
HIS DAUGHTER WAS TAKEN AT TWO WEEKS OLD. REBUILDING FROM GRIEF MADE HIM A STRONGER FATHER.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Raj Dhesi, Naroop Jhooti

Raj 00:00

It broke me completely, utterly completely in every which way. When you're at that lowest level in every way, emotionally and financially, some people choose to stay at the bottom, and it's hard. It's really hard to get yourself up, and not everyone's got it in them. But again, I come back to my support system. They picked me up. They made sure I was up. And I've definitely changed 100%. I've changed. I'm still the same guy, I was just stronger.

Naroop 00:45

Imagine being a single father navigating life's challenges while nurturing the future. The Dad Project tells these stories of strength, sacrifice, and unbreakable bonds. In Season 1, we dive into the voices of single fathers of color, capturing their victories and their struggles. It's time to recognize their impact, break down the stigma, and celebrate the powerful truth of fatherhood. Join me, your host Naroop Jhooti, on this inspiring journey.

Raj, thank you so much for coming down today, bro, and chatting to us about your journey as being a single dad. I met you when I did a talk at the Gravesend Gurdwara Sikh Temple, and I was really inspired by how you're trying to help other people who are single parents, both men and women. So I invited you down here and said let's have a

conversation, let's talk about your journey. Being a single dad, you're also in the creative game as a photographer and filmmaker, which is great. Take me back to your journey as a single dad. When you first realized, 'Okay, I'm now going to be a single dad,' what were those kind of emotions, man? Really put me in your world.

Raj 02:12

Well, my ex and I split when my daughter was only two weeks old, so it came as a bit of a surprise to be honest. It almost didn't feel real at the beginning, and it was just like a bad dream that I was trying to wake up from. At the same time there was COVID, it was lockdown.

Most of the places were starting to open up, but it wasn't as open as we'd like, so you're kind of still in that cocoon of your own home and your two or three friends. So the whole thing felt very surreal that your kid was taken away from you. It was really hard. It was really, really hard. Without the support of my friends and my family, I don't think I would have got through it.

Naroop 02:46

When you say it was really hard, describe to me what that meant. Was it the time apart? Was it loneliness? Was it not seeing your child? Was it functioning day-to-day? Describe that for me.

Raj 03:27

You go through a pregnancy with your partner or mother of your child for nine months expecting to be a dad at the end of it, and that was taken away from me. That was the hardest bit. It was not the journey that I imagined I would go through, especially that early.

In the early days of not seeing her, not knowing what she looked like for weeks before I saw her, which ended up then being months before I saw her again, just seeing the daily change in a little baby and not being able to hold her in my arms, not being able to do the normal things like change a nappy or just hold her, it was like something inside of me had been taken away. I almost died inside.

Getting up every day to try and be normal, try and go to work, try and socialize, and I work in a social environment as a wedding photographer. Locally where I lived everybody knew I'd had a kid, so then I had the community coming up to me saying, 'How's your

baby? How's your baby?' You just smile and say, 'Yeah, she's good,' but inside you know you don't even know, because you didn't see her.

Naroop 04:48

We as fathers, I think during that pregnancy period, we change. We change because you're now preparing to play a different role in the dynamic. You're becoming the protector, now your family is growing.

So hormonally and emotionally you're changing, and for that to be taken away from you must have been, I mean, I can't even imagine it. I can totally understand you saying this sense of a death, because I prided myself in being the first person that held my daughter.

Raj 05:32

Yeah, I was the first one to hold her. The nurse literally wrapped her up, gave her to me, and I was like, 'Okay, yeah.' The minute she was born, obviously I was there with my camera, took a picture of her as soon as she was born, the second she was born, and then held her in my arms. Never did I think two weeks later she'd be taken away.

Naroop 05:58

How did you fill that gap? What did you do to cope?

Raj 06:11

Work. At the time, obviously during COVID, weddings weren't really happening, so I wasn't that busy with work anyway. So I just went and found another job, unpaid most of the time, but I was just out of the house twelve, fourteen, sixteen hours a day, keeping myself busy, just leaving and not coming back until it was time to go to sleep.

