

GED_S01E12_The_Good_Enough_Dad_scott_stuart_240124_MID23-48_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: [00:00:35] 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 Scott Stewart.

Scott Stuart: [00:01:20] Five years ago, my son was bullied for liking girly things, so I wrote this book. It took ages to find a publisher who believed in it, but when we did, it quickly became a bestseller. It's been on stage and on the screen. It's also been denounced and banned by a bunch of conservative and religious groups. But most importantly, it has helped kids like my son feel that little bit more seen and loved. It's helped parents all over the world start conversations of acceptance with their kids.

Maggie Dent: [00:01:46] Scott is a children's book author and his book, My Shadow is Pink, was based on Scott's own experience with his son. Since publishing that book, he's gone on to write many more books, helping children be comfortable in their own skin. He's husband to Melina [00:02:00] and dad to a little boy with an incredible wardrobe. Hi, Scott. Welcome to The Good Enough Dad.

Scott Stuart: [00:02:09] Hey, thanks so much for having me. I'm really, really excited to be here.

Maggie Dent: [00:02:13] Let's wind the clock back a little bit. Tell us, what was your own childhood like that you can remember?

Scott Stuart: [00:02:19] I think I had a fairly standard childhood. My dad is a man who grew up on a massive sheep station up in country Queensland. And so he is somebody who grew up with extremely rigid rules around masculinity. My mum came from the north shore of Sydney and she grew up with an enormous amount of judgment, both of those things that got passed on to me. So I grew up feeling judged and shamed in almost every situation, and I grew up with these incredibly rigid definitions of what a man looks like, how a man acts. You know, those things were passed on to me, but I also had this kind of unique experience of moving a lot. You know, I think I went to seven. I don't remember the exact number seven, eight, nine schools, something like that. You know, because we were bouncing from country town to city, you know, trying to find one that works with my mum and works with my dad. And I got a really interesting insight into just how much of our rules that we have in society and culture, especially around gender, are completely made up.

Scott Stuart: [00:03:36] I'd go to one school and soccer was the thing for boys. And if you didn't play soccer, you weren't a real boy. And then I'd move schools and you play soccer. Like, who would do that? Like, boys don't play soccer, you know.

Scott Stuart: [00:03:50] And so there was this ongoing pattern of the thing that I was supposed to do to be a man and to be a boy and to fit in, [00:04:00] you know. Three months later, when I changed schools, it was a completely new and different rule. And so some of those rules, I realised just how ridiculous they were when I was young. But like I said, you know, I grew up with really, really rigid definitions within my family. And so as I became a teenager, as I became a young adult, you know, you don't think that those, that conditioning has found its way into you, but it totally did. I was a young man who you thought anything a little bit out of the normal was bad, was wrong. And it wasn't really until my mid 20s, early 30s that I really started to challenge that.

Maggie Dent: [00:04:45] And did you have any siblings or anything?

Scott Stuart: [00:04:48] Yeah, I have an older brother.

Maggie Dent: [00:04:50] What sort of temperaments were you?

Scott Stuart: [00:04:52] Oh, look, we're pretty different. You know, I was a professional dancer for a while, and he is the guy who, he got me into that, you know, when I was 18, 19 years old, he started doing this ballroom dancing thing and I thought, you know, Greg, that's ridiculous. Who would, you know what kind of a man like, you know, does ballroom dancing? And he only got me into it eventually when he convinced me, not totally honestly, but he convinced me that the room would be filled with Russian supermodels. And, you know, I should go. And I'll have you know, it's far better than hanging out in the change rooms with 15 other guys, you know, because I was a rugby player and I went along, it was not entirely honest. I was the youngest person there by about 55 years, but I had an absolute blast. But that's what, you know, my brother and I were like, we're completely different, you know? He sees the world in his way. I see the world in my way. But yeah, we're very, very different. Mortal enemies until we became young adults.

Maggie Dent: [00:05:53] What's one of the happiest memories that you can remember? Despite all the moving and the challenges that you saw, what do you remember? What puts [00:06:00] a grin on your face?

