

GED_S01E04_The_Good_Enough_Dad_ben_hannant_23110 1_MID19-39_FINAL.mp3

Anonymous female voice: [00:00:02] A LiSTNR production.

Maggie Dent: [00:00:04] This podcast was recorded on the ancient lands of the Gadigal peoples of the Eora Nation in Australia. I wish to acknowledge the rich and continuing culture and especially pay respect to the elders past, present and emerging, and to acknowledge and pay respect to any First Nations people from anywhere in the world who may come to hear this podcast. We hope that we may all come to walk with gentle feet, strong minds and compassionate hearts in this global village.

Maggie Dent: [00:00:36] No dad wants to be a lousy dad. Aiming to be a good dad is great. But you know what? Being a good enough dad is so much more important. I'm Maggie Dent, parenting educator and author and champion of Boys and Men. And this is The Good Enough Dad, where I chat with committed, caring, sometimes confused and often funny dads about all the ways they've discovered to be good enough at this parenting gig. My Good Enough Dad today is Ben Hannant.

Anonymous male voice: [00:01:09] It's going to pick. Hannant has scored and Hannant had scored for Queensland.

Maggie Dent: [00:01:17] That was Ben playing in the 2012 State of Origin against New South Wales. In his career Ben has played in the NRL with the Sydney Roosters, the Brisbane Broncos, the Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs and the Queensland Cowboys. He's won two NRL premierships and played for Australia. After retiring from NRL in 2016 he started co-hosting breakfast Radio on 90.9 SeaFM, But it's not his stellar sporting career or his media cred that lights up Ben's world. It's his family. Ben is husband to Emma and together they have eight children, four girls and four boys. Kai is 17. Ella is 16. Mia [00:02:00] is 13. Brax is 12. Ava is ten. Channing is eight. Koa is five, and Pippa is three. Oh, Ben. Welcome to The Good Enough Dad. Okay, Ben. So what was your childhood like?

Ben Hannant: [00:02:19] I was very lucky. I was brought up with a mother and a father. And I think that is so rare in today's society. I am very blessed to say I've got a mum and dad who loved each other and loved all of us kids. I'm one of 11, so I've got ten brothers and sisters. We grew up in a farm, a ten acre little block in Mudgeeraba on the Gold Coast, and unfortunately when I was about eight years of age, my parents lost everything in the recession we had to have back when Paul Keating was Prime Minister.

Ben Hannant: [00:02:45] And yeah, so we ended up moving into our neighbour's backyard in tents, which was quite embarrassing. As a young kid in primary school, we had nothing. We had no cars, we were eating wheat porridge. We'd have to crack around wheat to make wheat porridge for breakfast, milk the cow to get milk to go on that breakfast. So there was a time in my life it was probably the hardest time of my life, but it made me realise the most important thing in life. A lot of families break down in these situations when things get tough, but in this situation, it brought my family closer together and all of us kids banded together. We'd do jobs around the place trying to make money here and there, and we all put it towards helping our parents get back on their feet again.

Ben Hannant: [00:03:26] And. Yeah, that's, that's a big part of my childhood. We moved out into a two bedroom unit in Narang, a duplex sort of little place. It's a pretty rough neighbourhood. And on one side of me, we had someone who just got out of prison. And on the other side, someone was just about to go into prison. But in the boys room, there were six of us sleeping in that one tiny room. We had three bunks high on both sides of the room, no air con, and I'm number nine of 11. I've got a younger brother as well. So my little brother Ephram and I slept three bunks high. We just had to squeeze between the mattress and the roof. And [00:04:00] you think in summer time how hot it was up the top? We literally slept in just our jocks. Yeah. And just sweated our rings out. But I look back now, and it's tough and embarrassing and we got teased and all the different things. And you look back and laugh because when times are good, it's easy to be a good person. But when times are tough, that shows your true character. And I think my parents didn't mean that to happen to us, but that's something that brought us as brothers and sisters closer together and made us appreciate the important things in life.

Maggie Dent: [00:04:26] Can you dig out one of the happiest memories in your life either before that happened or in amongst it all or afterwards?