Naroop 06:35

What was that job that you were doing? What were you doing?

Raj 06:47

I was project managing on a new build for a good friend of mine. He gave me a job just to build his house for him. He saw that I was down and I needed something to do, and he really helped me through that. I just threw myself at it. I'd leave at 7:00 a.m., sometimes return at 9:00 or 10:00 p.m. at night. The hardest thing for me was every morning getting up and walking past my daughter's room that I'd made for her that she'd never been in.

Naroop 07:15

How old is your daughter now?

Raj 07:20

She's going to be four in two months.

Naroop 07:28

So you've come a long way from that time. How did you navigate that time then? You did the project management work, which was obviously a way to distract your mind, but the issue was always there, wasn't it?

Raj 07:45

Absolutely. Like I always say, wherever you go, there you are. You can never escape your mind and what's going on.

Naroop 07:55

What else did you use as coping mechanisms to get through that time?

Raj 08:05

I'm very blessed to have really good family and really good friends. They all pulled together to make sure I was always busy or always doing something. And I talk a lot. I'm not one of these guys who, if I've got a problem, is just going to shut up and not talk about it.

I was very vocal. I feel sorry for my friends now looking back at it, because it was all I went on about, but they were really good to me. I used to hang out with my friends a lot, played a lot of sports, and took up tennis for a while because it was something good to do one-on-one and you can chat in between.

At the same time, I was going through the legal side of getting custody with my daughter, so I did a lot of research on what my rights are as a dad. I didn't just leave it to my lawyer to tell me, I wanted to know everything about it. When I want to research something, I'll research it fully, and I just dived into that. That took up more time.

Naroop 09:00

How is your relationship now with your daughter?

Raj 09:16

Fantastic. It's brilliant. All I asked for ever was that she'd be happy when she comes to me and happy when she goes to her mum, and she is on both. She's really happy when she stays with me, and she's really happy when she stays with her mum, and that's all I can ask for.

Naroop 09:40

How do you think the separation changed you as a man?

Raj 09:53

It broke me completely, utterly completely in every which way. When you're at that lowest level in every way, emotionally and financially, some people choose to stay at the bottom, and it's hard. It's really hard to get yourself up, and not everyone's got it in them. But again, I come back to my support system. They picked me up, they made sure I was up, and I've definitely changed. 100% I've changed. I'm still the same guy, I was just stronger.

Naroop 10:15

I can totally relate to that, because I was also at that rock bottom place where I felt broken. I was lying in bed, and it feels like it happened yesterday. I said to myself, 'I want people to say Naroop came out of this a better man than he went in, and I will never let this moment define me.' It's important, and it had to happen, right?

This is my journey, but this is not what I'm going to be known for. That sense of self-worth, that I deserve to be happy and deserve to be the best, helped pull me out of that really difficult time. Did you do any kind of self-talk or self-work?

Raj 10:50

I think when you're on that journey, it doesn't matter what anyone says to you. The phrase that I always got told was, 'Everything happens for a reason, don't worry.' And I'm like, 'Thanks, but what does that actually even mean?' It's not what you want to hear. But I think you become your own best friend.

Naroop 11:15

You do, yeah, because no one can tell you anything, because no one can really, well, people can relate to you. I can relate to you, but I didn't have any single fathers who I knew, which is one of the inspirations behind this project. That's why I love talking to single dads, because we just get it.

Raj 11:30

You totally get it. I became my own best mate. I was like, 'Raj, I've got to get out of this situation. No one's going to do it for me, but I don't want this to stop me.'

Naroop 11:38

Did you ever have those conversations with yourself? What kind of stuff did you say to yourself?

Raj 11:45

I used to say the same thing: 'Why me? Why has this happened to me? I was always going to be a good dad. This is everything I've ever wanted. Why am I going through it? What have I done?'