Scott Stuart: [00:06:01] I don't want to bring it down. I don't remember too many super happy moments. I remember a lot of contentment and I remember a lot of conversations which I was instigating with my parents saying, You know, you don't love me like you love my brother. Like I always felt like the unloved child. But despite that, you know, I really thrived in certain environments. You know, I was the kid who was extremely athletic. You know, I was good at most things. So you put me on a football field or a soccer field or any kind of sporting endeavour. I just fit there immediately and perfectly. And so probably with my dad, where he started to get really interested in my sport and in how I was doing on the sporting field and sharing those moments with him.

Maggie Dent: [00:06:57] So was your dad into sports when he was a bit younger, or was it just because it was the alpha male kind of recognized, you know, best thing for you to be doing as his son.

Scott Stuart: [00:07:06] I think my dad was into sports when he was younger, he certainly was when I was growing up. We used to watch all the footy together, all that sort of stuff, but I never really got many stories of my dad's childhood. He's a man of very few words. I mean, it wasn't until my 30s that we started using the term I love you with each other and I don't remember him ever really sharing much about himself when I was a kid. I remember he once mentioned that he used to run the 1500m race at school, but that's all I really know. I don't know much about his childhood except for a couple of photos.

Maggie Dent: [00:07:49] Now I have to reassure you in this space because my counselling over the years, there's a big difference when I would ask a woman for her childhood experiences and I'd ask a man. He [00:08:00] quite often go, No good! Yeah, yeah, good. And one of the things is there's a different capacity to recall memories. And we tend to only remember the ones that were most painful or the ones that were really, really fantastic, like the new bike or whatever. So all the others, which are probably just fairly bland and normal, you can't necessarily remember. So I had to reassure a lot of men that didn't necessarily mean they were suppressing major trauma. They just didn't have a very good memory. So one of the things that can help us open into those memories is I might have asked a man, you know, did you have a bike at any point? And quite often they can recall a bike, right? And I say, so where did you ride your bike? You know, And then all of a sudden they've gone off to where they rode their bike with either their cousins or their friends. And then they remembered jumping, you know, and doing big things. And let's just honor that. There's a difference. So can you tell us about your son and the Elsa dress, please, Scott?

Scott Stuart: [00:09:05] When my son was three, four years old, he fell really in love with Queen Elsa. And I'm not entirely sure what it was because we hadn't even seen the film as yet. So I think it was just in the cultural landscape at that time. But he fell really in love with Elsa. He wanted the dress, He wanted the toys, he wanted it all. And then one day he said to my wife and myself, I really want to get the Elsa costume, which is this big, gorgeous, you know, sparkly dress. Yeah. And he wanted to get it and wanted to wear it. And my immediate reaction was one of intense discomfort. I felt really, really, really uncomfortable. And yet I couldn't really put my finger on why all [00:10:00] that was kind of going through my head was just, No, I'm uncomfortable. No, just just say no. And my wife and I, when my son was first born, one of the really great things that we did

was we had this conversation about what we wanted to instill in our child, whether it would be what kinds of values, kindness, all that sort of ... Whatever it would be. But the big thing that both of us really wanted to instill in our son was the ability and the freedom to be completely himself and for our role to be to let that spark shine as brightly as possible.

Scott Stuart: [00:10:43] And so in that moment when he was asking whether he could wear this dress, I had that anchor in the back of my mind saying, well, you said you'd let him be whoever he wants to be. And so I said, yes. I said, Yeah, go for it. Wear the dress. Even though I was feeling so deeply uncomfortable. And immediately this enormous joy just erupted on his face and he put it on. And we had one of the best days of my time as a dad. We had just a beautiful connection. We had so much fun together. And I would love to say that, you know, that's the moment I never became uncomfortable again. That's not really how it works. You know, the next time he wanted to wear the Elsa dress out on the street, out in public, I felt deeply uncomfortable. He wanted to go to the cinema in his Elsa dress, felt deeply uncomfortable. And each time we had to work through that next layer of discomfort that I was experiencing from my own childhood, where everything was about judgment and shame and all that was going [00:12:00] through my head each time was, firstly, I'm just uncomfortable, not sure why. Secondly, what if he gets bullied? What if this means I don't even know what this means? I don't know. You know, it was just all these things running through my brain. But we said yes. And life has just been absolutely spectacular ever since.