Ben Hannant: [00:04:34] The most happiest time being a kid growing up was going out with my family camping. Obviously, we couldn't afford to go to Fiji or any of those fancy places, but the most happiest time ever is going out and learning real life skills with my dad and my older brothers. I think as a young boy you really look up to your dad and my dad still is my hero. And so my older brothers I look up to still today and learning how to shoot a gun, how to clean a rabbit, how to cook up a rabbit, how to, you know, how to hunt down a pig, all those different things and camping under the stars and finding fresh water and all different sorts of things like those survival skills to make me, I don't know, as a young kid made me feel like, you know, I was only a young boy but made me feel like a man and be able to do that and then come back with something you've killed and cleaned and you're cooking it up and Mum and the sisters were pretty happy about it. So I know we don't have to do that in today's society, but that was probably the moments in life where just those moments where you feel like you're growing into the man you want to be, that that's probably the happiest time of my childhood.

Maggie Dent: [00:05:36] Eight kids. That's quite a lot. Ben, did you always want a big family like what you came from, or did that just evolve?

Ben Hannant: [00:05:44] No, I didn't. I actually thought I'd ... You go through a stage in your life, I think, where you hate your parents at a certain, not hate your parents but you think you know better than them. They don't know what's best for you and what they tell you, they're completely wrong. They don't understand you in that moment. Growing up, I [00:06:00] thought, There's no way in hell I want that size family. I don't want to be like my parents at all. I'm just going to have 1 or 2 and give them all my focus and that's it. But then I met an amazing girl at the age of 16, and I was going down the footie path, the party and playing up, having a good time. And this good church girl starts coming to my church and I knew that there's no way in the world she'd ever date a loser like me. And if I wanted to get someone like that, I'd have to change. And so I started to change my ways. And the more I hung out with her, the more I wanted to be better for her. She wouldn't date me for 12 months. She wouldn't date till she was at least 16. And then when we started dating, we basically just hold hands and kiss for at least over 12 months.

Ben Hannant: [00:06:41] That was it. But the best thing about it, which I look back now in that period, was we became best friends without all the touchy feely, taking the relationship to that next level. So I guess our relationship at that young age had more to do with than just the physical side of things. So I think that's why we're still so close and best friends. And then we we settle down. We got married and we had one kid and that's all I thought we'd have was one. And then it came to a point like, This is awesome. Why not two? And after that, why not three? This is awesome. And life just gets better and better. It's harder than ever before and more stressful, but kept getting better. And to be honest with you, if my wife and I could, we'd have another eight, to be honest because the most important thing in our life is our family. And you can't take money with you. All you can take is memories. And on our deathbeds, I'm pretty sure we're not going to be lonely, which is going to be pretty awesome.

Maggie Dent: [00:07:33] Ben I had four boys and I actually had five for a year. When my nephew came to live with us, I never saw the laundry floor. So how did you and Emma manage on the washing?

Ben Hannant: [00:07:44] It's called buying an industrial washing machine and dryer. So the big thing with what I'm doing at the moment is I don't care about electricity. I'm not trying to save the planet. We'll do that in other ways. But at the moment my wife does not have to hang the clothes up. Yeah, she does the washing. And then to be honest with you, now my [00:08:00] kids do the washing, my older kids do their own washing and they help out as well. So one thing when you become part of a big family is you learn to pull your weight. So I'm actually quite impressed, especially with my older daughters at the moment. They're going to be at the ages of 13 and 16 already. I know right now they could run a house and do a fantastic job.

Maggie Dent: [00:08:18] So and I hope your son's going to be able to do the same, though.

Ben Hannant: [00:08:22] Yeah, he definitely could. But that's not, it depends what role he plays in his family. So realistically, you know, the way I look at it is my job as a parent is to teach my kids, male or female, I don't give a toss what they are, is to one day be self-reliant, to be able to last without us.

Ben Hannant: [00:08:38] If we are doing everything for our kids and expecting them to be rosie and the best parents one day themselves and when we do everything for them, that's never going to happen. So the big thing I do with my kids is making sure we have a lot of fun, but with a lot of fun comes a lot of responsibility and jobs. And they do those jobs and that's when the good stuff really comes.

Maggie Dent: [00:08:58] It's one of my biggest messages for parents all the way along is to as soon as your children are capable, build that capacity in them, especially life skills, because you know they're supposed to leave home one day and they can only take with them what they've learned. And if they haven't learnt it, they haven't got it. So they're not going to be as capable and resilient..