Then I took myself out of self-pity and I actually went on the search for other single dads. I knew of a couple who were in my area. They're friends, but not like the sort of friends that you could talk to every day, just someone you see in passing.

I contacted them, started chatting to them about their journeys, what they do, how they've gone through it. Not everyone had a success story, but some did, and they gave me a lot of hope.

Naroop 12:25

What did they tell you?

Raj 12:45

Keep doing what I'm doing. Stay on the straight path. Don't turn to alcohol or things like that, which is very easy in our community to do, but was never in my head space anyway. They gave me good, solid advice as to how to be a good person and stay as a good person. If you're patient, good things happen, and they did.

Naroop 13:10

How do you think you've changed as a man through all this?

Raj 13:20

I've definitely become stronger as a person, because your child being taken away from you in whichever way it is, that's probably the hardest thing you can go through as a person. As you get older, you accept the fact that you might lose a parent, maybe lose a sibling or lose a friend, but you wouldn't think you'd lose your child in any way.

When you're not seeing them, you've lost them for that period of time. So as far as I see it, it's almost like grief you're going through. If you can get through that, come out a better person, be stronger, and be in a better head space, there's nothing that can break you.

Naroop 14:00

Do you ever suffer from parental guilt?

Raj 14:10

Yeah, absolutely. I have a really good relationship with my daughter, and on the days she's with me, sometimes I do have to go to work. The guilt when I have to leave her, even if it's for two hours or three hours, I don't want to go because I feel I've lost out so much. You're going to go in a day or two days back to your mum, and I don't want to lose a single minute.

Naroop 14:40

I totally relate to that, bro, because pre-separation I was at the gym six days a week. Now I'm lucky if I get four sessions in, and one of the sessions is at home. When I know I've got my daughter half of the week, I'm not leaving her home by herself or with anybody else just for me to go to the gym, so I train at home.

I don't have all the equipment, but I've got enough. Yesterday I trained at home down in the room, and she was hanging out with me. I'll make that sacrifice, and it's a worthy sacrifice because every minute counts. One thing I always say to myself is whenever I say goodbye to her for my time, I want to feel proud to know that I was the best dad for her during those days.

Raj 15:20

Yeah, absolutely.

Naroop 15:28

Was I present? Was I on my phone too much? Was I kind enough to her? Was I too strict? Was I strict enough? Was I a good role model for her? These are questions I always ask myself. I do it because on Wednesday mornings I'm dropping her at school, and I won't see her until Saturday night or Sunday morning.

I've got to feel comfortable knowing I've left her with my checklist ticked, otherwise it will sit with me for the next few days. It's happened many times where I'm like, 'I could have

been better,' and I'll sit there thinking, 'Man, I wish she was here, I would just do this for her now.' Then I'll try to overcompensate on my FaceTime calls with her: 'Daddy loves you.' But then I'm like, 'Narooop, you just need to remember these things when you're there.' But you can't be perfect.

Raj 16:15

You constantly tell her you love her all the time. Same here, same.

Narooop 16:26

I think I wouldn't have done that had we not split, which is one of the positives that comes out of this. All we can ever do is think about how we can turn the situation into something positive. Every dad I've spoken to has said they've become a better dad, which is why all these dads were selected, because they're all inspiring fathers.

That sense of responsibility is actually a really, really powerful thing, because then you can apply that to everything in your life. It just makes you make better decisions, man. Am I going to go and get drunk and be hung over? No, I've got my daughter. I used to do that when I was together and married, but now you don't take it for granted.

Raj 17:00

You take it for granted, that's the thing. I'm exactly the same. I'll go out with my friends, and if they know the night before that my daughter's coming, I won't drink because I don't want a hangover the next day and waste that time with her.

I don't want her to be like, 'Why is Dad just laying around on the sofa?' She's three and a half, four years old. She wants to play in the garden, she wants me to play on the swings with her and go down the slide with her. If I've been out the night before, I ain't going to have the energy for that.