Maggie Dent: [00:12:18] So good. And I've heard this a number of times in early childhood settings when sometimes it's around Mother's Day when they set up little spas and the kids, put kids into like pretend it's their mum and they paint fingernails and things, that there have been times where dads have come in after their sons have had their nails painted feeling exactly the discomfort that you are expressing right now because, you know, their man box in their head said that's not actually how boys do stuff. And I think one of the other challenges I've noticed over the years, which is great news and you'll be happy with this, that there used to be separate dress up boxes in early childhood for the boys stuff and the girls stuff, and that's not happening anymore. So our girls can be running around in, you know, Spider-Man outfits and the boys can be wearing Elsa dresses and nobody bats an eyelid. So this is one of those wonderful

moments when you, as a parent, get confronted with that choice you made, and then you grow and you've allowed him to grow.

Scott Stuart: [00:13:17] In my own brain, I would have always said to myself, Yeah, I'm a super accepting dad. Anything that he wants to do, I'm here for .. I'll fully support. And yet that one just was challenging for me. And it might have been because it was confronting my ideas of masculinity. It could have been because I was thinking, Well, what does this say about me as a dad? What what are other people going to say about me? Which in complete honesty was probably one of the bigger concerns.

Maggie Dent: [00:13:48] You're going to get judged.

Scott Stuart: [00:13:49] Yeah. Rather than what it might do to my son or anything like that. Where you're talking about we're in this great space now where at the daycare they can dress up [00:14:00] as anything. One of our really big turning points was, as I said, my son loved all things Elsa, and he had this Elsa doll that he used to take everywhere. He would walk down the street with it and he'd stop people in the street and he'd show them this doll like he just loved it. He was so proud of it. And one day he wanted to take it to his childcare, his daycare. And at this point, I didn't really think much of it, you know. So he took the Elsa doll to his daycare, and then he finished the day and he came home just in tears, crying. And we asked him what was wrong. And it turned out that somebody there, I don't want to put anybody on blast, but an educator there had said to him that Elsa was only for girls and because he's a boy like he shouldn't, he shouldn't like that. That's where I started to work on the book that became *My Shadow is Pink*, but that's really where we started to dive into gender stereotypes as kids, as parents, and started looking at how we can help to start to break those down a little.

Maggie Dent: [00:15:03] I don't know if you've ever been to a Wiggles concert, but if you do, in the days when Emma Wiggle was still there, you would have an enormous number of the boys all dressed up as Emma Wiggle and nobody had a problem. But you're right. So that's that social conditioning that is in all of us to a different degree. And that's why I kind of was different as a little girl because I wished I'd been a boy. So I basically did everything. I played with the boys. I didn't play with girls. I hated dolls. And I was you know, that was just my comfort zone. Fortunately, on a farm, no one really

noticed. But there were times that because I wouldn't wear a dress, you know, people thought there was something a bit odd with me. So I'm right in that space.

Maggie Dent: [00:15:03] Now, we all know that parenting can be really challenging no matter what kid you're raising. So have you had any significant [00:16:00] moments with your son when you thought, What on earth do I do now?

Scott Stuart: [00:16:04] Yeah, absolutely. I think the biggest ones generally come back to confronting how I was raised. We haven't done it in a few months, but we used to do a very regular kind of ritual, which we called Ask Dad Anything where he and I would do something that was slightly distracting. So we might cook dinner together, we might hang out and like watch a movie that we've seen before, something that doesn't mean we have to sit eye to eye and just look at each other and ask questions. But we had a little semi distraction going on and he had this opportunity to ask me anything at all. And almost all the time it was, Dad, why are the clouds white and why is the sky blue or something ridiculous.

