, and the next moment I'm remembering what happened. I'm really angry. It took me a while to understand one of the core emotions I was feeling was just extreme anger, disappointment, grief, sadness, shame, guilt. I felt so guilty that my son's first moments of being alive were away from me and I couldn't control it.

So it was just a really hard period of time. One of the things that made it hard too was that I didn't know that birth trauma was a thing. I remember I was experiencing this for weeks at this point and I was scrolling through Instagram and I remember seeing a post about birth trauma. I had never even heard the words birth trauma, but the second I saw that term, birth trauma, I was like, "I don't even know what this is and I know that I have it." I started reading through the comments on that post and I started... It made me feel so validated, and I was instantly like, "Oh my God, I feel so much better knowing that this is a thing and all these women are commenting on it." They're experiencing and that they've had it too. And I'm like, "Oh, okay. This isn't normal what I'm experiencing. This is something that I have and that I've experienced. And now that I know what it is, I can actually start to address it."

**Dr. Taz:** So how'd you do in the weeks and months that followed all of that? Did you go into anxiety or depression, or did you have any postpartum type symptoms?

**Sarah:** So that's really interesting. I was very aware that I was kind of suffering with almost like this PTSD, and I was very cautious in myself. I'm normally pretty attuned to my own mental state because I suffer with anxiety before this. So I was kind of waiting for the other shoe to drop, like, "Oh, I'm going to have postpartum depression, what have you." That never really happened. I experienced actually a little bit of perinatal depression where I had depression in pregnancy and I didn't... Once my baby was here and I wasn't pregnant anymore, that kind of went away and I did not experience that. It was its very own unique thing was this birth trauma that I was going through. In one sense, I was happy that I wasn't experiencing depression, but I was also just very confused. I was just like, "What is this?"

**Dr. Taz:** And I think that it's interesting because it shows up, there's birth trauma, there's postpartum. Some of the commonalities across the board is that the poor husbands and partners, they really try hard and they can't really wrap their heads around what's happening, right? It's equally traumatic for them, I would say, as it is for us, because at least the good ones, they want to help, they want to be involved, they want to fix and all this other stuff. And they're watching all of this happen, and they try but they're not really able to reach us. And so even in my experience of birth trauma, which was horrific, I mean, I made a lot of mistakes on this journey, which we all do, but everything from tearing terribly because I waited to ask for an epidural to issues with my mom not being there because of her own mental health issues and stuff like that, there was a lot that I was processing and going through in that first pregnancy, right?

I don't remember it, but I have told by my husband, and my mother-in-law was an angel, she literally descended on her house and moved in and quit work for a whole month just to take care of me, but they're all saying I was depressed. I had postpartum depression. And I don't remember it because I'm so in my head that I'm going through the motions of every day and I can do that in a very disconnected way.

And so that feeling of disconnection, I think that feeling of disorientation is very common. I think a lot of women feel guilty when they start to feel that way. I remember talking to another woman who was having those same feelings for no other reason than she was a celebrity wealthy woman who had every form of help in the world, but no one was letting her take care of her baby. So she was having the same disconnection, disorientation because she wasn't given the time and the space and the privacy to bond with her child. So for the second one, she's like, "I want them all gone. Everyone needs to be gone. I want to do this on my own."

Hi there, superstars. I have an exciting announcement. My new book, *The Hormone Shift: Balance Your Body and Thrive Through Midlife and Menopause*, is out this October and is available for pre-order right now wherever books are sold. Most women, let's be honest, have been led to believe that entering midlife means existing at the complete mercy of our mysterious hormones for the next decade. When we take our concerns to our doctors, we're told that our debilitating symptoms are normal or we're fine, or it's in our head. I'm here to tell you that fine is not good enough. I want women to thrive through every life stage. So I've devised a hormone reset plan that blends the best of eastern and western medicine together to bring your body back into balance, minimize unwanted symptoms, and have you feeling like yourself again. It's not you, it's your hormones. Are you ready to thrive? Go to [prh.com/thehormoneshift](http://prh.com/thehormoneshift) to pre-order your copy right now.



So I mean, think it's a very... You're right, no one talks about these things. No one talks about the fact that you may experience these weird emotions, and that's okay. But again, it's having that support system, right? Having someone you can turn to. And I think it needs to be women. I hate saying that, but that's why in the olden days, you would send the pregnant mom off to her mother and to the women of the family to have the baby, because I almost feel like it's a circle of women that can understand and protect the next woman having a child. So I don't know, just a thought there. But you moved through that, had your baby, what's the struggle now? How's it going with the one-year-old?

**Sarah:** He is wonderful, and it's great. I mean, every day is like a new challenge. Right now I'd say probably my biggest challenge is we're actually thinking about number two.

**Dr. Taz:** Oh, wow.

**Sarah:** Yeah, which it's something we've always wanted. We talked about this before even having our first kid. We definitely want more than one. We definitely want to go for two, maybe three. Well, that was before I went through all of this horrific entire pregnancy and a rough birth. I always just kind of assumed like, "Yeah, we'll get there. We'll get there and we'll do number two." Well, now the clock is ticking, and we're getting to a point where it's like, "Okay, yeah, we thought maybe a two to two and a half year age gap. I would need to get started pretty soon." And I'm at a point now where I'm like, "Wow, okay. I thought I had moved through a lot of the trauma and a lot of the stuff that was really affecting me early on in my postpartum days, and I have, but now the idea of getting back to number two is it's bringing up a lot of those fears, anxieties, and post past trauma that I've had in this experience."

I've had a couple moments where I'm like, "Wow, I really wanted a baby, but my entire body is telling me absolutely not."

