



Episode 9: Living Sustainably with Veronica Milsom

Living Sustainably

Tiffany: Hi everyone, today, I'm lucky enough to be joined by actress comedian, radio presenter, mom, and podcast host Veronica Milsom. Veronica hosts a very own podcast called Zero Waste Baby. In this week's episode, we'll be discussing how to live sustainably with a baby. I'm so excited to have this opportunity to chat with you, Veronica. Thanks so much for coming on today.

Veronica: It's an absolute pleasure. This is obviously very easy compared to trying to live and raise a baby sustainably.

Tiffany: Well, thank you so much. I'm looking forward to our chat, but before we get started, it'd be great to hear a bit about your experience living sustainably with a baby. Could you start off by telling us a bit about the reasons you decided to create that amazing podcast called Zero Waste Baby?

Veronica: I decided to do it after I had my first baby, and I was pregnant with my second. I was about six months pregnant, I think when the Amazon rainforest was burning, there were fires right across Australia. There were floods. Everything environmental seemed to be completely out of control and they didn't feel like there was anything being done about climate change. I looked over to my husband and I was like, "Why are we having another kid? This is crazy." And he was like, "Well, it's too late now." And I was like, "I agree, I'm six months pregnant." And I said, "Well, maybe I should just try to do it... Like, raise our baby in the most sustainable way possible and also just set a really good example for our future people." So that's what I endeavoured to do, and it's been tricky, but it's been super rewarding.

Tiffany: Yeah. I can imagine. I think trying to do something like that would be so tricky because obviously there's so many products, so much to purchase, so much that a baby needs. So it must have been so challenging. I'm really looking forward to chatting with you about it today. How can someone really live, I guess, in the most eco-friendly way as a parent in today's world, and what does that actually mean, and how can we achieve this on, I guess, a basic level? Because I think what you've done is incredible, going zero-waste, but just, I guess, if you could give us a bit of a tip on how to live in the most eco-friendly way that we can as a parent today?

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Veronica: Yeah. I reckon you hit the nail on the head by just saying eco-friendly. What I did going zero waste was too crazy. I don't recommend that. It's too tricky, but if you just change a few things and make a few alternatives to decisions you... easy to make, like getting disposable wipes or something. If you change that out for flannel wipes that you wash, instead of throwing out and getting single use out of things. Small little decisions like that make a big difference.

But as you were saying before, there are so many things you need to buy for a baby. I mean, there really aren't many things you need to buy new for a baby. That's the big thing that I discovered. There's a couple of things that are a bit weird to get second hand, like dummies. I mean, you could probably have a second hand dummy. It does seem to have residual spit in it, but anyway. I've gone off on a tangent, but what I'm saying is that there's so many things that you can get secondhand that I just used for such a small time frame, whether that be like a bassinet, a change table, even just using someone's second hand flannel wipes, you could do that, and it saves you a whole heap of money and you just troll Facebook Marketplace and there's so many people wanting to get rid of great stuff.

Tiffany: I mean, I've got a lot of secondhand stuff myself from my children. So I can totally agree with you on that one. I think it's so great to be looking for those alternatives and trying to reuse rather than buy everything new for sure, and it can be tricky though, to know what you can and can't buy. Secondhand and new, like you said, that can be a tricky thing to workout, but definitely something to look into, like you said, there is so much out there rather than throwing too much away, just reusing and passing things down. I love op-shops. So for me that was something that I've always loved to do myself, just shopping for myself. So clearly that's not just about limiting what goes into landfill, though, is it Veronica?

Veronica: Yeah. I mean, it's a lot about that. Like, limiting what goes into landfill, but the process of community that can be involved in swapping things and reusing things and saving money and all of that is really great too. But one of the big sticking points for a lot of people is nappies, which are like, "Well, you kind reuse nappies." To that, I would say I rented my reusable nappies, which I thought was quite a good way to do it. At first, I was like, "This is slightly weird. There's a lot of babies that have done poos in these nappies before mine." But as long as you wash them the right way, and they're dried out in the sun and all of the grossness is gone. It's completely fine, and it's a great way to go.