Scott Stuart: [00:16:54] And then he every now and then would come out with these really challenging questions like, Dad, why have I never seen you cry? And .. which was really challenging to me because I am the guy who weeps every time he watches Titanic. And and then I had to realise I do cry to media, but I don't cry about real life. Real life. I hold everything inside and..

Maggie Dent: [00:17:25] Why Dad?

Scott Stuart: [00:17:25] Yeah, that's right. So we used to have these huge, deep, profound conversations always coming back to Dad, why are you the way you are? And it was really, really challenging confronting all of those things consciously because it's so easy just to accept that stuff as background noise and just let it kind of control everything we're doing as parents.

Maggie Dent: [00:17:52] And you had that kind of black and white kind of raising where there was this is the answer to the question. You weren't even probably encouraged to be curious [00:18:00] and with your son's curiosity.

Scott Stuart: [00:18:01] Yeah, absolutely. I mean.

Maggie Dent: [00:18:04] It's a beautiful thing.

Scott Stuart: [00:18:05] Yeah. I mean, he. Look, I have a very different communication relationship with him than I had with my dad. Anything that we spoke about, manhood was about when your chest gets hairy, when you lose your virginity, you know, stuff like that. That's all the signs of being a man. So the night that my son said to me, I've heard this term 'real' man. That's not the exact phrasing, he said. But, I've heard people talk about being a 'real' man. What is a 'real' man? And suddenly having to not just deconstruct the things that I had been taught, but also saying, what do I want him to associate with masculinity and manhood? So yeah, that that ask Dad anything has been wildly challenging just to confront everything that I have in me.

Maggie Dent: [00:18:59] Yeah and it's always okay to say I don't know, but let's find out together.

Scott Stuart: [00:19:04] I think that's my number one answer on almost everything is I have no idea. Let's figure it out.

Maggie Dent: [00:19:09] And one other really good tip. If they come out and ask for something that's really a bit tricky, like Dad, what's sex or something? One of the best ways you can start off with is- you tell me what you know, and then I will add the rest of it because I had one dad who said that his son ran out and said, Daddy, what's sex? And so he went into everything. And then he finally said, Oh, so why did you ask? And he said, Well, Mummy said to come out and dinner will be ready in a few secs. So you can see that we can get ourselves a little bit tangled up.

Maggie Dent: [00:19:44] Okay, So we always love our dads to be really real. We all muck up, but can you give me a specific parenting fail where you feel you let your son down?

Scott Stuart: [00:19:55] I'll say a funny one first, and that is when he was really [00:20:00] little, I had this park next to me with this set of swings, and I'd always like, every day I'd take him to the swings and push him. And we used to have a great time.

And then we went to a different park and I plopped him on the swings. And there was a mothers group just nearby, and one of the mums got up and came over and said to me in quite a condescending voice, Don't you think that child is a little too small for swings? And you know, that thing where you're parenting gets questioned immediately, like you have no idea what you're talking about. And so I got him in the swing and the very first push, he flips out of the swing. I was just like, of course. And so then sheepishly kind of like packing him up. And while this mothers group is shamefully looking at me and walking away.

Maggie Dent: [00:20:52] Yeah. No, that's. That's scarred into your psyche forever.

Scott Stuart: [00:20:55] That's right. Yeah, it was it was tough in terms of other parenting failures, more serious ones. Look, I think I have an ongoing relationship with parenting failures. I think most of us do.

Maggie Dent: [00:21:09] Nearly all of us do. Come on.

Scott Stuart: [00:21:10] And I think that I'm an extraordinarily patient dad. You want to talk about Lego Ninjago for 4.5 hours? Let's do it. Super, super patient. Except for a couple of. There's a couple of things that I think because of how I was raised with a very, suck it up mentality, I really struggle to empathise with certain conversations where he might have been struggling emotionally with something that is huge for him, and in my mind, it's no big deal.

Maggie Dent: [00:21:54] Yeah.