Maggie Dent: [00:09:22] You retired from the NRL in 2016 and your best years were also while there was babies and toddlers and things happening. So it's a pretty intense career. Was it difficult balancing that bruising, competitive world with all those nappies and growing family at home?

Ben Hannant: [00:09:43] To be honest, no, I wasn't. It's probably the highlight of my whole footy career was having my family along for the journey. So from day dot, from when I first started playing in the NRL in 2005, that's when my son was born, my oldest son.

Maggie Dent: [00:09:54] Wow.

Ben Hannant: [00:09:55] So my whole career I've had kids all the way up until 2016. I had six kids at that stage in [00:10:00] 2015 when we won the Grand Final.

Ben Hannant: [00:10:01] My best memory of my whole footy career is not scoring tries in Origin or Australia or winning competitions. It is after the grand final in 2015 and walking around the field with my kids in hand and my wife there and the things that my kids said to me and the way they were looking at me, that is the happiest moment of my life because I know they've been on that journey with me for the. Now, my oldest son had been on that journey for 15 years with me and all the way down to my youngest child and seeing how much it meant to them and the things they sacrificed and what we

were able to achieve. It took me nine years to win another premiership again, so it took a hell of a lot of effort, not just from myself, my wife, but all my kids. And that moment, honestly, my whole footy career, I'd give everything else up if I could just remember that one memory after the game, which was pretty awesome.

Maggie Dent: [00:10:46] How important has Emma been to keeping both sides of your life in in that balance that you've just explained?

Ben Hannant: [00:10:54] She's my rock. Yeah, definitely. By a country mile. Everyone says behind every good man there's a better woman. And that's 100% in my case. And yeah, my wife's actually very shy and you know, she's very different to me. You know, it's yin and yang. I'm very outgoing and I back myself. I have confidence. If I want to do something, I believe I can do it where she's more shy and reserved and we achieved everything together. And to see I'm pretty impressed and very blessed to have the career that I have. But I look at the other side where people don't see as my wife, where she was at the start of this journey and where she is now. And I'm ten times more impressed of the woman she's become during our journey together than what I've achieved. So unfortunately, people don't get to see that. But as a husband and a father, I feel very blessed to have someone like Emma in my life. And. Yeah, and the crazy thing is, we're still young, and this is only the start of our journey. And one chapter of footy is closed, another one's opened and we're going to keep going down rides and keep improving and we're going to make mistakes, but we're going to have some fun doing it.

Maggie Dent: [00:11:57] And what I'm hearing, it's a team. You are both a team.
[00:12:00] Yeah. You don't stand alone out there doing that. You're actually you're working together to get the best at home and in the workspace.

Ben Hannant: [00:12:08] That's a great way of putting it. It is a team and it's not that we are the same at all. I have different strengths to her and she brings different strengths. There's no way I could raise the kids the way that she did. And I believe every every kid deserves to have a mother in their life to raise them. But unfortunately, in today's society, you can't because both parents have to work. My wife was very fortunate and blessed that she could stay home and raise our kids the way that she wanted to raise them. And that's super important and I don't take that lightly. We are very blessed to be

in a situation where I've been able to play football and now do radio where my wife has been able to be a full time mom, which to me is the most important job because the next generation, I want my kids, as a father, and I think the only position in anywhere in life is a father that wants their next generation to be better than them. Like we want our sons and our daughters to be 2.0 version of us. And that's what I'm excited about. I know my my sons and my daughters will only be better than myself and my wife only because of the hard work my wife's done.

Maggie Dent: [00:13:07] Yeah but Ben, you put the bar pretty high. You two. No pressure on your kids?

Ben Hannant: [00:13:13] No but it's. But that should be in life. It's all about what makes you happy in life. Let's. Let's be honest. What truly makes us happy in life is reaching our potential. Everyone can sit around and look at others. Oh, they're better. They're not. Every story you hear of anyone who's famous in sport, like the background you look at Cristiano Ronaldo or Messi, the way that they were brought up, Messi was too small. He had to have hormones to pick him up. His grandma used to pick him up and take him to trainings and he wouldn't have never made it without certain people, especially mother figures in his life. Same with Cristiano Ronaldo. You think of every sport along the way. Everyone in life is going to go through hardships, but the thing that makes them so good is they're willing to keep what they do next when something goes wrong and they want to reach their potential. And when they do, they keep raising that bar.

