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Sean Szepts: [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 their 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: [00:00:35] No dad wants to be a lousy dad. Aiming to be a good dad is great. But do you know what? Being a good enough dad is so much more important. I'm Maggie Dent, parenting educator, 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 Sean Szepts. Sean makes his living creating content. He writes articles, he makes podcasts. He's written a book called "Not Like Other Dads". He's a husband and a father of twins, Cooper and Stella, who are turning six this year. Hello, Sean.

Sean Szepts: [00:01:28] Hi there.

Maggie Dent: [00:01:29] Sean, tell us what happened in the home this morning.

Sean Szepts: [00:01:33] Oh, what happened this morning? This morning was an emotional morning, an emotional start to the day. My husband and I tag team every other day. So we each get 3 or 4 days to sleep in a week. And this morning was my sleep in day. And so I got up at 7:00 instead of 5:30 or 6 like my husband did. And when I woke up it was to tears. I could hear them across the house. I didn't know what the tears were for, but that [00:02:00] was, you know, how my day started. Tears in the bathroom about a hair knot that was ripping the scalp. Tears downstairs about what shoes they could wear. But the big tear, which is less funny, is my son struggles with

Mondays not so dissimilar, I think, to a lot of kids, especially in that transitional period from preschool to kindie. We're in summer care right now, but he said to me, I don't like Mondays dada. And I said, why don't you like Mondays? That's such a bummer. And he said, because I get you to myself for two days, and then on Monday you run away to work. Tears at the gate. And I'm the dad who doesn't stop crying. It doesn't get easier for me. I still long to hold out my hands for as long as possible. At the gate. I still give the fifth or sixth or seventh hug, even though they might advise you should, you know, break it and walk away. And so he was crying at the gate this morning. So it was an emotional, packed Monday for me.

Maggie Dent: [00:03:00] Even as a kid, you knew you wanted to be a parent. Tell me what that dream looked like.

Sean Szeps: [00:03:07] In the earliest of days, long before I understood my own gender, before I understood gender stereotypes, how parents were made up, long before I understood my sexual orientation. We're talking three years old, like foundational years. I knew and my mother knew, and my father knew that I was drawn to female characters on television. It's something we still talk about because we can't put our finger on where it came from. But if you work hard to try to come up with an answer, I had a wonderful mother, a fabulous set of grandmother role models, and I knew even at such an early age that the mums in movies and in television and in songs were doing the heavy lifting. It seemed quite obvious to me, men back in those days, and maybe even a little bit today in films [00:04:00] and in movies, had the beer in their hand. They were sitting on the couch. They were yelling things. They weren't closely connected to the kids. Usually they weren't the ones saying, I love you. They weren't the ones who were around at school. And I just remember seeing the mums on television and thinking, if I had a choice, if you gave me an option, I would rather be a mum than a father.

Sean Szeps: [00:04:20] Now, maybe that has something to do with just the way I'm built and designed. I've always, but I've always been really passionate about children. I've always been surrounded by a lot of younger cousins. I worked in that world, and so for the first 11 years of my life, it was a journey of wanting desperately to be a mother, realising as I got older that that wasn't a possibility because I was a man, which meant I could only be a father. And then coming to terms with the fact that that was okay, I

would just, uh, be a father. Who put a little bit more effort in, maybe, and it would work out that way. Then I realised I was gay, and that happened around 11. And then I buried that journey of wanting to be a parent at all, because obviously back then the world was very different than it is today. There wasn't an answer, there wasn't an option for me to grab onto. And so it's a unique journey started with motherhood, progressed naturally to fatherhood, realised I was gay and decided I wouldn't be a parent at all.

Maggie Dent: [00:05:18] But things changed. So tell me, with your husband, when did that possibility re-emerge? When did that dream appear again?

Sean Szeps: [00:05:30] When I was in university, which would have been 2006, 2007, 2008, the United States started slowly but surely to first legalise civil unions and then work to legalise gay marriage. And that was happening while I was developing a stand up comedy routine, a constant joke of like, I'm not going to be a parent. That's for the straight breeders. Hahahahaha. I thought it was so funny. Anytime someone brings up parenting to me, I'm going to mask the fact [00:06:00] that I really want to be one by making it a joke. And then right in front of your eyes, the world starts to change. And then I move to New York City and it gets legalised there. And then you're walking down the street. And not only are you seeing gay people holding hands, but every few blocks you might see ones with kids. And so I had to start to kind of in real time, go, it's a possibility now. Is this true? Do you not want to be one? Or is it a personality that you've developed to mask your truth? I fell in love with Josh around the exact same time. So 2011/12 and I guess right in front of my eyes, I'm falling in love with someone as so many other people do, and it's as if it is not of your control. You are watching the movie of your life. I'm looking at this man like every woman listening, or maybe every man listening and going, I want something bigger with him. I want to watch him become a father. I want to be on that journey with him together. And it was literally like a blink of an eye moment. My husband and I have not always agreed for that reason. He wanted kids. When he met me, I thought it wasn't a possibility. And then over time, he came to terms with not being a dad because he loved me so much. And then the world changes and here I am going, actually, I changed my mind. I really do want to be a dad. I've wanted it all along. Please, please.

Maggie Dent: [00:07:19] Okay, so give us a nutshell journey of the challenges of turning that dream into a reality.

Sean Szeps: [00:07:27] Unlike everyone else, sexual intercourse would not produce a child for Josh and I, though we did try. So when we decided to have children, which was around 2015/16, the only options as far as I was concerned were fostering and adoption. And so we just signed up for all of the adoption sessions. We had a really good friend who was fostering at the time, but that couple had lost in inverted commas, like quotes, two children in a row, and it was really hard [00:08:00] for them to give those children back to these families. And so I just thought, I don't know that I can handle that heartbreak. Let's do adoption. So we just started going to all the classes, found out from a girlfriend because she was pregnant, posted online. I congratulated her, only for her to come back and say I'm carrying for another family. And that just blew my mind. I had never heard of surrogacy, did not know that it was an option, didn't know that it was legal. Literally felt very new to me. And so I just dug deeper, went online, and I remember the first article that came up was an Aussie family and it was a brother, I believe, in the New York Times writing about his sister donating eggs. And the story was complicated, which is why it was being written about in The Times. Didn't end up well for them. It was like a legal battle, but it didn't matter. The fact that it was an option, that if you had a member of your family who would be willing to donate their eggs, that you could use the sperm of your partner and create children that were yours.

Maggie Dent: [00:08:55] Wow.