Scott Stuart: [00:21:54] And I think externally I do an okay job usually [00:22:00] of making him know that at least I care about his feelings and those sorts of things. But there's a certain point that we reach occasionally in those conversations where everything inside me is just screaming, If it was me, like, get over it, I don't want to put that on him. But there are many a time I've had to walk away from one of those conversations because everything in me is just fuming and screaming like, Just get over this. Like, who cares? Like I said, I try to not externalise that, but I have definitely a couple of times.

Maggie Dent: [00:22:37] Yeah. And I think that's one of the things dads tell me is in those moments when it's pretty intense or there's, you know, like they're really losing it because it's the wrong colour cup or something, You just want to just... Yep? Particularly boys and you probably the same. And you had two boys in your family, but often we speak more harshly to boys. So we'll say stop being a wimp, stop being so stupid. So we'll shame a boy in that moment. And then so what happens when your own son does it or your own daughter does it. There's a part of you that every single part of you is feeling uncomfortable. So you want to shut it down to help you.. And then you feel you fail if you can't because you're the fixer in the family. So it's a it's a common dilemma I hear from a lot of dads. But I think your strategy of taking a deep breath and stepping away is way better than losing your shit at him.

Scott Stuart: [00:23:29] It's amazing how much of our struggles just come back to us being uncomfortable in ourselves, you know? And they're just doing their thing and living life and we're feeling all these things and, you know, that's where the problems come.

Maggie Dent: [00:23:51] Now, you did mention that your dad wasn't kind of all that forthcoming and communicative and everything, but what do you think you might have [00:24:00] learned from your dad that has been helpful in your in your in your dadding journey?

Scott Stuart: [00:24:05] Yeah. So my dad, similar to myself, is extremely patient. I remember him just sitting there. He didn't have a whole lot of interest. Wouldn't show a lot of interest, but he wouldn't interrupt. And maybe that's because he only ever says three words at a time. But he wouldn't interrupt and he'd listen to everything I had to say. And so I remember at least being heard. And that's one of, I think, his best traits as a dad was that patience and that listening. And so that's something that I definitely learned from him.

Maggie Dent: [00:24:42] It's definitely a gift. Definitely a gift with that one. Scott. Okay. So what have you chosen to do differently to your dad, other than using three words? What other things do you think you do differently?

Scott Stuart: [00:24:56] Look, my wife might argue that I don't necessarily do that too differently to him, but I struggle a lot with the expression of emotion. I really, really find it hard to express what I am feeling because that was all shut down for so long. And so I have a very conscious practice of telling my son what I'm feeling and to a point where somebody might come in and say, Well, he doesn't need to know that you're feeling sad today, but I am so conscious of expressing that to him because I don't want him to have this like, stunted emotional communication that I have. And sometimes it will mean honestly, always it's very forced. I'm feeling a bit this. I would always just hold it in and then I'll be driving home with him or something and I'll say, actually I didn't have a very good day today. You know, I was a bit frustrated in a meeting and one of the things that I have learned, [00:26:00] which has been really, really beautiful, is even though I still have to force that expression of emotion, it's still nowhere close to natural for me 25, 30% of the time. He then comes back with a struggle of his own and something that he's been feeling, and suddenly it opens up all this communication that we probably wouldn't have had, that would have been lost in the day was good. I just learned a couple of things, you know, so it's opened up a lot. And that really I mean, it has come from not wanting to continue the cycle that my dad had, but that is something that I got from him.

Maggie Dent: [00:26:37] That's excellent. Okay. So if you had problems with anger, because a lot of dads tell me that when they get sad, they get angry or they get frustrated, they just get angry because anger was acceptable for boys and men, whereas sadness, vulnerability, fear was a sign of weakness. Was that is that one of your experiences or not?