Maggie Dent: [00:13:58] I think the other bit [00:14:00] is they can't do it as a solo individual. So the more support they have from loving family, no question the two go together. I'm pretty sure as a committed NRL player over a number of years you would have had to hold your emotions in check. And then as a dad with a big family where kids are full of big feelings, emotions and meltdowns from toddlers to teens, how did you navigate the emotional hotspots as a as a dad who was a professional athlete?

Ben Hannant: [00:14:30] Well, I failed just like every other dad. And what most people, a lot of people who are probably listening to this don't know me too well. I've actually got three kids on the spectrum. On the spectrum, I've got two with ADHD as well. I've got two medicated. I've got two other kids that are dyslexic. So our life isn't perfect. Our kids aren't great students. We suck at school, to be honest, but they're hard working and we

have our issues along the way. And as parents, you navigate and you learn different ways with kids on the ASD spectrum. My oldest son who is on the spectrum, I just thought he was a naughty kid. I didn't understand. I was like, but in our eyes I thought he was perfect. There could be nothing wrong with my son. It took probably six, probably 5 or 6 years before we actually got professional help because things got so bad where we're at a stage where it was a good day when he wanted to take his own life. It was a bad day when he wouldn't say anything and he would try and do it.

Ben Hannant: [00:15:20] So as a parent, that's the most scariest thing in life, is those moments where you want to be able to be there and protect your kids at all times.

Ben Hannant: [00:15:27] But there's going to be situations where you can't, and then you have to learn different tools and different mechanisms and you never give up. And the big thing I probably learnt about being a parent and during those periods of my life is when you think there's no light at the end of the tunnel, there always is light. You can't see where you're going, but you know you've got room to take a step. Just take another step. You know it's okay to fall down, get back up, take another step. And before you know it, I look back now and I see my older son and where he is at now. He's going to be twice and more than twice, ten times a man I'm going to be because the things he [00:16:00] learned and the hardships and and difficult ways he had to learn along the way is now making him a better young man. And he's going to make him a better husband and father than I am, I think.

Maggie Dent: [00:16:10] Ben, what would you say to other dads out there who are struggling with their kids autism diagnosis or identity?

Ben Hannant: [00:16:18] I think the biggest thing is don't be afraid to get help. As for me, I was a professional football player at the peak of my career. I was playing down at the Bulldogs, got Dally M Prop of the Year, we got minor equal minor premiers that year, I was playing for Queensland, I was playing for Australia and professionally my life couldn't have been any better. But at home, my personal life with my son was. I'd get a phone call every day from my wife at least twice a day, bawling her eyes out, crying, saying, I'm a terrible mum. I can't do this. You know, my son's bashing her up. He's trying to run away. He's trying to hold knives, all these different things where he was having meltdowns. I didn't know what it was and I just thought I had to come in and sort

him out and come in. And it was very different to the way he treated me than how he treated my wife as well. So the the back end of 2010, when I was down at the Bulldogs, he would come to every single training session with me so he wouldn't stay at home with Mum. He would come with me. He'd be in every video session. He might be running water for us, doing everything with us boys constantly. And it came to a point where we took him to the shops at Miranda Fair down in Sydney and he had a meltdown down there.

Ben Hannant: [00:17:23] And I just thought, No, he's chucking a patty. I need to stand up and put the fear of God into him. And that's what I did. I put the fear of God into him and I gave him a smack. And I asked him, I gave him the look like, Mate, I am going to I'm going to give you what for ... And he looked at me as if I was nobody, looked through me and just kept on going. I just knew at that moment, this isn't normal. This isn't right. I know there's plenty of dads that are listening have been through a similar situation where the look that the kids give, you know, something's not right. And that was the moment for me where things changed for me and I realised I needed to get professional help. I quit at the Bulldogs. I got released [00:18:00] to get back home, to be around family, to help my wife and we got the professional help. There was no NDIS back then either, so we had to pay for everything ourselves, I would have paid ten times the amount of money if I had to, to be able to get the help that he needed. And essentially once you you understand what is going on, there is nothing wrong with your kid. They're amazing kids. If anything, it's like someone that might have a heart condition that has to have a blood thinner to their still.