My dad guilt is so bad, Naroop, even when she's asleep. I put her to sleep at 7:30 or 8:00, and if I go meet my friends afterwards for a bite to eat or something, even though I know she's asleep, I'm like, 'I should be at home, because what if she wakes up?'

She'll be fine, she ain't going to wake up, and even if she does, my parents are home and they look after her. But that's how far the guilt is, that even if she's asleep, I feel I should be in the house.

Naroop 18:00

I don't think that's a bad thing, man. We all make decisions with our time. Everything that you do, you could probably do again at another time. You can go out with your mates another time. But as she gets older, suddenly you don't really become her number one because she wants to hang out with her mates, or she gets a boyfriend and your role changes. But that love is always there.

Raj 18:25

Yeah, you're just not number one anymore. You won't be able to express it in the same way. She's not going to want to lie there with you and give you hugs or let you tickle her, read her a bedtime story, or watch a movie with her. She's going to want to hang out with her friends.

Naroop 18:42

These are decisions I make constantly. Should I be here or should I be there? I could be there, but what's actually more important to me is that I would give all the money away and every opportunity away to be with my daughter if it meant I couldn't see her again. So I just apply that same logic: she's number one, everything else can wait. What is your routine like with her now? What kind of things do you do?

Because fathers with daughters especially, we have to adapt and change, don't we? You've got to see what her interests are. I took my daughter to Westfield a few weeks ago and she wanted to go to Sephora and all these places. So I've got to know: firstly, are these products bad for her skin? Is this right for her age? I'm asking shop assistants, 'Is she okay to use these products?' What do you do to make sure daddy time is fun?

Raj 19:42

Her being so young, it's just about playing. As the weather gets better, we play in the garden a lot. I don't really give her any device time at all. She's got a little iPad, one of those kids' iPads, and it's probably been discharged for about three months.

When she comes I'll say, 'Yeah, I'll charge it,' and I'll just put it to one side because I don't want her to play on it. She'll be playing on those devices her whole life. Right now it's about learning, playing outside, and having fun. I want to give her good, fun core memories.

We play in the garden a lot, whether it's on the swings, the slide, playing football, or just chasing each other. She likes to just chase me up and down the garden, and if my

parents are home, she chases her grandparents up and down the garden. She loves being outside. Inside, even when we're playing with toys, I try and get a lot of learning toys so I'm teaching her stuff. I've got a big love for music and I put my music on in the background. She probably doesn't like half of it, but it's to try and build her tastes a little bit.

All dads want their kids to be like them and have the same interests the dad has. She watched her first football match with me a few weeks ago and she actually sat and watched the whole first half. At three and a half years old, I was like, 'That's quite amazing.' She did it because she knows I like it, and she wants to make me happy at the same time, which is really cute. So yeah, I've not got to the Sephora stage yet.

Narooop 21:25

Yeah, I'm not looking forward to that bit! Tell me about some of the sacrifices that you've made in your life to be the dad that you are now, because I think that's a running theme throughout all these conversations. You've got to sacrifice your life to be the kind of father that you want to be. Talk me through some of the things that have changed for you.

Raj 21:58

The biggest sacrifice has been work, especially now that my routine with my daughter has changed. We have alternate weekends, so I no longer work as much. I used to travel a lot with my work. I used to go around Europe and around the world doing weddings. I've stopped. I pretty much don't do any destination weddings anymore, purely because I want to be there for her.

If they don't meet my schedule on the days I have my daughter, I'm not taking them on. These years don't come back. The money will come back, but this time won't come back. So that's been a big sacrifice, my work.

My social life has definitely taken a hit, but my friends are understanding. My friends have all got kids, but they're all together and not separated. They understand it and they're really good. They'll arrange things for when I have my daughter so we can come around and our kids can mix. It's a different friendship now with the same guys that I used to just go to the pub with.

Naroop 23:06

How do you feel when you're doing meetups and you're a single dad, maybe there with your parents or your mate with his kids, but he's married so things are a little bit different? How does that make you feel?