Scott Stuart: [00:26:57] I tend not to, except for those conversations that we spoke about before. I tend not to get very angry, but I do get very numb. I get to where I probably couldn't describe what I'm feeling. I'm just not feeling anything. I just got to get out of it. I'm uncomfortable. You'd never look at me and say, This guy is angry. But just that complete disconnect, I think, is probably the way of putting it. I just disconnect from emotion and need to step away, or I can just take it kind of coming at me like if it's in a fight with my wife or something and like she's saying things to me at a certain point, I just disconnect from it and I can hear it and hear it, but I'm just not connecting anymore. And I just need to step away to actually connect back in with some emotion. That's probably my biggest feeling. As opposed to anger.

Maggie Dent: [00:27:45] Yeah. And that means that emotional expression wasn't necessarily safe for you as a boy. The number of times I've met men who say they're numb, they just don't feel anything. So when you've shamed or you've hurt a boy so [00:28:00] much, they have to shut their heart completely down. And it's it's pretty powerful when we're able to open that heart back up because you might need to let go of a lot of sadness or disappointment or whatever, but underneath it, that means there's more love that can come in and more tenderness that's genuine.

Maggie Dent: [00:28:22] So we all worry about our kids. But I just wonder, what is your biggest fear and biggest worry when it comes to parenting and raising your son?

Scott Stuart: [00:28:30] I think my biggest fear at the moment is he's not on social media or in social media in that world. He doesn't have a phone, anything like that yet. He's ten years old. I know some ten year olds have them, others don't. But it's moving into that space where that is going to become an expectation. It's not an expectation for his age group as yet, but where it becomes an expectation, I know how social media works. I understand the algorithms and I understand how really easy it is to be manipulated down into some really bad places on there. And so we're right in that navigation of how we are going to handle the transition to when he has his own device. That is not one of ours. It's not like a phone he can borrow or something like that when he has his own device and own kind of unrestricted, unmonitored access to the Internet. So that's kind of the biggest thing that's in our heads right now of where he could end up on the Internet and some of the beliefs and things that kind of get implanted when they go to those places. And we're just kind of in that early stage of what's that middle stage of figuring out how on earth we are going to manage this thing?

Maggie Dent: [00:29:49] Yeah, it's the 24 seven access that to that digital highway, isn't it, that we don't let our kids run out in the middle of a highway at 110 K an hour. So why would we do that with, you [00:30:00] know, the main highway or the digital highway? We're not going to do that. So we've got to. Yeah, your job is I've got to build their skill level and their awareness level so that I can raise a responsible, respectable digital citizen in a world that actually doesn't give a toss about our kids in a way. They just want money from watching ads and they want them gaming because there's more ads and there's more money. So they are, you know, and if you know how algorithms work, don't you, is that the more negative the content, the more likely they're going to see it,

that the more we marinate our children in negative content, the more likely we're going to create those mental health challenges later in life.

Scott Stuart: [00:30:36] Yeah, and I keep hearing from friends and people I've met who they've recently made the jump to their their, I think particularly sons. You know, I haven't spoken to many who have had daughters going through this, not saying daughters aren't going through this. Just I've only spoken to kids with sons who are doing this where they have gotten access to their own TikTok account or something like that. And suddenly they're just a completely different person and completely disconnected from their family and really struggling with their mental health. Where a year before there was none of that. You know, I think that's our yeah, that's our biggest fear.

Maggie Dent: [00:31:17] I think that could also coincide with the early stage of puberty and adolescent when their brain gets pruned and they become a little bit revolting for a while. But I think your challenge in this as you move forward is we've got to see how he can use this positively and we've got to make sure we put those rails on the bridge. That's our job, and that there are some great spaces that will be able to teach you how to use some of the apps more successfully than others. Because ultimately, as they move into adolescence, connection online is a big part of friendship groups. So we've got to be able to make sure they're not excluded, but we've got to make sure that they're not being harmed from that exposure as well.

Maggie Dent: [00:32:00] As [00:32:00] you've been speaking, Scott, I've heard these wonderful things you're doing as a dad, but I want you to have a chance to stand on the platform and go, What do I think is my biggest parenting win?