Ben Hannant: [00:18:26] Their heart's still everything. Everything's still. It's just their brains wired differently. They need different tools to cope with different situations. And when you realise that there is nothing wrong with your kids, if anything, they're gifted, they're amazing, they're hard working, they stick to rules, they're very disciplined. There are so many benefits of what these kids bring to a family, but with the right help and it took us probably 2 or 3 years. It didn't happen overnight, but with the right help. And if anything, it's also helped us be better parents as well, taught us the tools to be able to cope and to teach kids this way. And it's not about giving them everything they want, everything they need. These kids need tough love, too, at times. Sometimes you have to be realistically know that behaviour is not acceptable in society. One day you are going to have to contribute to society and do these things. So it's finding that balance,

but giving the kids the tools to be able to one day be self-reliant and live in society. So that was a big, big wake up and a learning curve. I was only a young dad too, at that stage. I was probably 24, 25 years of age. It sucked for me, but I'm very grateful for it because it's made me a much better dad.

Maggie Dent: [00:19:45] When have you mucked up?

Ben Hannant: [00:19:47] I've mucked up plenty of times. Always muck up. Now you're probably going to cancel me or call docs on me. But I've taken the kids out to lunch one afternoon and gone to Maccas, got all the food handed out. And when we go to Maccas we have to buy two family [00:20:00] meal deals. It's not just a, mate she's a proper she's wining and dining there. We have to buy a lot of burgers, a lot of chips and drinks, and we're sitting down and eating and I'm like, there's leftover. There's a leftover cheeseburger, chips and drink. Who hasn't eaten? Who hasn't eaten their lunch? Turns out little Channing, he was six years of age at the time, was sleeping in the car still, we left because he didn't come out with everyone else. So little Channing sound asleep in the car, we go out to the car, he's still asleep. We wake him up, he comes inside, eats his burger and thinks nothing of it. So many a times things like that happen. Obviously with a big family. Sometimes you might leave one at football training too long or.

Maggie Dent: [00:20:33] I've left one at the pool. Ben So I'm right there.

Ben Hannant: [00:20:37] Yep, it happens. And you're going to have fail moments and don't beat yourself up about it. It's okay. If anything, yeah, there's a lesson in that for the kids and yourself as well. It teaches your kids resilience and not everything is in their time as well. So it's one of those things, every situation in life, as long as you're trying your best to be the best parent you can be, it's okay to fail as long as you're trying your best because.

Maggie Dent: [00:20:59] You're good enough.

Ben Hannant: [00:20:59] That's enough.

Maggie Dent: [00:21:00] What is one of your biggest fears or worry about your kids?

Ben Hannant: [00:21:05] That I haven't done enough for them. That's the wrong way of putting it that I'm not I haven't been there for him when they needed me is probably a big thing. That's the biggest one. Obviously, with my job now, I'm going in the mornings. When I was playing footy, I'd be every second week I'd be flying to Sydney, Melbourne, New Zealand. So it's away a lot. And the biggest thing is probably when my kids need me or in a time of need when dad's there or should be protecting. And if I ever missed that moment, that's, that's my only fear in life. I'm not afraid of anything happened to me. But the biggest thing is, is in that moment when my kids and kids are going to need their dad. And to be honest with you, I think every kid, I don't care if they're from a single mum, every child needs a father figure in the home. The stats show how important a dad is in a kid's life. And if that kid needs a dad at that time and I'm not there for them, for my kids, that's something that I'm very conscious [00:22:00] of. And when I'm doing things for myself, I always ask myself the question, Hang on, who's sacrificing for me to be able to have this fun? So that's probably, I don't know, that might be a bit corny, but that's what freaks me out the most.

Maggie Dent: [00:22:13] So that particular fear that I'm not going to be there when they need me particularly, you know, to protect them is actually linked into the biological drivers that are within men to be our defenders and protectors.

Maggie Dent: [00:22:26] And so one of the challenges that I'm helping to decode for a lot of our men is that you won't always be able to be there and especially around your daughters, because it's one of the things I found when I was counselling. Sometimes I'd have a girl sob who'd had a really awful experience where she had been abused or, you know, hurt in some way. And as she sobs at me, she said, My dad always said he'd be there and he wasn't there. Well, he couldn't have been there. It was actually a school camp. So our challenge now is to is you've already touched on is to build the capacity within our kids to be able to be strong enough in most of the situations. So it's not always, you know, you can call dad. Absolutely. But if he's not there, have I given you the skill and understanding to know how to look after yourself when when something unsafe happens?