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Veronica: (cont...) But having said all of that and having said that you can save money, it can also be a little bit expensive to go eco, which was something that I encountered along the way in my podcast.

Tiffany: Yeah. I can imagine. So in your experience, what are some good ways to lessen your carbon footprint overall? Because obviously you've mentioned the nappies and things like that. Are there some real tips there that you can give everyone today just around how to lessen your carbon footprint?

Veronica: Well, on the nappies, I mean, you can use reusable nappies, as I said, but you need to wash them at a high temperature. It takes a lot of energy, preferably dry them in the sun and not in the dryer because dryers use a lot of energy making your carbon footprint bigger. One thing I tried was elimination communication. I don't know if you've heard of that, but it's basically where you go nappy free. You try to toilet train your baby from the first couple of weeks after their birth, and you do that through making click-and-whistle noises that act as cues for... It's like training a dog, essentially, that indicate to your baby when they should do a wee and where. It remarkably works for some people. I didn't have a heap of success with it, but I blame my baby and not me.

Tiffany: Wow. That's amazing. Just to think about doing something like that is quite incredible. It would take a lot of patience and commitment, I can imagine.

Veronica: Yeah, and the thing that I realised about it is that you kind of can't go out to a cafe. You really have to be homebound a lot in the beginning, because you need to be like near a sink where baby can wee over, or a potty or a piece of Tupperware or whatever. So the training days with your baby initially mean that being home a lot works, which really should have worked for me because I was in lockdown. But anyway, it didn't, and again, I blamed the baby.

Tiffany: Yeah, yeah, yeah, but they're great bits of advice to look into, I guess, and to consider all those different things, like you said, reusable nappies, and trying to have maybe nappy-free time as much as you can. But of course, we need to find ways in which we can find a balance, I guess, too, though, because putting too much pressure on yourself as a parent's never good, and it's so hard to find that balance at the best of times. So I guess, finding that would be a tricky thing for a lot of people.

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Veronica: Yeah, yeah. That's right. You can't put too much pressure on yourself. If you can just make a few changes to eco-alternatives, then that's great. I mean, at the end of the day, it is the hardest job in the world and you just can't expect too much of yourself. Actually, the one real irony of me making this podcast is that so many nappy brands and stuff have reached out to me and wipes brands being like, "Hey, why don't you use ours? They're good ones." I've been like, "Oh, no." I keep getting sent all of these packs of nappies and wipes and stuff. So on occasion, when I go traveling and things, I'll use wipes when everything's just too hard. Traveling is a pretty good exception, I think. I did attempt once to go through on a road trip with reusable nappies, and we ended up having to just dry them out the side of the car. We had the windows wound up, but the whole car smelled like a hot, wet Pee Sauna. It was intense. Yeah, that really tipped me over the edge, and I was like, "You know what? I think it's like 80 years disposable nappies on a road trip."

Tiffaney: Yep. So thanks for sharing all that, Veronica. I think it's really important to consider that there are so many products out there that are eco-friendly and for everyone listening today, it'd be great to sort of have your insight as to what you felt was great, because I think it can be really hard to know what products, like you said, we should be buying and what we shouldn't and what's out there. There are so many great products out there now, which is fantastic, particularly very, very different from what I guess I experienced myself as a parent because my kids are now teenagers. There's so much out there now, but are there some things that you could recommend?

Veronica: Yeah, for sure. As far as nappies go, disposable ones, I would recommend, Bambo is quite a good eco-alternative, also the eco-originals brand I found quite good. I liked Bambino Mio as a brand of reusable nappies because they had Velcro, and you didn't have to worry about any sort of snap clip things, and it was just all in one. There weren't a lot of little bits that you had to clean separately.

