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Tom Daley On Parenting, Surrogacy And Dealing With Negativity

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“There’s not a second of the day where I don’t think about him,” gushed Tom Daley, as we asked about his newborn son Robbie Ray Black-Daley. It’s only when the Olympic diver became a parent that he truly understood what a life-changing experience it would be. “You have a moment where you fall in love so deeply and unconditionally that you forget about everything around you,” he told us. But Tom and husband Dustin Lance Black’s journey to fatherhood wasn’t straightforward. The couple had their son through surrogacy, a contentious topic in itself, on top of facing the challenges and criticism of same-sex parenthood. Now, Tom is back in training, working on a BBC documentary about surrogacy around the world, and absolutely besotted with his new son. We spoke to the 24-year-old about life as a new parent, his feelings towards surrogacy and his critics, and when baby number two will be on the way.

On Parenting

“I’d never changed a nappy but I did practise on a butternut squash!” he laughed when we asked about his preparation for parenthood. “The first 24 hours is the biggest learning

curve I've ever been on. Once we got into the swing of things you learn so much at an exponential rate." And while he read a lot of parenting books, he relies a lot on his instincts. "You realise how different your child might be to what a book is saying. You learn what particular cries mean to your child and what they're wanting at a particular time," he explained.

Tom keeps things simple and doesn't rely on lots of gadgets. When he leaves the house he takes lots of muslins, nappies and plenty of food. "You don't need to get too fancy with it," he added. If there's one thing he couldn't live without, it's Pampers Pure. "The nappies have a line on the front that turns blue once the baby has peed. You don't even have to take it off to check!" he said, sounding particularly impressed. Tom is official partner for the new Pampers Pure Protection range.

Tom's favourite parenting hack draws on his love of meditation and yoga. "When Robbie cries, I hum a low bassy, hum in his ear and he stops crying. I don't know if it's the soothing tone but you can just feel his body relax."

On Robbie Ray

"He's so awesome and super chilled," said Tom, when asked what Robbie is like. "I don't know if we're just really lucky with Robbie — he sleeps and eats really well." So do Tom and Lance have a dream baby? He admits they've had to make sacrifices, but a key part of parenting has been to "ensure we're looking after ourselves in order to best take care of Robbie."

"It's like he's completely changed all my perspectives of everything," says Tom. He admitted, like any parents, that it's heartbreaking having to leave your baby to go back to work and training, but mused "that the moment when see your child at the door and you squidge his cheeks, it makes anything, a good day or bad day, go away." Overall, Robbie makes him work harder and rest harder. "I want to make the most of the training session to make it worthwhile being away from him," he told us.

On Surrogacy

Tom and Lance were met with contention on their decision to have a child through a surrogate, heightened by their decision to do so in the US. When asked, he straightened

out both of these matters explaining, “We came to the decision because there’s something so special about having a bond with your biological child. The reason we didn’t do it in the UK is, one, because my husband is American, and two, because they don’t protect surrogates or intended parents in the way that they do in the State of California.”

Tom has become a surrogacy ‘expert through experience’ and was a natural choice for a BBC documentary exploring surrogacy around the world. The hour-long film, discussing the experience of surrogates and intended parents like Tom and Lance, will air in 2019. On the couple’s decision to travel to the US, Tom explained, “in the State of California, surrogates have total control of the whole situation all the way through, and everyone is protected legally.” He continued that only 1-2% of people who apply to become surrogates are successful in the process. This is due to the rigorous process where prospective surrogates are psychically, psychologically and financially screened to ensure are right for the procedure. Here in the UK, things like those screenings don’t exist.

“Nothing is illegal, but there’s no real law around surrogacy in the UK” he told us. “It’s a big grey area and people are making up rules about what they think is right. Intended parents are allowed to make decisions about the surrogate and vice-versa. The transparency and honesty aren’t there and that’s what comes with being able to do it in a regulated manner.” However Tom believes it’ll be a long process before anything changes.

His documentary, titled Surrogacy, aims to educate the British public about the laws on surrogacy around the world. “I think when British people see the documentary I’ve been making they’ll be shocked about how different the process is in America compared to the horror stories you hear. Of course you’ll hear about the things that have happened in Thailand and India which are awful and shouldn’t be allowed to happen. In the States, there are clear rules and regulations around those areas.”

On Celebrity

Tom has been in the limelight since he was 15 and had enough negative press thrown his way to last a lifetime. Despite this, he has a healthy attitude towards fame and the media. “I learnt from my dad to not care what anyone what anyone else thinks,” he told us. “At the end of the day, people have those opinions their opinion and they’re entitled to have them,”

he says of online trolls. “As long as I’m happy, my family and friends are happy, I don’t pay any attention.”

No doubt being a same-sex dad has had its challenges, but on this Tom explained, “People who initially had options that were not favourable feel differently when they see our family together— they see how much happiness it brings us. Robbie is such a loved and wanted child. He’s brought so much love and joy into our lives and brought our family together.” Being an ambassador for Pampers Pure has helped Tom to demonstrate that parents and families come in all different shapes and sizes.

On London Life

Tom lives in London and loves to make the most of it when he can. “London is so diverse and we’re really excited about bringing Robbie up in a place so rich in culture and art,” he said. “We try not to be restricted to the house or let Robbie be an excuse for us to sit around and do nothing.” And his favourite, family hangout? The Southbank. “We love to take walks along there to the frozen yoghurt bus” he said. As for when Robbie gets older, “it’ll be good to take him to the Tate Modern and other great places he’ll be able to explore.

On Baby Number Two

Tom has always wanted to children and a big family, “a whole diving team”, he once told The Sun. As for when baby number two would be coming along, he was tight-lipped and said, “We want to see how we goes with Robbie first and then we’ll see after that.”