Raj 23:25

It used to bother me a lot. You'd see your friends' kids, and when they're hungry or something, they run automatically to their mum: 'Mum, I need some water, Mum.' My daughter's mum's not there, because it's not her time there. That used to make me really sad, thinking, 'How is she feeling that her mum's not around?'

That used to upset me a lot. But as time has gone on, I don't let it bother me as much. I'm just Mum and Dad when she's with me, and I'm sure her mum is Mum and Dad as well when she's with her. Still to this day I feel it, but kids do adjust. They say kids are resilient.

Naroop 24:12

They say kids are resilient, but that doesn't compensate for the life you want to give her. Amy asked me a really interesting question: 'Why do you think you were able to be the type of dad that you are?' And I said it's because I was given amazing role models through my parents.

They had a love marriage, even though for people in their sixties at that time it was a lot of arranged marriages. They love each other just as much now as they did when they were first together. They gave us everything. I don't think I've got any childhood issues where Dad wasn't there or Mum relied too emotionally upon the child. None. I take my hat off and say my parents were perfect to me, and I feel sad that I haven't been able to give Lara that.

That is very difficult to process, especially when I see my brother and he's got a girl and a boy and an amazing wife, and I see this life he's living. Naturally you look up and ask the Universe, 'Why?' But you can't live in that state, can you?

Raj 25:28

No, absolutely, because it will just destroy you.

Naroop 25:35

What I tried to do is say, 'Okay, Universe, you've given me a challenge. Guess what? I'm just going to show you that I'll smash this.' When I dealt with my separation and being a

single dad, was I really getting vexed that I got a sixty-pound parking ticket? That means nothing. What is really going to phase you if you can come through this on the other end? It just makes you so strong that none of this stuff really matters. Is that relatable to you in terms of wanting to create this life for your child and feeling that she may not have what you really wanted to give her?

Raj 26:34

Everything you've said. My parents were great role models. Going to my dad, he was faultless. He worked hard, but he gave me everything, and that doesn't mean material things, that means emotional support and support in general. Whether it was that I wanted to play football or what team I supported, or if I wanted to go out when I first started drinking, there was never anything that my dad wouldn't do for me or wouldn't guide me with. He taught me without teaching me how to be a great dad.

Naroop 27:12

Do you think your dad could do what you're doing now? Could your dad have been a single dad? My dad said to me sometimes when I'm with Lara, 'You're doing great, man. I couldn't do what you've done.' That generation was so different, wasn't it? I don't think my dad ever changed either mine or my brother's nappies. Never.

Raj 27:40

My dad was very hands-on. My mum had a corporate job, and my dad was self-employed, so my dad was actually around more than my mum growing up. But he was always fun. He left the discipline to my mum. We were more scared of her in a way than my dad. We knew when my dad walked through the door we were going to have fun. It wasn't like some Indian families of that generation where you'd be scared of your dad. We weren't.

My sister has four children, and as her three eldest were growing up, I treated them like my own. They always kept saying to me, 'You're going to be the best dad, you're going to be the best dad.' When my daughter was born, they were like, 'Oh, she's so lucky to have you as a dad.' They still say it, and they call me their second dad. I couldn't wait to be a dad, and then it was like your whole world just got shattered.

Naroop 28:30

Do you think single dads of color are misunderstood? In the sense that there's an idea that it's women who want to have kids and not men, and that women will handle most responsibility and not men. Because like you, I just always wanted to be a dad. I love

children to this day. I love being around kids, it brings you so much joy. Do you think that's the case, that we are misunderstood?

Raj 29:00

100% we are misunderstood. Especially in a separation, automatically it's like, 'Well, what did he do? He must have done something, because no woman wants to be a single mum.' But that's not always the case, as you and I know.

We are definitely misunderstood because of the older generations who had kids and weren't present. A lot of our generation grew up with Mum and Dad always at work, and Dad would come home from work and go out to the pub or just ignore the children in a lot of houses. I've seen it in my own extended family. My dad wasn't like that, therefore I was never going to be like that.