I went down a whole rabbit hole with creams at one point, because I knew that I had to keep using nappy creams, but the plastic containers that they were in were causing a real issue for me trying to do zero waste, and so I was making my own creams, which I got taught how to do from an expert, which you could hear about on the podcast, and they were in all glass containers. But otherwise flannel wipes, I found online and bought those and reuse them.

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Veronica: (cont...) But honestly, you can just use a flannel shirt and just rip it up. I mean, that's a bit weird, but when you're trying desperate measures, when you're trying to go to zero waste, that is certainly an option. But otherwise, there are lots of eco-products out there, but the best products are the ones that you can just rent or borrow or get hand-me-downs rather than buy, because there's just enough stuff in the world.

Tiffany: Yeah. Yeah. No, I agree, and I think it is great, particularly when you have multiple children, to be able to hand down items and if you have friends and family that can pass on products. That's such a great way to be able to make a difference, isn't it?

Veronica: Totally. Yeah. Even if you feel like you're the first of your friendship group, or your family, which is the case for me to have had a kid. There's just, yeah, Facebook Marketplace. There's so many people wanting to get rid of stuff.

Tiffany: Yeah. Yeah, and it's so great that there is that ability to find all these products now, whether it be like you said, furniture, clothes, reusable nappies, reusable wipes, toys, all those sorts of things. There are just so many different ways. So when it comes to, I guess, toys, because again, toys are a massive thing, and as I remember when I had my first, we were given so much stuff and it is lovely. It's all coming from a great place. Are there some other things that you would recommend doing with children versus just having toys, other alternatives to toys to keep them entertained? Because I think, you do get so much and you really don't need it.

Veronica: Totally. But, yeah, there is the guilt of the kid going, "Why wouldn't I get all these cool toys that all my friends at daycare get." We go to the toy library, find them there. But it's also a tricky conversation to have with grandparents, because they're like, "What? No, I'm getting your kid the cool toy that I found that lights up and stuff." And you go, "Uh-huh, I guess we needed that Emma Wiggle ballet bar. Sure. Take it to your room." But some of the great gift ideas that we found were things like adventures, like giving a voucher to go on an adventure or a babysitting night with their auntie where they get to do cooking. They make popcorn and watch a movie. So things that involved adventures were quite good because they weren't about accumulating things.

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Tiffany: I think that's great, and I did lots of things around the house with my kids when they were young too, a bucket of water goes so far and sand and just getting out there and going to a playground. Every day, I had like some sort of outing plan just to get out of the house and have them in nature and that sort of thing and grab out the pots and pans from the kitchen and have them play with those. There's so many different things, I guess isn't there, that you can just incorporate into your day and to entertain them rather than having those stereotypical toys.

Veronica: Yeah, and if your kid is at childcare, you get such inspiration from the activities that they do. I was watching a video the other day where they'd made an entire obstacle course all around the tables and chairs where you had to jump on one, go around another one. It was epic. The kids loved it. They paid eye of the tiger the whole time, and it was just because it had been raining for three weeks straight in Sydney, where I lived, and they were desperately trying to think of something to do, and I was almost brought to tears. I was like, "I love these people and where they find the inspiration to just making anything an activity and anything fun." As long as you sell it right. That's what it's about with kids. Say a thing. It's just like, "Hey, what we're going to do is go on an epic adventure, follow me." Then you pretend that you're going past the monkeys. "You've got to go under here. It's the swamp where the crocodiles are. Now, let's do it again, but faster."

Tiffany: Yeah. It's amazing how the imagination just gets carried away if you instill the right types of, I guess ideas in their minds. So for sure, it's all about selling it, definitely.

Veronica: Yeah. I mean, having said all this, I am shocking with Screen Time. My kids watch TV every night before they go to bed and they're obsessed with that, actually. I'm embarrassed by how much they're obsessed with it. So one of their favourite parts of the day is sitting in their jammies, cuddling together and watching PAW Patrol. I'm like, "How is this the best part of your day?" They just love it. Eating Nutri-Grain from a cup.

Tiffany: It can be really tricky to weed out all the things that you think we've discussed earlier.