Sean Szeps: [00:08:55] I know that that's not important to everyone. And when you're sitting in an adoption session or a fostering session, or even a surrogate session, you meet those people who don't care at all. It's just about being parents. But in that moment, whether it was selfish or egotistical or what motive, I do not know. I thought my whole life I've been different. My whole life, I can't do anything in a way that feels normal. And my whole life I wanted to be a parent, to see a child that was my own, that was also my partners. And I just thought for decades and decades, that is not something that could ever happen for you. Sit on the sidelines and watch everyone else play the game. That's what your life is going to be like. And in that moment, reading that one article, I thought maybe it's possible. So we switched gears entirely and chase down surrogacy. I guess the big hurdle as far as there's two big hurdles. One; society expectations, homophobia, pressure from others. Why would you want to do this? This is so expensive. This is so wild. You could adopt. That's better for the world. There are

kids that need families. Why even have children at all? [00:10:00] You're gay. This isn't natural. So there's that. And then the second obvious hurdle is financial. Anyone who can't conceive naturally knows this. At the very smallest of scales, you're going to spend \$14,000. That's at like the very bottom of one IVF cycle. And we needed to figure out a way to find around 250,000 AUD. Massive, massive privilege. And so those are the two big hurdles there society. And can you find the money?

Maggie Dent: [00:10:29] Yeah, and I'm sure anyone else has been on that IVF journey knows exactly the heartache and the costs. It's not an easy journey.

Maggie Dent: [00:10:44] Did the first few weeks of parenthood live up to the expectations or the dream?

Sean Szeps: [00:10:54] Um, I'll actually say yes, which might be a shock because if you know any part of my journey, you know it did not end up going well. Uh, so if you ask that same question, month six, very different answer. But the first week, anyone who can't conceive naturally will admit to you if you ask them, and you're alone and it's private, that the desire and the want and the drive to be a parent and the the process is so much longer than nine months. And when you're given that opportunity and it is a gift if you choose it to be. The fantasies and the dream and the wanting and the longing is a normal baby process on steroids. To have made it there. To be a gay person alive, and the same lifetime where it wasn't even legal to get married. And I didn't see a single example of me. And to have a child in my hand to have two children in my hands.

Maggie Dent: [00:11:54] Babies.

Sean Szeps: [00:11:55] There was nothing that could bring me down. Like there's literally not a single thing. No homophobia [00:12:00] thrown my way, no sleepless night, no trauma of an emergency C-section that could take away the great gift of parenthood that I thought for so long would never be an option for me. And so that first week was a constant bliss. A pinch, pinch, pinch pinch. I'm here. I have children via surrogacy, eggs from my family, sperm from my husband's. I'm one of the first hundred ever to have this experience you're not going to take, I will not let this not be a beautiful week. So that first week really was wonderful.

Maggie Dent: [00:12:36] Profound gratitude.

Sean Szeps: [00:12:38] Absolutely.

Sean Szeps: [00:12:39] Yeah.

Sean Szeps: [00:12:39] And I do try to hold on to it in the difficult times.

Maggie Dent: [00:12:45] Becoming a new dad, you know, as you move forward from the that beautiful bubble of joy and gratitude to the reality. It wasn't easy, was it?

Sean Szeps: [00:12:54] No. Like the script that existed at the time, and I would argue it's probably really similar today. Man, woman. Black white. Woman does X, man does y. Obviously, the only real examples I had all around me were straight and quite traditional. So all the women in my life were stay at homes to begin with, including my own mother, and all the men in my life went off and worked. And that was beautiful and fine and it and it worked for all of them. And it worked for me. I think I turned out pretty great, and I love my parents. And so stepping in to parenthood really felt like uncharted territory, because the script really didn't work for the two of us. So, so trying to figure out who did what was really challenging. Both of us didn't give birth, both of us couldn't breastfeed, and both of us were available to do everything. So who does what? And so we just basically started to copy straight couples. I'll be the woman, you be the man. I'll take [00:14:00] on all of the kids stuff. I'll stay at home, you'll work and get the money. And that really didn't work for us. What was most troubling about attempting to follow that script in the beginning was I wasn't fooling anyone. I obviously wasn't a woman. And so when you go out to doctor's appointments, when you're going to the playground, when you're going to the kids meetups, when you're trying to find a parenting group to join, people look at you immediately and go; one of the things is not like the other. What are you doing here?

Sean Szeps: [00:14:29] And so, yes, sleep deprivation and trying to figure out the kids was difficult. And working with my husband to kind of understand who does what and support each other through that phase was hard like everyone else. But I guess the real challenge for me in the beginning phases of fatherhood was being the primary parent, a role traditionally filled by women. As a man who's a father wanting desperately to

mother with other mothers and not being welcomed into that kind of group. That was the hardest part. It felt like I was in high school and I couldn't have a seat at the table, but I needed a seat at that table. I had to talk to other people who were struggling the same way I was, and I knew that I wasn't breastfeeding, and I knew I couldn't relate to cracked nipples or the aftercare of birth. But other than that, I felt like.

Maggie Dent: [00:15:19] You were doing everything.

Sean Szeps: [00:15:20] I'm doing everything else. I care just as much. I also have a partner who I want to complain about. I also am getting up late at night and doing everything and because of my gender, I don't have the emotional support at the time to work through it with people. That was the hardest part of parenting.

Maggie Dent: [00:15:39] I think also we, you know, get stuck in those things that mother's mother and father's father. And unless you've seen something a little bit different, you know, and given your original dream, you know, you're the softy.

Sean Szeps: [00:15:52] Yes

Sean Szeps: [00:15:53] There's no question. And, um, you know, and Mother Nature tends to attract us together [00:16:00] a little bit, like, you know, one's got a little bit more of the sacred feminine, the other the sacred masculine. Because there's a reason why. I found it interesting is that I had a dad who mothered. As a little girl um, I was, yeah, fraught with lots of nightmares. And I was a chronic bedwetter, and I sleepwalked. And whenever I was sick, it was never my mum who came to me. It was my dad.

Sean Szeps: [00:16:24] Oh, wow.

Maggie Dent: [00:16:25] So isn't it interesting that, you know, as I've moved forward in life and I've worked around men, um, you know, I have met, there are those men this came intuitively to them. And not only that, my uncle that lived on a, you know, property not far away, he was the softy, you know, I can still remember him knitting and stuff. So I was blessed, even right back in the 50s and 60s, with men who mothered. And so it's one of those big things I, you know, that as we move forward that there, it's not

necessarily what is being conditioned into them to be normal. However it's incredibly possible.

Sean Szeps: [00:17:06] Yeah. Oh absolutely. I had a father. My title of my book is Not Like Other Dads. And it's not about me. It's about him. I had a father who was not like other dads, who filled the role of mother and so many parts of parenthood that that traditionally would have been a woman. And so when I grew up, I just thought maybe that was normal. And so as a child, you don't have that script to grab onto. I think my mother was shamed a lot for being more fathering, you know. Oh, she's really tough. Oh, she's a little too strict. Uh, you know, that constant judgment when in reality they were still fulfilling the same traditional roles, just swapped in many ways. And and we still benefited in all the ways that people would say you benefit from traditional roles. And so, yeah, clearly it's possible. And it's been possible, those [00:18:00] men have always existed. It's the pressure, I think, amongst other men or the pressure from women amongst other women, that drives us to feel that maybe it's wrong.