Narooop 29:50

So you think it stems from our parents' generation and this idea that the men never really did much, and so that's projected onto us.

Raj 30:00

Absolutely, which I know is obviously not true.

Narooop 30:05

That's really interesting. Tell me about your work with the Asian Single Parents Network, because that's how we met. I found it really inspiring that you've taken your experiences and channeled them into something so positive, that you want to help others, men and women, who are dealing with all aspects of being a single parent. Tell me a little bit about how you got involved, your journey working with them, and what you hope to achieve.

Raj 30:41

It goes back to the early days of my separation. With COVID lockdowns, a lot of contact centers, coffee shops, and shopping centers were still closed, and we didn't really have a mutual safe space for me to go see my daughter. At my local Gurdwara, Gravesend Gurdwara, I've always done little bits there, whether it's helping them with photos, videos, or events, always just being present.

I called the then-president and asked him, 'Look, I know it's closed and we're not meant to be there, but could you help me out? I really want to see my daughter.' He was really good to me. He literally gave me the keys and said, 'It's all yours. See your kid.'

At that point I thought, going forward, I've got to do something here at the Gurdwara to help others in my situation. I was lucky I had that contact and had that access, but not everyone can. I spoke to him afterwards and said, 'This is something I want to do for other single parents, not just dads, mums as well.'

I want to create a safe place for us to see our children, and at the same time you can learn about Sikhi, and also it's in the community.' That's the biggest thing, because dealing with the community is another challenge.

When you become a single parent, people look at you differently and treat you differently, especially when you go to the Gurdwara for an event or even just to go pray on a daily basis. People look at you and do that side tilt of their head: 'How's your daughter? How are you?' It's like, I'm fine, you can do it without the sympathetic nod.

Narooop 32:45

You think they feel sorry for you.

Raj 32:50

I think some feel sorry for you, and some look down upon you, like there's something wrong with you almost. So I thought we've got to do something to take that stigma out. At the same time during COVID, the Gurdwara started a health and wellbeing team to help people with general fitness, wellbeing, and the biggest thing was mental health. I was part of the group who started that.

We've got a great team and we do a lot of different events: suicide prevention, alcoholism, general healthcare. For me, I wanted to do something involving single Asian parents and creating a support network where someone can come, share their story, and get advice.

That was when I was introduced to Aruna from Asian Single Parents Network, and we had been planning this event for some time. The Gurdwara was great with us. They said, 'Pick a date, it's yours, and if it goes well you can do more.' You were there for our first one, and we're hoping to do some more.

For me, having been through this journey, it's a really tough journey to go through. It doesn't matter if you've got a great amicable relationship with your ex or whether you haven't, either way it's difficult. Can we do something as a community just to support

each other and make that journey a little bit easier? Even if we can help one person, it's worth doing. That was always my mindset.

Naroop 34:25

That's beautiful, man. I'm sure you meet people at these events. If you met someone now and they said to you, 'Raj, man, I've just split up with my partner, going to be a single dad, feeling really low,' all the emotions that you've been through and I've been through, what kind of advice would you give them to give them hope? What would you say to them?

Raj 34:55

Don't fall. Keep your head up, keep strong. It's the only way you're going to get through it. If you're not seeing your kid, you're not going to see your kid if you keep falling down the hole. You need to prove to yourself, to your kid or kids, and unfortunately to the legal system if you're going down that route, that you're fit enough to be a dad and fit enough to be a parent. Sometimes there are mums not seeing their kids. You've got to show up just like you would have shown up if you were together, if not more. Definitely more.

Naroop 35:35

I've experienced feelings that I've never had before of being overwhelmed. What that usually feels like is everything stacking up on each other. Now I constantly feel that someone needs something from me constantly.

Sometimes I go to people's houses and they're just sat there watching TV, and I'm like, 'How have you even got time for that? Legit, how have you got time for that?' Because I'm literally jumping from one thing to the next constantly, doing multiple things.