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Tiffany: (cont...) Find that balance as a parent, you need to feel like you're doing your part because it makes you feel good and you want to do the right thing, but you've also got to have that time out for yourself and find a way to find some sort of balance in there. It is so tricky and there's so much parental guilt that comes into things all the time. So it's like, you can't really escape that. Can you?

Veronica: No way. Especially when your timeout involves actually just vacuuming the lounge room or whatever. Then I had such a flashback to a conversation that I've had a million times with my mom where I was vacuuming the lounge room next to where the kids were watching TV, and they were like, "Hey, can you be quiet?" And I was like, "Are you serious?" And then I was like, "Oh, my gosh, I've said that to my own mom a million times."

Tiffany: Yeah. Crazy. Well, I think with my kids, too, I used to get them involved with cleaning and things, of course, to a degree because there's certain things they can't do. But I do remember, but my son wanting to grab the Dustbuster. He thought it was like the most amazing toy, and so if there was a bit of something on the floor, I'd get him to go grab the Dustbuster and he'd go crazy with it. That was a really great way of keeping me entertained, but also getting some work done around the house.

Veronica: Well done. That's genius. I love that.

Tiffany: Yeah. Because he was actually quite afraid of the large vacuum cleaner, too, the regular one I used for the rest of the house. So it was a good way to get that done, and I guess not having him feel afraid as well. So that was something that I used to try to do as much as I could. Like you said, the cooking is a huge thing. Getting them involved with cooking. They're learning such great skills as well.

Veronica: Yeah. I mean, the easiest things are often just so gross, though, my kids are obsessed with making jelly, which of course just involves jelly crystals and hot water and stirring, and I'm always like, "Oh, no, please no more jelly in the fridge." And they're like, "Let's cook jelly." I'm like, "It's not really cooking, but sure." I end up just sculling it like cordial.

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Tiffany: Yes. Yes. So when you did the Zero Waste Baby, and you had to do so many different things to kind of fit in with trying to have just the least amount of waste is possible, what did you find was the easiest change to have made during that whole process that you think any anyone could apply and do in their life?

Veronica: Absolutely, the wipes. The wipes are just such huge offenders where it just adds so much to landfill and it is such an easy swap out with something that you can then put in the washing machine. So yeah. I mean, if that's possible, that would be great. Other things, like mopping up hands and stuff. It doesn't need to be a paper towel. You don't need a disposable mat under your kid when you clean, change their nappy. It's things like that where you just take a moment and go, "This is just not necessary and there is such an easy swap." I remember the first time that I went to Baby Bunting with open eyes about eco-parenting, and there's an entire aisle called disposable items. I was like, "Oh, my gosh, this is so shameless." No one even sees a problem with this, and it's just all single use items that don't need to exist where there are eco-alternatives.

Tiffany: Yeah. I think the flannels and what you mentioned there is a really great one. How did you find though, taking them out and about, like you said, when you're traveling around, what would be your top tips there with kind of using those reusable flannels when you are out and about, and having enough with you and then being able to get them home and clean them and that sort of thing. What would be your tips there?

Veronica: Honestly, I don't use them when I'm traveling. That's the only time I don't use them, and I use the eco-original wipes. I think that they're supposed to be more biodegradable, but honestly, I think it's pretty hard to make wipes biodegradable, but especially like it says biodegradable, but it takes a very, very, very long time. But yeah, I think I cheat quite a lot when I'm traveling, and then otherwise I try to do my best. Yeah.

Tiffany: Yeah, and I guess there's certain things that you've kept in place after finishing your time of going zero waste, which is incredible to have achieved. But what are the things that you've really stuck with, Veronica, that you've felt that you can do daily that's really easy?