Ben Hannant: [00:23:22] And that's hard as is it to hear that you're 100% right there? You're because you can't be there, but a part of you, hopefully the part of you that is

there with them. I understand what you're saying. Is that part that you've taught them to how to handle that situation.

Maggie Dent: [00:23:34] And not only that, when they muck up, particularly on the adolescent journey and let's be honest, you've got five of them on that journey at one time, they will muck up because they are not as good at making choices, and they're..

Ben Hannant: [00:23:45] They will? They are mucking up.

Maggie Dent: [00:23:47] Guess what? When they actually crash your car, you want them to be able to want to call dad, not run from dad.

Ben Hannant: [00:23:56] Yeah, well, my son's already done that first day, he actually got his driver's license. [00:24:00] He's a very good driver. First day, he was so confident, he drove fine. He drove my ute out, and he went working as a chippy on his two day apprenticeship at school. And as he was reversing out at his boss's place, the front of the car scratched all the back tray of his boss's ute and dinged in my car. And it was a fun conversation

Maggie Dent: [00:24:24] He called you?

Ben Hannant: [00:24:24] I'm very glad he had the balls to call me and say, Dad, I'm so sorry. I'll pay for it. Still hasn't paid for it. But he did call me and say I will make it right. And Dad, what do I do now? And in that situation, he'd never been in that situation. I was glad that he did call me and asked me what do I do next? Which was tell the boss and let him know that he'll fix up the damage on his car as well.

Maggie Dent: [00:24:46] I was nearly going to ask you about your biggest parenting win, but that's it right there is he called you and those steps you went through are exactly what they need to hear. Like you've mucked up and your job is going to be to make it right. But we're going to help you in that. You don't, you're not on your own in this and everyone mucks up. So we're just going to make sure we make it right.

Maggie Dent: [00:25:12] What did you learn from your own dad that you have taken into your dating journey that's been helpful for you?

Ben Hannant: [00:25:21] That's a good question. There's so many things. I look at my dad and and there's so many life lessons I've learned, good and bad as well. Not all great. Some have been bad as well. But the biggest one I've probably learned to my dad is, to be honest, be true, every day when you wake up, look yourself in the mirror and say. Or, you know, say to yourself yesterday, did I do everything I could have done? Have I been the best husband, father? Did I do my best at work? Have I reached my potential every day? And every single day I do that. And that's probably something I learnt from my dad, is always look myself in the mirror and have have a look and say, Am I the man I want to be? And [00:26:00] nine times out of ten, you'd be surprised. The answer is no. But that doesn't get me upset because I know that just encourages me that I want to be better. And the reason it's no is because I set a high standard. It's okay. I'll never get perfection ever in my life, but it's those little wins along the way.

Ben Hannant: [00:26:17] I'm heading in the right direction. I know that my heart's in the right place. I'm trying to do the right things and it gives me encouragement that today's a new day. I can be that little bit better because a lot of people focus on their careers. And number one thing in life, for me, I don't really care. I'll always know that my parents taught me to work. I'll always be able to make money. I don't want to be rich. It doesn't bother me. But the big thing is, is the people that I do have an impression over and the people I'm trying to raise to be better than myself, which is my kids. They're the ones that I'm constantly trying to hold myself accountable for to; am I really doing enough today, or am I going a little bit easier? Or am I too focussed on playing golf and going surfing or whatever it may be, enjoying the spoils of life? Or do I need to focus on some things that are more important that will make a difference in my family?

Maggie Dent: [00:27:06] The fact that you pause and reflect is incredibly powerful because that's actually what's helping keeping you on track. And that's a good habit. You did mention there were some things that weren't so good. So what have you chosen to change from what you learned from your dad?

Ben Hannant: [00:27:23] Well, the biggest thing I don't know if I should share this, but I will share it because hopefully it helps people. I might get my dad a little bit upset, but when my dad lost everything, he never fully recovered. And what I mean by that is he's an old school man and he wouldn't even realise if he had depression or he wouldn't,

doesn't believe in that sort of thing. But he never, ever truly recovered. So when times are tough and we lost everything, how would I say it nicely? He never, ever went back and just just did what it took to be able to help get the family on the feet. He had a big successful cleaning business on the Gold Coast, cleaning all the high rises and all different things. So he always had [00:28:00] to have a job equal to that or something, something big. But one thing I've learnt in my life is do whatever it takes, no matter what. In 2006, when I won the premiership for the Brisbane Broncos, actually I was at the Roosters before that and Wayne Bennett signed me up or he agreed to sign me up for two years in 2006 and 2007 for \$150,000 a year. So I told the Roosters, I'm not re-signing with them, I'm going up to the Brisbane Broncos. At that point I got dropped back to reserve grade at the Roosters and the end of season came and I rung Wayne Bennett up and I said, Mate, when's pre-season training start? I haven't heard anything.