Maggie Dent: [00:18:11] So one of the ways that dads can mother more is really about spending that amazingly connected time with the kids and I love it that it's the rituals that you might do with them. You know, it's those, those kind of dancing in the kitchen when some crazy song comes on is something I remember. A dad came up to me after a seminar and said, I know you said it's really important for us to sing like nursery rhymes and to talk to the, well, I didn't know any of those, Maggie and I'm a, I'm a tradie and I like ACDC. So my little girl you know when she's with me in the work truck that's what we did. We sang to ACDC right. Like all the time. And I'm, I'm looking at him and his throats bobbing up and down. And he said, I just wanted to come up and tell you that my girl and I have just come back from Sydney. We've been to an ACDC concert. She's 19. We still rock it together. And I just when he dies, ACDC will bring her dad right back to her. So it's, those are the moments that don't sound like mothering, but it's about us connecting in a way that is absolutely pure with love and connection.

Sean Szeps: [00:19:26] Yeah.

Maggie Dent: [00:19:27] Isn't that a beautiful thing?

Sean Szeps: [00:19:28] I love it.

Maggie Dent: [00:19:29] My four sons are all dads now, and, um, they don't father like their father. Um, there are times that they father like I mothered. And when that happens, it it really grabs me in the heart. Because I didn't give them a lesson. So we are influenced. And I see as men move forward with these great big hearts and step up and, you know, try and work out systems for breast milk in the freezer. You know, I see so much hope.

Sean Szeps: [00:19:54] Yeah, absolutely. I believe that when we're finding our partners and you alluded [00:20:00] to this, it's, it's without our control. It is literally like, you know, we're just like magnets connected to specific individuals. That relationship structure, that partnership that forges, is unique and special, and we don't judge it so much. And then when we become parents, sometimes we throw all of what makes our relationship special and what makes our relationship work out the door to fit a parenting script that sometimes is different than the relationship/ dating script. So Josh and I met, we had strengths and weaknesses that perfectly met together the yin and yang, the perfect circle. And then when we became parents, we randomly walked away from that as if to say, well, someone needs to mother and that means she must do A, B, and C. And I think the reason that there's hope is more people are leaning into what works for us.

Maggie Dent: [00:20:57] Yes

Sean Szeps: [00:20:57] The world is already hard enough. The mortgages are too high. We're both working. It's a struggle as it is. Social media is complicated script. Let's just figure out a way to make it work for us. And if that's the case.

Maggie Dent: [00:21:09] And our family.

Sean Szeps: [00:21:09] Yeah.

Maggie Dent: [00:21:09] And our children. The ones we got. Not the ones that are necessarily written about in the book.

Sean Szeps: [00:21:15] Yes.

Maggie Dent: [00:21:17] I think it's kind of surprising that up to 1 in 10 dads in Australia will experience post-natal depression. So, Sean, what made you realise that it might be something you were experiencing?

Sean Szeps: [00:21:30] I had heard of postnatal depression and I knew that it was a thing some mums got. I had read enough articles and had devoured enough parenting books that I knew that it was a possibility for women. And so when I started to experience depression like symptoms, I thought, this isn't that because I didn't carry a child or give birth. This is my own shit that I need to deal with. It wasn't until I executed [00:22:00] an escape plan to abandon my family that I realised this is something you should go and get help for. I had, like so many parents before me, a challenging transition to parenthood. On top of becoming a parent to twins and being the primary parent, I moved to a new country at two months with no friends, no family, left my career behind, and my husband started working as soon as he landed, leaving the house at three in the morning and going away to host radio. And so there was a lot building up.

Maggie Dent: [00:22:33] And two babies.

Sean Szeps: [00:22:35] Two babies.

Maggie Dent: [00:22:36] Come on, not just one.

Sean Szeps: [00:22:37] Two babies. You're doing the twin thing on your own. And I remember thinking, it's so terrible to admit, but men aren't supposed to struggle. That is what I thought. I was like, you're already failing at this job. You thought you'd do really well. But on top of it, you're experiencing depression for for sure, you're having very scary thoughts. But you're a man.

Maggie Dent: [00:23:01] So be stoic.

Sean Szeps: [00:23:02] Suck it up. She'll be right. Get over it. Toughen up. All the things we know we would never say to a young boy. And yet here I am, saying it to myself every day. I knew that the thoughts in my head were dangerous. Run away. Leave the family behind. Josh will figure it out. The kids don't care. They're too young to

know. Your family won't really. They'll get over. It was like the main thoughts. And then there were other dangerous thoughts. Oh, I'll just lock them in the room. I can't deal with this anymore. I'll just go down the street and they'll be fine. Oh they're crying really loud, I'll just let them fall back asleep in their shit, you know? Really negative, scary thoughts. And I kept on thinking this will go away. This is just a phase. You don't need help. But when I got in the car in the middle of the night at three in the morning, drove to the airport, researched the tickets so that I knew exactly what flight to get on. Got out at the airport, Sydney International Airport. That is [00:24:00] when I was like, you can't do this alone. It's not getting better and it's definitely not going to get better if you tell absolutely no one. Lying to your husband every single day when he comes home and you tell him it's great, it's helping no one. So I went home and I talked to him.

Sean Szeps: [00:24:13] He set up a meeting for me at the local GP. I went in, I told the GP the truth. This is exactly how I'm feeling. And he said, I'm going to print out some forms right now. It's a postnatal depression test, mostly given to women. And when he flipped it over and showed me, it said at the top of the page, mother twice.

Maggie Dent: [00:24:33] Yeah

Sean Szeps: [00:24:34] Right at the top of the page. And I just remember thinking, proof, right there in writing that this isn't supposed to be happening to you, that you really are failing yourself as a man. And even though I'm gay, I still have always felt a deep connection to my masculinity and my man-ness and and the beautiful lineage of being my father's son. That meant something to me. And when I saw that little form and the doctors handing it. And here's this professional guy going, well, it doesn't normally happen to men, but let's fill it out. A wonderful man. And there at the top of the page says the thing you are not. God. It's hard to not feel like you are really seriously a failure. This is supposed to happen to women, not to men. And I filled out the form and I got an incredibly scary number, and he was like, we need to put a plan in place immediately.

Maggie Dent: [00:25:23] Yeah. It's big. It needs to be parent, doesn't it?

Sean Szeps: [00:25:29] Yeah. Most definitely. I'm telling you, no clinical psychologist would disagree when I say that mental health doesn't go easy on you because of your

gender, our parenting might, for some, depending on their culture and the way in which that culture supports who does what. That might go easy on men I would, I would say. But mental health doesn't [00:26:00] pick and choose based off its gender who it's going to attack. And so if that's the case, then those forms are massively failing. A large chunk of people. Who, when they see something like that, or they do the research online and it says woman and mother, as soon as you Google it, you go, well, I'm definitely not going to raise my hand now.