Yesterday I was exercising at home while my daughter was in the room, backing up footage from a shoot, doing three things at once because otherwise it won't get done. That feeling of being overwhelmed is constant. Were you like this before?

Raj 36:40

No, I never had that before, because I was able to share responsibility and now it's all on me. I feel I make my mind busier than I need to be sometimes.

Naroop 36:55

How?

Raj 37:00

I'm multitasking a lot more, doing two or three different things at the same time. I'm filling my time on the days I don't have my daughter. The days that I have my daughter are probably a little bit easier.

Naroop 37:15

See, my days are easier when I've got her. That's interesting.

Raj 37:20

It's different because I don't do anything else. My work schedule and my editing schedule everything gets dropped when she's there.

Naroop 37:30

How often do you see your daughter?

Raj 37:35

Over the course of two weeks, I have her about five or six days. My split is 50/50, which means she goes to school, I drop her off at 8:30 and pick her up at half past three. Really it's 9:00 to 3:00 that I have to myself. In between that I have to eat, do calls, do work, then pick her up. When she comes back I'll try to squeeze a few bits and pieces while she's having dinner, or put her to bed and try to do a little bit more work. It's a juggle.

On the days I don't have her, then it's my time, which means I've got to squeeze in exercise, double down on my work, and make time for everyone else in my life who needs me, which is a challenge.

Naroop 38:25

Just as you're working on and building the Asian Single Parents Network and doing amazing work in person with people, I know when I became single I was looking for some sort of Alcoholics Anonymous equivalent where I could hear people's stories or go to groups and speak to single men and single fathers who I could relate to.

What are your thoughts on a website where you can hear other single dad stories similar to this, with conversations, advice, tips, guidance, and positive stories? Would you have used that? Would you still use that now?

Raj 39:00

Yeah, I definitely would, because it might not be me that needs the advice, but it might be somebody else who is in their early stages and something that I could maybe advise

on. But then I could find someone on there, like yourself, whose daughter is a bit older and going through something different. When I get to that stage I'll be like, 'How do I deal with this makeup stage?' I could come on there and say, 'Guys, how did you handle this?'

One question that I'm dreading and is imminent from my daughter is going to be, 'Why aren't you and Mummy together? Why do you live in separate houses?' She's too young yet to have had that conversation with, but I know it's coming and I'm not sure how I'm going to handle it.

Narooop 39:55

Honesty. I think honesty is the best part. Kids are smart, they're way too smart. I've been honest with my daughter about everything, because the minute you hide one thing from them, they lose trust. If they don't trust their dad and they don't trust their mum, it's not a good thing.

So just be honest, that would be my advice. Sometimes the honesty hurts a little bit, but even if you were together in a marriage there are difficult questions to answer.

Raj 40:30

Of course there are.

Narooop 40:35

I always think it makes you a better father. When you said about people looking at you with pity when you go to the Gurdwara, I go with pride. I'm proud, man. I can handle this, don't worry about me, I've got me. That confidence is a vibration and people feel it instantly: this is a man who is in control of what's going on, don't pity him.

Raj 41:00

No one show me pity! What has been done has been done, I'll deal with that. I'm at peace with it, truly at peace. It had to happen, happened for a reason. My life has evolved and changed in ways I never thought it would, but it's fine. It's taken a while, but we've now got a good routine.

My daughter's mum and I are getting on really well. We've got a good working relationship as co-parents, my daughter's happy, and I feel happy again. I'm excited and I'm really enjoying life.

Narooop 41:45

Good, I'm really enjoying life too. Bro, thank you so much for coming down today. Being a photographer and filmmaker as well, it's nice to have you this side of the camera! Your story is inspiring. Coming from your angle of having a daughter at such a young age is different to mine, because Lara was six.

It's been a real pleasure, and I'm really proud of you doing the work with the Asian Single Parents Network. I've offered you my support in whichever way I can help with sharing my story. I'm proud of you, man. Thank you so much for coming down.