**Dr. Taz:** Wow.

**Sarah:** And so it's trying to navigate where my heart's at, where my body's at, and realizing that there is a disconnect and that I'm going to have to actually do some work to get ready to do this all over again.

**Dr. Taz:** Yeah. Well, that's an important point. What would you do to release trauma? Do you have an idea? Have you thought through it? What would you do to help you actively try to release some of this?

**Sarah:** So the first thing I did was I turned to Google and started just looking things up because that's the beauty of the age that we're in right now, is we don't need to

reinvent the wheel. We don't need to figure all of the stuff out on our owns. There's information, there's resources out there.

So one of the first things I did, well, I've mentioned this, I had been talking to somebody who specialized in birth trauma. She had recommended to me EMDR therapy. So I started looking at... There's a apparently an EMDR protocol that's called a Future Protocol, and it deals with anxieties in the future. So I started looking up a specialist in my area for that. That's something that I'm going to do. There's a couple other things. I think one of the things that is really holding me back is just the birth, the idea of going through the birth again. I'm somebody who had a C-section. I've heard that if you have one C-section, the next one has to be a C-section. And I've since learned that that's not necessarily the case.

**Dr. Taz:** Right.

**Sarah:** I could potentially do a VBAC. I wanted to learn more about a VBAC so that's where I've started to do. I signed up for a birth class because I talked to another mom, another VBAC mom who she's like, "Listen, I think being educated about everything will make you just understand and feel better about the situation," because right now I'm pretty blind. The whole idea of I've already gone through birth one way and now I'm going to have to go through a completely different birth is scary to me, so just having some education I think in that area is going to help.

A third thing that I'm doing is reevaluating my birth team. So if I'm going to go through this again, I'm realizing I'm not super comfortable with my whole doctor. And I think even just sitting in that... I even just thought about going to that waiting room again would probably send me over the edge. So it's like, "Okay, maybe that's a step, is finding another OB that I'm comfortable with, finding a different doula I'm comfortable with. Maybe even delivering at a different hospital." These are all, I realized, triggers for me. Definitely, when I find my next doctor, I think having open conversations in the beginning and explaining to them that I am somebody who's coming in with this birth trauma and finding somebody who at least can maybe help me navigate through that is going to be crucial.

**Dr. Taz:** Are you seeing a lot of people talk about birth trauma? I don't think I see much or see a lot of resources necessarily, even EMDR, specifically for birth trauma. Are you seeing much of that out there?

**Sarah:** I had never seen anything until I started looking. Once I started looking, it's kind of that phenomenon. If you've ever been shopping for a car, maybe you're like, "I want a Jeep" and then all of a sudden you start seeing Jeeps all over the place?

**Dr. Taz:** Right. Right. Right.

**Sarah:** Once I started looking for it actively, I started finding resources. And amazingly, Instagram, social media has been a great place for me, even just to connect with other moms, with other people who have been through it. My own podcast, I mean, I talked openly about my experience in birth trauma, and I was flooded with people coming to me and telling me what worked for them and all of that. Luckily, I mean, once I knew EMDR was the type of therapy that I could do and that might be helpful, once I searched for it in my area, I was able to find some practices that use it.

**Dr. Taz:** Goodness. Well, it's definitely not a joke to be pregnant, have these families, raise these families. I think we're called super woman for a reason. I mean, I think just the art of childbearing is something in itself, and it changes our bodies, it changes our minds, it changes our chemistry. It is life changing for sure. I think we just have a couple minutes left. What advice would you give new moms, someone thinking about being a mom, or someone who's actively pregnant right now?

**Sarah:** Some advice, I mean, just something I wish I did a little bit differently in my first pregnancy is that I just relied heavily on my doctor, my OB. I kind of wanted to put blinders on. I was like, "I don't want to know anything about delivering and birth. It freaks me out. I trust my doctor to get me and have my baby delivered healthy, and both of us survive this." And I wish if I could go back, I would definitely educate myself a little bit more on birth, maybe take a prep class. There are all these amazing resources out there.

**Dr. Taz:** Oh, right.

**Sarah:** Yeah. I've had people on my podcast come in that teach these eight week courses on getting ready for delivery. It is like training. I think you almost have to look at it as training for a marathon or training for the Olympics because your body's doing something unbelievable. It's the hardest thing I think any of our bodies can do. And I think you got to approach it from a place of training, of really doing your homework and not just relying on others because everybody's personal experience is going to be so different. Nobody has your body. And to listen to yourself. And yeah, I think that would probably be my advice.

**Dr. Taz:** I love that. I think that's so helpful. So your podcast is Bottle Service, right? And it is everywhere the podcasts are heard, I'm assuming, and we can get our hands on it?

**Sarah:** Yes. It's Bottle Service with Big Kid Problems because Big Kid Problems is my persona on the internet, so...

**Dr. Taz:** Yeah. Yeah. I love it. I love it. I'll have to check all of that out. Well, thank you so much for taking time to talk to us about this. This is a really important phase for all women. I think we just need to talk about it more. It's not all happiness and perfect pictures and all that other good stuff. There's a lot of other stuff that hits the fan in between. So the more honest we are and the more open we are, I think we can just learn from each other and realize it's kind of normal and it's okay. So thank you again. I appreciate it. Other than the podcast, you're on Instagram as well, correct?

**Sarah:** Yes. Instagram, @bigkidproblems. And then my personal is @sarahmerrill\_hall if anyone wants to slide into my DMs, talk about anything pregnancy, new motherhood, that's basically all I talk about these days. I'm obsessed.

**Dr. Taz:** I love it. All right. Thank you for taking your time today to talk to us about this. And for everybody else watching and listening, we'll see you guys next time.