Ben Hannant: [00:28:37] You know, when do I start with the Brisbane Broncos? And he goes, Oh, sorry, Ben, I forgot about you. I forgot to put your contract in. And we didn't actually sign it. We agreed over the phone. So unfortunately there's no money left. So I've only got one spot in the top 25 squad for 50 grand a year. I already bought my first house, my first car. I just had a baby. So I was going back to the Brisbane Broncos on 50 grand a year playing professional football, training 12 months of the year and 50 grand wouldn't. At the time, interest rates were high. That wouldn't even have paid my mortgage, so I could have decided to quit football. I could have said this is too hard and sold up the house. But in that moment I realised the only person that's going to get me out of this situation is myself. I can't rely on my wife. I can't. I don't want to. It's my job as a father to provide for my family. I don't care what anyone says. My role as a parent is to be there, protect and provide for my kids. That's the old school man in me. Not everyone has to agree with it. That's fine, but that's what I believe. So I rang up someone who was involved with the club that knew someone at the markets and I got a job starting at 1 a.m. in the morning till 8:00 in the morning at the Rockland Markets in Brisbane. So I'd wake up before midnight on the Gold Coast, leave home on the stroke of midnight drive to Brisbane, and I would throw boxes of fruit and veg and tomato and everything around for eight hours as a 21 year old kid and then go on to NRL first grade training alongside like Shane Webb, Petero Civoniceva, Brad [00:30:00] Thorn, Tony Carroll, Darren Lockyer, Dane Cole, Corey Parker, Sam Thaiday, all these players who have been greats of the game. I was a young kid and that year I played every single game of first grade. I played every semi-finals and I won a grand final and even grand

final week, I got up at midnight, I got in my car when I was tired and I had a kid that was on the ASD spectrum. I didn't even know about it, that wouldn't sleep, didn't want to be held. So by the time we finished training at 5 p.m. in the afternoon, we train in the mornings and then train in the afternoon. So I'd be stuck in Brisbane all day. I'd have to fight the peak hour traffic back to the Gold Coast for two hours. Now you might sound like I'm whingeing. I'm not. It's the proudest moment of my life. It's the moment that I realised that there is nothing stopping me achieving my goals.

Ben Hannant: [00:30:40] If I'm willing to work, that doesn't matter. I'd come home. I'd spend two hours with my wife and little boy, Kai, and I'd go to sleep, get 2 to 3 hours of sleep on average, that was it, 2 or 3 hours of sleep and I still won an NRL comp that year. I still managed. I could have made every excuse. I could have blamed others. I could have blamed Wayne for giving me the crap contract, could have blamed the situation I was in. But at that moment I realised that the only thing that was going to stop me achieving my dreams and my goals is me. And as a father, it was my role. It's made me realise life has been easy since that year. So if anything, it taught me that. You can achieve anything anyway. So that was a moment. That's something I learnt from my old man that I made as an NRL football player who wants to be throwing boxes of fruit and veg around. I should be sitting back sipping drinks at the beach and getting paid big money, being an NRL football player. But that's not what I had to do at that time. I had to work and that's something I've probably learnt from my old man, is that no matter what, I don't care if it's flipping burgers at McDonald's, whatever it may be, I'll do whatever it takes to put food and a roof over my kid's head.

Maggie Dent: [00:31:44] Do you reckon all those boxes were a bit like an extra gym work out for you?