Maggie Dent: [00:26:19] And that whole journey out of dark places like that, men have told me one of the hardest things is to own the shame it brings up in them. So it's like a barrier before I can get the help is I've got to be able to stop doing that to myself and recognise this is an experience because I'm human, not because I'm a man or a woman. It's because I'm human.

Sean Szeps: [00:26:40] Yeah.

Maggie Dent: [00:26:41] Um, thanks for sharing that.

Sean Szeps: [00:26:43] Of course.

Maggie Dent: [00:26:48] You've had your fair share of judgment as a dad, and you write about it in your book. And I've heard this from solo dads as well. But what about the time with Stella? And she's talking to that mum in the park, and, um, let's have a listen, shall we?

Sean Szeps: [00:27:03] Okay.

Sean Szeps: [00:27:04] I kept my focus on Cooper, but watched out of the corner of my eye as I listened in. I love your hair. The woman offered kindly. Thank you, said Stella. Did your mum do your hair? Stella pointed in my direction. No, Dada. I smiled and waved at the woman who looked my way but refused to smile back. Mum taught him well. I have a Dada and a daddy. Well, everyone has a mummy. I rushed to Stella's side. Excuse me. She's three years old. She doesn't have a mum. Being a mum is more than just giving birth. It's a title that's earned.

Maggie Dent: [00:27:43] So, Sean, what did that mum in the park get so wrong about your family?

Sean Szeps: [00:27:48] Oh, well, there is not a mother in our family. Uh, I have always believed that it is a title that is earned. I have many wonderful friends who were adopted [00:28:00] and were supported beautifully by mothers and fathers who helped to raise them. And never have I questioned that relationship. Now, maybe if we want to talk about biological connection, we can. But I believe parenting is something that you earn. You don't get to just have sex and walk away and think that you earn the right of being called a father. You need to stand up and stand in and do the work and support a child as they are raised. What she got wrong, other than the fact that every single family is going to have a mother, is this idea, a very outdated concept that men aren't capable of supporting their daughters through stereotypically feminine things? I know men who learned how to paint nails, who figured out how to do plats, who care a lot about insuring their their daughters have the right clothes and the right heels and the perfect Barbie doll. And all of those things are stereotypical. But I know men who have stood up to do that, just like I know women who have mastered how to play cricket or footy, basketball, right? Who who do what it takes to support their young boys through stereotypical, you know, masculine activities. The idea that a child, a young child who has enough agency and confidence to answer a question from an adult with truth, and that that would be questioned at every single touchpoint, is wild to me. What if my daughter's mother had died right at birth? The fact that you are unwilling to see a possibility of a child being supported by a man, because it could only be possible that a mother could excel at braiding hair, is to fail that child who is speaking their truth to you. I'm fine with people being homophobic. Truly I am. [00:30:00] I don't, I'm not demanding that you accept me in my family. But what I am demanding is that we respect young children.

Maggie Dent: [00:30:09] And their truth.

Sean Szeps: [00:30:10] And their truth. So if you're going to ask a question, they're going to give you an answer to push back. That's why I got angry. I never speak up like that. But I will for my child in situations like that, when I feel they're being failed or derailed by someone else.

Maggie Dent: [00:30:23] Sean, that assumption that you can't raise children without a mother figure. Other than getting angry because she didn't really know your family. What else? What else is that saying, really, about how some people see the world?

Sean Szeps: [00:30:40] I mean. If we look at our own nuclear family and we believe that the way it works is so perfect, we thrust that onto others without taking into consideration that the children or the partners or the parents above us could potentially be different. It's so dangerous because it eliminates all other possibilities. Women who don't feel natural as mothers, who don't rock up with the skill to braid their child's hair. Men who are coming with the right intention, like we have this idea because of the way in which we were parented or failed by a father, or failed by a partner, that all other fathers must be failing their partners in the same way. The idea that she saw me coming towards her, knew that I was the father who had braided the hair and went a step further and said, mum has taught you right, shows me that we bring our discomfort, our frustration with our own situation and thrust it upon others. There are women who could not for the life of them, braid hair.

Maggie Dent: [00:31:45] Maggie Dent I can't, right here.

Sean Szeps: [00:31:47] And there are men who rise up and go, I'm going to master this. Watch me.

Maggie Dent: [00:31:53] Yep.

Sean Szeps: [00:31:53] Not for the mother, for their child. I meet so many people of every gender [00:32:00] and sexual orientation who are disrupting the norm, that I'm now at the point where I'm like, clearly there is not one. It is just failing us in boxes. There are so many parents. Let's just look at single parents for a second, who wear all the hats, but they don't look in the mirror and go, today I'm going to be a mum and now I'm going to be a dad. They just get the job done for the child. And so to thrust out into the world our frustration with our own problem or anyone who doesn't follow it the same way, is, is to fail you as a as a person and your potential to connect. But it's also failing your child who grows up and continues that exact same thread of them believing there's only one way to be a parent.

Maggie Dent: [00:32:46] I've met solo mums who only have boys who've told the same thing that, so how are you going to raise them up to be decent men? You're just a woman. Like, it's unbelievably crazy that that perception still holds. So let's pull it down, because I don't think it's, I think as our world shifts into that embracing diversity part, but we every now and then like, you know, we somebody like Hugh Jackman was raised by his dad. Got a problem with him?

Sean Szeps: [00:33:17] No.

Maggie Dent: [00:33:18] No. Right. He's a he's a beautiful loving dad as well. So we keep making assumptions based on stereotypical attitudes from the past. That all moms are loving and tender and all dads aren't. That's that's not it either. So we've got to really be able to drop that. And I'm really proud that, um, my oldest son did some YouTube videoing and he can braid hair far better than his mum.

Sean Szeps: [00:33:40] There you go. That's the way to do it.

Maggie Dent: [00:33:48] Sean we all have fears and worries for our kids. What do you reckon are your biggest?

Sean Szeps: [00:33:55] The one that I sit with the most frequently, is [00:34:00] that my daughter will be failed by a lack of physical, face to face, constant answers to questions about her biology that I don't have direct experience with. It's funny, I've done a lot of work to ensure that I understand her struggles. Ever since becoming a father and being failed in those initial months by, you know, by not knowing about her body. I have done the work to make sure that I could teach a damn biology class if I had to, so that I could support her, but there's a lot of fear wrapped up in being the one with the answers. When I don't need to be being the one to speak on behalf of a woman to a woman. I mean, men have been doing that for a long enough. Do we need another man trying? And so I think there's a lot of fear wrapped around, does she feel safe to come to us? If not, does she know who to go to? Are there women in our network that she feels a bond with that she can go to? That's probably the most present fear that I have.