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Veronica: Avoiding squeeze packs of food, even though they're so tantalising to kids at the supermarket. They're like, "I want that yellow one. It's got a picture of Elsa on it or whatever yogurt." And then you kind of think, "Oh gosh, it would be so easy just let them suck on it in the car on the way home." But I really try to avoid squeeze packs and lots of the single use plastic that food packaging comes in. So that is tough, because a lot of them, like the Muesli bars and things, but went through a big phase of making my own Muesli bars, which is good too, because of what goes in them. We try to make them with honey and not sugar and dates and that kind of thing to supplement sweetness, but not make them horribly bad for your kids. So yeah, home-making snacks have been a really good takeaway that I've definitely kept going.

Tiffany: Yeah. Awesome. I think that is a really good one. Like you said, there's so much single use plastic when it comes to food and things like that, particularly for kids, because it is so easy, but it is easy as well to make those things at home, and if you know what's going into it, because who knows what's in food today as well. It's nice to be able to think that you can pick the ingredients, make something that you feel comfortable with and you know it's healthy for your child as well. So that's a great idea. You did mention that one of your family members did a sleepover overnight or something. Was that one of the best things that you got gifted, do you reckon for your kids?

Veronica: Yeah. Well, when we had my daughter's first birthday, yeah, we got gifted from her auntie a sleepover party, which was a really cute idea because that didn't involve anything that we were consuming or that was going to be taking up space in our house and eventually taking up landfill. It was just a really fun activity, which she really looked forward to, and it wasn't something that she was just going to play with one day and then chuck out. It was an experience associated with a memory, and I think they were dancing in the kitchen to ridiculous songs and, yeah, it sounded really great. In fact, I wish I'd been invited, and even though I was like, "Wow, free babysitting night."

Tiffany: Yeah. Yeah. But those sorts of things, like you said, having those experiences, are so lovely. I noticed I've listened to a little bit of your Zero Waste Baby Podcast, and one of the topics that you covered and I felt was really interesting was when you had someone come in and help your two year old, was it?

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Tiffany: (cont...) That actually got rid of some of the items that they didn't need and maybe donate them to an op-shop or something, and I thought that was a really amazing concept, and idea. It must have been tricky.

Veronica: It was such a weird process. So it was a Marie Conde consultant who came to our house because I was like, "Oh, how can we get rid of all of this stuff? Maybe I'll just see if there's someone who can help my daughter work out what still sparks joy, as Marie Conde says, and what doesn't." So she methodically put things into piles, and then the consultant and my two-year-old daughter went through all of the items. She's like, "What do you think of this unicorn? And my daughter was like, "Nah, I don't really like it." It was tough because toddlers are hoarders, naturally, but we ended up getting a whole sack of stuff and taking it to the Salvos, and there were no tears. I was just really surprised by it in the end, also, because it means now whenever we go to the Salvos, she's like, "I get to have whatever because I give things and now I can get stuff again." I'm like, "What?. It's okay.

Tiffany: But at least it's better than buying everything new like you said, getting things from op shops, you're kind of reusing and recycling rather than buying something brand new.

Veronica: Sure. Yes, exactly.

Tiffany: Yeah. I used it a bit with my kids as well because we used to take things to the op-shop a lot, but we also used to shop a lot there. So they've always had that as part of their life, and I think it's a great thing to instill. So they do recognise that recycle and reuse aspect and that giving them that knowledge and providing them with that information early on and teaching them that those things are important is such a huge part of this too. Isn't it? Solving the problems of the future.

Veronica: Yeah, exactly. Totally.

Tiffany: Yeah, for sure. Well, thank you so much for sharing your experience, living sustainably with the baby. It's been so interesting and informative. You're clearly very passionate about making whatever differences you can really, and making the world a better place for our children.



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Tiffany: (cont...) So well done you on doing that Zero Waste Baby for that period that you did and continuing to do what you do today. Thank you so much for coming on today.

Veronica: Awesome. Thanks, Tiffany.

Tiffany: Well, I really hope you've enjoyed listening today. If you'd like to learn more about how to live sustainably with a baby, you can check out Veronica's podcast, [Zero Waste Baby](#), or follow her on socials [@veronicamilsom](#).