Ben Hannant: [00:31:49] It definitely did help, but it's probably, I probably did too much, to be honest with you. But the good thing about doing that job, I was actually surprised, is when I was so tired, like I [00:32:00] was like a zombie. I was so tired. And a lot of people a lot of my teammates didn't know what I was doing. I didn't want them to know what I was doing because I was embarrassed as well that that's what I had to do to put food on the table. But the big thing is when that sun came up at about 4 or 5 a.m. in the morning, it's funny, it gives you a boost of energy. Every morning I got to watch the sun rise, and that was a moment when I'd just take a five minutes look at it as it was coming

up and going; get after it today. And you know, my day is already, I've already started my day. I've already worked harder than anyone else in my team. It gave me that edge while all my teammates are sleeping, I've already done half a day's of work and I'm ready to rip in. So that was a good moment in my life.

Maggie Dent: [00:32:42] What is the one thing, you're going to cut it right down to one Ben, what's the one thing you want your kids to learn from you?

Ben Hannant: [00:32:52] I think, to be true to themselves. And what I mean by that is know who they are. The big thing I want my kids to know is who they are. Don't be influenced by others. Don't be following a crowd, whatever it may be. Find out who they are. I believe everyone has greatness in them. I'm a religious man, so I believe we're all made in God's image. Whatever you may believe in, that's your prerogative. But I believe everyone has greatness in them. And if you're true to who you are and you don't follow the crowd, you don't make excuses. You don't be a victim. You don't blame others. Every moment in your life is an opportunity to learn from. And when you know who you are and what you are, you will not negotiate. You won't wander off the path that you want to go off. You will stick and you will achieve every single goal and every dream you want. And the great thing is, when you're doing those things, you will find someone very similar to you who you'll end up getting married to one day. Because if you're doing those sorts of things, you'll attract someone very similar as well that's looking for the same thing. So that's how I met my wife. She was the one that made me get on that straight and narrow. But I'm hopefully my kids have that same opportunity once they know who they are and they'll be influenced by [00:34:00] the world or their friends or whatever trend or fad it is. That's that's the one. That's my answer. That's the one thing.

Maggie Dent: [00:34:08] I love it. The mantra, be yourself because everyone else has taken is one of my favorites. Okay..

Ben Hannant: [00:34:13] That's a good one. I like that one. Is that your quote?

Maggie Dent: [00:34:14] No, but it's out there, but I love it. I used to say it to kids and that's particularly important for our neurodivergent kids, isn't it? Because they keep getting seen through a lens of neurotypical people. You just be you. But we've got to work out how that can happen. So your final question, Ben? Ready? If you could win

back time, what advice would you give to your pre-dad self about being a dad? How old were you again?

Ben Hannant: [00:34:42] It was just before I was 21. I was.

Maggie Dent: [00:34:44] All right. You're 20 year old self.

Ben Hannant: [00:34:47] Oh Geez that's a long time ago. That's 18 years ago. Don't beat yourself up. Don't beat yourself up. Not going to be easy. That's probably the big thing. It's not going to be easy, but is by far the most rewarding thing. Don't ever quit. Don't ever give up on your wife or your kids. They'll give plenty of excuses in your life to quit on your kids. They're going to disappoint you at times. Same with your wife. There's plenty of opportunities where you can blame others or make an excuse to quit and give up. But anything worthwhile in life is never easy, but it's damn well rewarding. And the most rewarding thing that's in my whole entire life. I look back of all the successful things where people think I've achieved so much in the world. Nothing comes close to being a husband and a father. So that's probably my one thing is would be my advice would be. Don't beat yourself up. Never give up.

Maggie Dent: [00:35:39] Ben. Thank you. Thank you for your time.

Ben Hannant: [00:35:41] Thanks, Maggie.

Maggie Dent: [00:35:44] Ben Hannant, co-host of The Breakfast Show on the Gold Coast. 90.9 SEA FM. Gee, Ben had so many things to say that I think are worth holding on to, so let's grab a few now for The Good Enough Dad checklist. So [00:36:00] number one, Neurodivergent children. I think that was a big message for us all, that if you've got a child with things that are looking bigger than you can handle, reach out for help as soon as you can. Really big message. Secondly, as Ben was explaining, you can't always be there to protect your kids from harm. However, we can teach them some life skills to navigate those moments and also remind them they can always call Dad no matter what. You can still call Dad and he'll come. And thirdly, I think that great tip where they realised that there was one burger left. I think it's a good tip for anyone with multiple numbers of children. Please do head counts. When you leave the car and when you get back to the car so that you make sure you got them all. Even I mucked up

on that one. I'm Maggie Dent and this is The Good Enough Dad. Follow us on the LiSTNR app or wherever you get your podcasts.