Sean Szeps: [00:35:09] And even when you've done the work, even when she has the close relationship to my sister in law and she's gone to her one time for help when she

had an issue specific to her biology. Is she going to continue to have that relationship? I know what it's like to be a little bit different. I know what it's like to be a black sheep in a family, a beautiful rainbow sheep in my case, even when the parents are doing everything right, we don't have access to the script in their head, and so we don't know what that's like. And so there are moments every now and then where she'll be upset and maybe a little over tired, and she'll say, I wish that there was another girl in the family. And so, yeah, I think that will always live there. Does she feel that she has the right support? Does she know who to go to? And as she ages, is that going to be a problem for her? I think I'll always struggle with that because [00:36:00] I care.

Maggie Dent: [00:36:01] So the research is really strong on that. A warm, connected relationship with a father is probably the most significant thing in a young girl's life. That they menstruate later, they have sex later, they tend to have a more authentic sense of self. They're more comfortable in mixed environments. That's really strong research.

Sean Szeps: [00:36:25] Oh wow, that's great to hear.

Maggie Dent: [00:36:27] So an auntie figure?

Sean Szeps: [00:36:29] Yes.

Sean Szeps: [00:36:29] And warm connected. She's got two warm, connected dads. So does that mean she gets double that? but it is it's really really strong. So it just sits with you to know that's why I am who I am today.

Sean Szeps: [00:36:41] Yeah.

Maggie Dent: [00:36:41] My mum was, you know, non-maternal and harsh and cruel and unwell. But my dad wasn't. And that's why I am who I am.

Sean Szeps: [00:36:51] Well, now we're on the subject. Now that I have you here. Um, because the other thing I believe to be true is that men in groups of men are more likely to be homophobic and nasty than women within groups of women. Stella's girlfriend seemed to understand more our family dynamic, and they never giggle about it. But

Cooper's friends do a little bit, and I'm imagining that it could potentially be harder for him to have two dads as he gets older than my daughter.

Maggie Dent: [00:37:19] Probably.

Sean Szeps: [00:37:19] Yeah? Okay.

Maggie Dent: [00:37:20] They're not as, um, a few different things. They don't think things out as clearly and carefully. Girls are often, thoughtful and working things out and also boys are wired to make fun of shit. That's why they, so they're going to make people laugh about stuff, right? They just don't think.

Sean Szeps: [00:37:41] And so empowering him with communications so he knows what to say.

Maggie Dent: [00:37:45] The key aspect's that humour is a really important part. Fortunately you're quite gifted with that. But he needs to know that there's a difference between humour that makes fun of others. When we laugh at others rather than we laugh with others. And that, you know, sexist humour is just not appropriate. [00:38:00] Racist is not appropriate. Um, the Irish don't care, so you can still go for them, you know what I mean? so it's a whole journey of letting them know that laughter and lightness and humour is a really important bonding process with boys and men. Um, however, we're moving from what we used to accept. And there'll be a line in the sand some days that we will come down and say, that's not okay. And making fun of gay relationships or making fun of people who are different, is one of those lines that you're going to teach him not to cross.

Maggie Dent: [00:38:38] We've already worked it out that you're a little bit more like Chili than Bandit on Bluey.

Sean Szeps: [00:38:43] Yes.

Maggie Dent: [00:38:44] And of course, your funny reels on Insta are incredibly relatable to mamas. So does that play out all the time around home, or is it just you? Uh, it's your kind of thing.

Sean Szeps: [00:38:58] I think it is my thing. Like, I was...

Maggie Dent: [00:39:02] So accurate, like you so get it!

Sean Szeps: [00:39:04] Yeah. I mean, the messages I get most frequently are; you really understand us mums! It's funny, sometimes I get upset by it because I'm like, well, I'm a dad making a video about my experience as a man, and everyone just sees it as me playing a character about women for women, and I just let them have that experience. As long, because as a creator, my job is to support parents through the challenging parts of parenthood. If I can make you feel seen and heard, then I don't actually care if you think it's an act. A lot of people follow me and don't even know I'm a parent for the first day because they think I'm just doing a comedy sketch. But for me it's just my truth. I've said all the things I say in the videos. Sure, I turn it up a notch. Like just just a notch. I don't actually yell at my children like that, but i bring myself fully. And when people see motherhood, I know that what they're [00:40:00] seeing is primary parent and that tends to be women. And so it's okay as long as I can constantly be myself and only use the word parents. You will never see me say mother or father online. I just say parent every single time. Then slowly but surely, when they come to realise that that's who I am, they learn something powerful, which is, as a woman, you can connect with a man about the parenting experience because it can be the same. Gender is not that important. It's more about the role we play. That's my great work on my time on earth is to do that.

Maggie Dent: [00:40:33] Now, Sean, you have some very funny posts on Insta about parenting fails, which we've just said everyone can relate to. I want you to be a bit brave now and tell us about a fail that yeah, didn't go well, and that one you're not able to laugh about when you messed up.

Sean Szeps: [00:40:50] There are so many. There are two, but one in particular that I have written about and spoken about very rarely, but just wrote about it. And so I'm excited to start to talk about it, because it's such a massive, scary fail that could have gone very wrong. But the reasons why it felt like a failure are unique. We travel a lot. My children have been on more than 70 flights and they are five and a half. It's fundamental to my husband and my relationship is seeing the world. And I'm American. So, you

know, you've got to get back to see your family. And we were really struggling early on in the parenting journey with how to get the kids on those long haul flights back, and I was struggling with, you know, literal depression and couldn't figure out how on my own to support them through the time changes. And I was at wit's end. And I said to Josh, I don't even want to go back to America. Let's just wait till they're older. My husband was like, there has to be a way. We have to figure out how to do this. And so, you know, we googled around and talked to our GP. And finally we've heard from some older parents, friends of ours who are grandparents. That said, [00:42:00] when my kids were young, we just gave them a little bit of Benadryl or like Synephrine or whatever. And I was like, oh, tell me more. And so on a long haul flight, we drugged Stella and Cooper with just the smallest amount of Benadryl.

Sean Szeps: [00:42:18] Cooper fell right asleep, which was wonderful, and passed out with Josh and, you know, whatever. Slept for ten hours. And Stella did the opposite. She went crazy. She was like a small child who couldn't get off a roller coaster ride. She was too young to really be able to articulate what was happening to her, but she couldn't stop moving and fidgeting. She was afraid, she didn't want anything. There was nothing to help. She was moving about the plane. And then she started to scream and cry and her eyes were bulging and it was the look of a person who desperately needs help, and there's nothing you can do as a parent. On paper, the story is a little bit funny. You're on a plane, and here's this child who needs help, and they're screaming and wailing and in the bathroom, and they're banging themselves and throwing things around. And no toy will help. And you're the parent. But in that moment, I was like, you have failed this child. This child is like an adult on an acid trip. It's not possible to stop, it is there, no amount of water or carbs is going to fix it. And you just are looking at this little kid. It's a beautiful moment because in the long run, you go no one else but you. That's the lesson, right? If no one else is going to help this child but you, then you need to have done all of the work to consider what could potentially go wrong.

Sean Szeps: [00:43:41] It doesn't matter how many mothers told you that they did this in the past, I failed her, she's freaking out. There's nothing I can do. And any parent who has been in a situation where nothing you can do can help knows that that failure lives with you for a very long time. I still have nightmares [00:44:00] about it. When I'm on a plane, I can't help but think of her face, the banging on the bathroom door from the flight attendant after Stella threw herself against the wall and was screaming literal bloody

murder. Yeah, that was a fail that I will probably never forget. And I will always, always go back to sometimes and the first stages of parenthood were making thousands of micro decisions a day. It's why we never should judge a mother on her phone at the playground, the amount of decisions she has made and actions she has taken in that one day, let alone the hour. You're making so many decisions and one of those decisions can be the wrong one. Obviously you can look at this story and go, yeah, well, you're an idiot who would give their child Benadryl. That's silly. But in the moment it just felt so right. I had a problem, one of many problems. I needed a solution. But God, looking back on it, I just wish I could punch myself right in the face. You idiot! How dare you fail your kids like that? So that's the big fail.

Maggie Dent: [00:45:02] And you do know that nearly every parent has at least 1 or 2 of those?

Sean Szeps: [00:45:06] Oh yes. The more that's, I guess the great value of sharing it publicly is it's not something you want to write about in a book. Who wants to write on paper for their children to read one day, a fail that could have gone even worse, right? Like a worst case scenario fail. Especially when I make a living as a as a parent. That's my job is creating content about parenthood. And so to have that judgment live on record, articles written about it is a little scary. But very few people come for me. Instead, they come and go, oh, thank God you've shared that story. I did this type of thing. I did the same thing in this situation. One of my big regrets, thank God you told me that we were considering doing it and we will not. You know, all of those moments make it worthwhile.

Maggie Dent: [00:45:50] It is something I learnt early on when I started running seminars for parents is you know, I put a photo up of my beautiful, handsome sons, you know, at a wedding. [00:46:00] And, um, you know, then I just say, yeah, and I've slammed their finger in a car door and said, what did you do that for? And I've forgotten lunch boxes and library bags and, um the worst thing on earth is I forgot Book Week, which is an international sport and I'm a high school English teacher, so it was a complete double fail. Um, those things, you know, and when we just, that's what we focus on, that is why, you know, as parents, our job is to the endless mistakes. Um, you never did that again. That is our learning. And we just hope that they survive those few mistakes. Um, I have one that's even worse that I didn't own for years. And you could

identify since you've been this sort of a mummy figure is, um, ten days after the birth of my first right, I might have been someone who said, how hard is it to have one child? I've been high school teaching. I have to know, you know, 1500 kids names. And, you know, I'm coaching basketball and I'm on this, I'm just a busy woman. I'll just be home with one baby. God, it's going to be easy. I'm going to read books. Yeah. And ten days in, I had to go shopping. Right. And I have a new nappy bag, and I hadn't had one before, so I was a bit excited about new nappy bag and packed everything into the car and got down to the nearby supermarket to get my baby out. And I'd left him at home.

Sean Szeps: [00:47:25] Oh wow.

Maggie Dent: [00:47:26] I was only a ten minute drive away, but how the hell can an intelligent woman, yeah, you know, leave the baby at home, right? I couldn't own that for so many years because I was so embarrassed, of course. And I never left him home again. He went in before the bags, but, um, that's exactly why, when you are becoming, it is the relatable. And people look at me going, oh my God, she's done some, jeez I've never done that. I've never been that bad a parent. Sure. Okay. I'm prepared to listen now.

Sean Szeps: [00:47:54] Exactly.

Maggie Dent: [00:47:54] Because she ain't telling it. You know, like it's not telling me how to suck eggs here.

Sean Szeps: [00:47:58] Exactly.

Maggie Dent: [00:47:59] And we're moving [00:48:00] forward.

Sean Szeps: [00:48:00] Yes. And there are so many people who can relate. And I actually know multiple women who have left their children in the wrong spot at the wrong time. And multiple men, including my husband. We've all been there in some way, shape or form. What you do with that is what makes you a good parent. Do you care enough to be stressed about what you did? That plane story completely forced my husband and I to sit down and not just talk about how we travel, but how we parent together and when we don't enjoy it, and how we can better support each other when

there's problems. All because of that and one, one instance. So when you look back at that time, sure, you go, I'm a better parent because of that for sure. And here's the processes that got put in place because of that terrible situation. Oh, you're so right.

Maggie Dent: [00:48:47] I want you to tell me something you're incredibly proud of that you haven't already shared. You know, your biggest parenting win.

Sean Szeps: [00:48:55] I've had a couple recently, like in the last three weeks, that I've just gotten home and just gotten emotional about. The biggest fear I have had and probably will continue to have, is have I set them up for failure in a very heterosexual world? In their lack of mother. Their complicated creation process. Am I creating a hole that only a decade worth of therapy can fix? That's what I live with. That's what I lose sleep over. That's what I write and create stories about. And in the last couple of weeks, I've had two instances where someone has asked my children about the family makeup, more specifically, a phone call with a family member. Where they said to my daughter, you look so much like your father. And she said, well, that's because, and she didn't use these words, but she said, that's because she said, I come from insert egg donors name. And [00:50:00] I thought a five and a half year old is able to acknowledge exactly how she came to be. With age appropriate words, but the actual like the real answer. In a world where we might be worried about giving her all the details, where there's a lot of children who grow up and find out their adopted way too later in life, or maybe their parents try to smooth it over till they're old enough to understand that Josh and I have done the work slowly to ensure that they understand exactly where they came from and how much love has been created.

Sean Szeps: [00:50:40] We were on the phone call last week. So this is the other situation with the surrogate who we have family calls with. And Cooper was so excited before the call to tell her that he thinks of her as this like stepmother figure. And it was his words and his understanding, and he wanted to tell her. And here we are on a call and the five year old is telling this amazing, selfless woman that I think of you as family. And to see the look in her eyes and her three kids eyes who are on the call with and her husband and I thought, that's something to be proud of. I've done, I've channeled this fear to ensure that my children never don't have access to the truth, and know all around them that there is love, and that they, at five and a half, feel that that that their story is theirs and they get it. That is something I'm really proud of, and I feel like I'll

continue to be proud of it, because we're going to go through phases where they want more or less, and I will always be able to say, you've always known the whole truth. That's yours. You own it. It's yours. I'm proud of that.

Maggie Dent: [00:51:45] That's pretty special. That really is. Okay, so you have a good dad.

Sean Szeps: [00:51:52] Yes.

Maggie Dent: [00:51:53] What do you reckon is one of the main things you've learned from him as you go forward as a, as a dad. Now. [00:52:00]

Sean Szeps: [00:52:00] The number one thing and I think about it constantly was his respect, admiration, obsession with my mother and a constant articulation out loud for us children to hear of all the work that she did. I don't know a lot of men or women who do that for their partners in front of their kids on an ongoing basis. My father was the father who, after the car was packed for a holiday, would turn to my mum and go, we'd be nowhere without you. And the fact that you thought of all this stuff before we left has made our trip possible.

Maggie Dent: [00:52:37] That's amazing.

Sean Szeps: [00:52:38] And we just. So I grew up around that. I grew up, of course, you think it's annoying when you're a kid. Oh, my parents love each other so much. My dad is constantly saying, even you think the worst of it, you're like, oh, he's just saying that because get out of the doghouse. Because he didn't pack the car. It's not that it never was. They respect each other. And specifically in a world that doesn't respect women or mothers as much as they should be respected. Here was a man who constantly, it's as simple as seeing something and acknowledging it, but out loud for your children to hear so that they can learn to respect the work that it takes to be a parent so they're not blind to what it takes to get a family on a holiday, and that's just one instance. And so I constantly look back at my own parenting. My husband is exceptional at this, I can do better, is out loud, acknowledging the respect that you have for your partner. So your children come to see not just what's good communication and not just what it means to be a good partner, but how hard parenting is and what it takes

so that they can see that and they don't take it for granted. I just think he deserves a lot of praise for that, because all three of us have grown into adults who are good at doing that for our partners because of him.

Maggie Dent: [00:53:59] One [00:54:00] of the things I found really insightful when I was reading your book were some of the big moments that you and Josh had to sit down and plan a different way forward. And, you know, I've done couples counseling and um, so often men are incredibly defensive in those moments. But that's not what happens when you two meet a brick wall. You, you know, you've you've got that lovely blend of absolute, we're in this together. We're going to work our way through this every time you get to there. I was really incredibly impressed with that because technically that's not something guys do naturally well,

Sean Szeps: [00:54:38] No.

Sean Szeps: [00:54:38] But you have obviously that's that need to respect each other. When you respect each other, you hear each other. And then you we make we could try plan A, we could try plan B without the ego getting in the road that says no my way.

Sean Szeps: [00:54:52] Yeah. I'm so glad you brought that up. Josh is a public persona and people know of him, but what they don't ever get to see is what a good partner he is. No one gets to see it.

Maggie Dent: [00:55:02] No, no, they shouldn't either.

Sean Szeps: [00:55:03] Yeah, well, he's like, you know, he's an ABC journalist who can't get involved in my social media because of that. And I create branded content. So he can't be anywhere near that. And so even people online, a lot of people just think I'm a solo dad to two twins, and they don't get to see this amazing person who is equally involved in helping to raise the kids. But specifically, probably a majority of the moments you're talking about is my husband leading those conversations. He's really wonderful at creating those space, and I think it comes down to early on in our relationship, him challenging me to treat our relationship like it could never possibly end. He said, very early on before we got engaged very early, like months into our relationship, what would it look like? To imagine till death do us part today so that there's no way out. What

would you do if there was no way out? What would you do? Allah arranged marriages, right? Like where? There's no other option. This is it. [00:56:00] Let's make this work. And because of that, when arguments do occur, you're always willing to put in the work because there's no way out. You've just decided that. And after 12 years, that becomes the foundation of the way you communicate. If you have a problem, speak it early, not late. If you're in the middle of a fight and you're not feeling supported, address that. If there's an issue that night and you can't sleep, wake them up and talk about it. All of those things come from somewhere. But it's a muscle, a serious one that we have to work on all the time. And we've been working that out for a decade.

Maggie Dent: [00:56:33] What have you chosen sure not to take from how you were parented? What are you not bringing forward?

Sean Szeps: [00:56:40] Probably my parents did so much right. And I think if you read my book, you'll be like, wow, he really likes his parents. They did a lot. They did. Josh and I are one of the rare few who came to parenting, we sat down and said, let's talk about what we did and didn't like from our parents. And we both really enjoyed the way we were raised and based off my friendships, I don't think that's as true as it should be. My family chose early on, partially financially, but I think also just to align with their values to be homebodies. Uh, they didn't have a ton of friends. They didn't go on date nights. I just always saw them supporting us. They were there for us all the time. Never missed a game, never went on big trips, work trips. And so as a young person, that's the foundation of them. They are parents, not people. And I've spoken to them about it into adulthood, and that's a choice they made in there. And they stand by it and they're proud of it. Being parents is something they really wanted to do, and they wanted to do well.

Sean Szeps: [00:57:40] And that little nuclear family of five was the only thing that mattered to them. That was troubling in times of friction because I only saw them as parents. And so when they acted as people, I thought they were failing and I turned on them. I also never got to see the value of putting [00:58:00] yourself first. Of, I never saw them going out and choosing self care. And so that's something I struggle with as an adult. I don't blame them, but that's probably something that I have chosen actively to do the opposite, to build in time away from my family, to build in time away from my husband, to prioritise my friendships. Josh and I have a schedule that is busy and

partially it's busy because he gets to work out three times a week and I get to work out three times a week. That's unnecessary complication to maybe through the lens of my parents, but through the lens of me, today as an adult is critical to my happiness. And if I'm happy, I'm a better partner. And if I'm a better partner, I'm a better parent.

Maggie Dent: [00:58:49] Here's a big question for you. What do you hope that Stella and Cooper learn from you as their dad?

Sean Szeps: [00:58:59] I had a mother reach out to me maybe like a year ago, and her child was coming out. She was freaking out. It's probably 10% of my job is coaching women online through their children coming out. Men do not reach out to me with those problems, by the way. Just throwing that out there. Women find me through their friends and say my son or daughter or child has just come out as anything under the beautiful umbrella. Help. And one of the things I always say is I have never met someone who falls under the umbrella of diverse, who hasn't turned out to be sympathetic and empathetic to others. It just doesn't happen. Queer people are forced to sit on the sidelines and watch the world move by. And they're judged and they're hated and they're mocked. And through that, they become more empathetic and sympathetic for others who are different. Not just sexuality wise. And I have always felt that someone [01:00:00] who struggles at a young age always ends up being less of a prick as an adult.

Maggie Dent: [01:00:05] Well, you say it as it is.

Sean Szeps: [01:00:07] It is. That's just a fact. You know what? When I meet an adult who's a bumhole, I'm like, let me guess. High school was real easy for you, wasn't it, Sharon? And so for me, my hope is my children are growing up in a family that is different. I don't need to pretend otherwise. I'm not naive to that. They see a script and a structure all around them, and they know. And they know now. And they've known for about a year and a half that they're not, quote, "normal" through the lens of the world that they live in. And my hope is when they're 28, I parent for the 28 year old. One of the great gifts my mother gave me don't parent for the 21 year old or the 13 year old, or the 11 year old. 28 when they got their stuff together and they can appreciate the circle of life. 28. I parent for that 28 year old who is able to be gracious and kind to someone in a wheelchair who sees someone with alopecia and doesn't stare and mock, who has the

skills to ask someone comfortably with empathy. Hey, do you mind if I ask you a question about your arm? I noticed it's a little bit smaller, and I'd love to support you if I could. And helping us pack these boxes. My children, that's the great gift I hope they get. Coming from a family like ours who isn't accepted by everyone, that they will grow up to be kinder, more loving and accepting people of others. I really do believe that that's a super power that people who are different have.

Maggie Dent: [01:01:37] I love the, um, the saying I used in my high school classrooms was everybody matters no matter what.

Sean Szeps: [01:01:44] That's beautiful.

Maggie Dent: [01:01:45] Right? Its inclusion. And that's what creates genuine social capital.

Sean Szeps: [01:01:50] Absolutely.

Maggie Dent: [01:01:51] That, you know, slays the ego in its path is that when we recognise everybody matters no matter what. And yeah, that's the gift you're giving them. [01:02:00] And our final question. So if you could wind back time and could sit down with Sean before he became a dad. What advice would you give yourself before you begin the big journey?

Sean Szeps: [01:02:16] Start building your village now. We've lost it in many ways, and there are great people like you talking about the importance of it and wonderful parenting experts explaining the downside of isolating yourself from a support network. Travel, transportation, technology has made it so we feel like we can thrive alone and in our nuclear family. And I just. I'm a Cuban who grew up in a matriarchal society of families that lived together until they died, right. My great grandmother, my grandmother in my physical home, and the great gift and value of that was not on me as a child. And there are so many benefits. But on my mother, who got a break every now and then, who had support around her, who didn't have to constantly reinvent the wheel. Who is able to run to the grocery store and not have to take all three of us. And I see all around me all of these parents who are trying their best, who are juggling like mad men and women and are almost choosing a life of isolation because there wasn't enough of a

pressure put on them to build out. How many babysitters can you find? How many people have you watched their kids so that they would scratch your back down the line? How often do you call your parents, even if they live a state away? Where is that village that is there to support you as a parent so that it doesn't have to be so hard? But, and I've always said this through the lens of mental health and I think it works here. It is impossible in times of struggle [01:04:00] to randomly come up with solutions. You are depressed and stressed and sleep deprived, and if you think in those moments you're going to come out with a clear, concise path of how you're going to survive that day, you are mistaken, my dear. In times of happiness we build systems to support us in times of sadness. So before becoming a parent, figure that out.

Sean Szeps: [01:04:24] I always say the greatest gift I was ever given was the people who didn't let me choose and just helped. You don't get to choose. You and Josh are going on a date this week. You can pick the day, but you don't get to say no. And I'm watching your kids or I'll be there in two hours. I have five meals refrigerated. Put freeze, put them in the freezer. That's you don't have to cook this week. And you know what happened when they had kids? Who showed up? I did, because they laid the framework that I was a part of their village, so I scratched their back. I just think if we all did that to just one mother or father in our life, just one this week, that actually the world would see a little shift. So I would love everyone before they have kids to start to figure out who's the village. If you don't have it, what's that going to look like to create that space? You don't feel like you trust anyone. What can you do to ensure that there are people around you you do trust? And if there's huge blocks there, I don't trust anyone. I don't like my family. Sign up to see a therapist and let's start to work on that. The village is critical and makes parenting easier. You do not need to struggle as much as you are.

Maggie Dent: [01:05:25] Yeah, that's a, you know, we're a social species. We're meant to be connected and human connectedness in real time. Not just online. Is exactly what we all hunger for. So you're exactly right. Because, you know, one of the things we find sometimes from new mummies and daddies who are new is we're meant to be doing this, right. So when someone says, can I drop by and give you a hand, can I? They go, no, no, we're fine. No. We go, yes, please. Every time. Leave it on. I'm not necessarily going to open the door. You [01:06:00] don't want to see my face right now. And I haven't had a shower for three days. But please leave the food on the front step. Thank you very much. Where do we get to be, have to be these heroics because we never did.

If we're in a kinship community, we were there for everyone because exactly what you said later on, it comes back.

Sean Szeps: [01:06:18] And it's mind blowing. I don't know a single parent who has thought that it is easy the entire time. Not a single parent who wouldn't, in retrospect, gone, oh, I could have benefited from having just a little bit more help. But if you don't think that that is you flip the script and go, are you willing to watch a friend suffer? Just flip it. It's not about you. You're a hero. You don't need any help. But do your friends? And I guarantee you, if you're so strong, you're going to go, of course I want to help that person.

Maggie Dent: [01:06:45] So asking for help is actually a sign of courage, not a sign of weakness. Particularly for men, it's a really big part of that journey. So thank you for that message. It doesn't matter who you are, particularly in the early years when then they are meant to be challenging, aren't they? I can't thank you enough, Sean, for, like I said, a comedian with a very deep soul. Thank you.

Sean Szeps: [01:07:08] Thank you so much. I just have to say publicly so everyone can hear. You were the first person to say that I was a father who was mothering. When I saw that in the email you sent me however many months ago, I finally felt seen and validated and heard. It's the power of labels, right? There are people who find a label, and it gives them that euphoric feeling of being seen and understood. And in that moment, because you've been talking about it for a very long time, I'm sure you're like, I've been doing this for a decade. No one understands. But in that moment I saw that sentence and I thought, that is me. That is what I've been doing. I've got it. There's nothing wrong about that. That's beautiful and powerful. And I tell now everyone who will listen that you told me that that's who I am and that's who I am. So thank you, thank you.

Maggie Dent: [01:07:58] So that was Sean Szeps. [01:08:00] His book is called Not Like Other Dads, and we'll put links to the book and to Sean's Instagram in the notes of this episode. Sean had so many great insights to share, so here are just three that you can add to your good enough dad checklist. The first one is knowing that parenting babies is really hard work, no matter who you are as a parent, and that creating a tribe or a village around you, and that asking for and accepting help is not only okay, it's

incredibly important. Number two. It's really important for dads to recognise they may worry about meeting the unique needs of their daughters. However, daughters need a warm, connected relationship with their father for them to thrive throughout life. That's the biggie they need. And number three. Working as effective co-parents needs mutual respect. Regular conversations not only about the challenges, but about the wins you were having and that you problem solve together. And you make sure you both have times where you have a break and you do your own self-care and self-nurturing. I'm Maggie Dent and this is The Good Enough Dad. You can follow us on the LiSTNR app or wherever you get your podcasts.