Scott Stuart: [00:32:12] I think the amount of trust that we have between he and I, which I mean, there are certain times as an example, we were going, what do you call it? We're up high. High ropes course where you're up, you know, climbing on the ropes in the trees and stuff like that. And we reached this moment, which was a big zip line that goes down to the ground. And he was absolutely terrified. And we also realized when we got that, that there was no way of avoiding the zip line. It wasn't something that you could disconnect and go a different way, like the only way was down the zip line. And he was really, really scared. And we had this moment and I said to him, You're

perfectly safe. I know this is scary, but you are safe. And I remember him looking at me going, Oh, okay, I'm still scared. But he trusted me to understand that it was, it was totally safe. And I think that trust has come from him seeing and also experiencing me going through these challenging things emotionally with him.

Scott Stuart: [00:33:22] Like, I remember when he wanted to dress up as Elsa to go to the cinema and it was one of the first real times that he was going out in public in this Elsa dress. And he asked me to dress up with him. And I was beyond terrified to step out in public in this Elsa dress, like we'd had a couple of dances around together in the lounge room. But I was so terrified to go out there with him. And I expressed that to him. And he fed a lot of my own [00:34:00] words back to me.

Maggie Dent: [00:34:02] Don't you love being parented?

Scott Stuart: [00:34:02] I know. And so we did that together. And just all those little moments have helped build this really great trust with each other. And I think that's probably the thing that I'm most proud of in our relationship and as my experience as a dad.

Maggie Dent: [00:34:20] Can I just acknowledge to you what you did at that moment with your son? Because so often we go to, oh, this will be fine, it's no problem. We really easy and we invalidate, what you did was validate that he was finding that difficult and then you reassured him. And so often we just, you know, school's going to be fine. You're going to love it. It's going to be. But we need to say, I can see it's a bit hard and I can see you're a bit anxious. But together, you know, I've got you. We've got this. You just you just nailed it. So that's even gone to a nearly, need to hand you over a small little medal for that one.

Scott Stuart: [00:34:52] I accept. Thank you.

Maggie Dent: [00:34:58] I'm going to ask you what is the one thing that you would want your son to learn from you as his dad?

Scott Stuart: [00:35:06] I think it would be just to and this is probably because I'm so consciously aware of it and struggle with it myself is to confidently be himself regardless

of discomfort or disapproval. Just being himself and having the courage to show that when appropriate. That would probably be the biggest thing. And it's funny to say that as somebody who has so much time and exposure on like social media and things like that, but I really struggle to put myself out there. You know, I really struggle to be seen just for who I am. I really, really struggle with that. And so this whole thing is a massive journey for me and I just want him to be comfortable with it from day one. And I want him to at least think that Dad helped him do that.

Maggie Dent: [00:36:00] Isn't [00:36:00] that interesting when really we recognize that parenting is not just about us raising our kids, it's about our kids helping us to become a better human.

Speaker4: [00:36:09] Absolutely.

Maggie Dent: [00:36:10] I wouldn't have signed up if I'd known that was happening. Okay. So I want you to imagine that you could go back and talk to yourself before you became a dad and what advice do you think you would give to that Scott?

Scott Stuart: [00:36:26] I got some really strange advice when I was, before I became a dad. But I got one really good piece of advice, which was you may not feel the connection straight away. Like the movies say you're going to fall in love the instant they're born, but it might take you a little while. I felt it straight away, but it kind of like freed me up to feel however I wanted. I think probably the biggest piece of advice would be to just relax. Everything seems so important and so crucial, but there's always tomorrow and nothing is as serious as as as it seems like it felt like it was going to change my world completely. And it did, but it changed it for the better. So yeah, just to relax and enjoy the process. I think sometimes I have been so focused on, I was so focused on, Well, how do I be a better dad tomorrow? How do I, what am I going to do tomorrow? What about getting to sleep tonight? I just need my five minutes of sleep, whatever. That I forgot to enjoy the process a bit. And funnily enough, now, looking back on the newborn stage, my absolute favorite memories were at 3 a.m. where it was just he and I chilling out like I was feeding him. And it was just us in the peace of our house, you know, nothing going on except us. Then my absolute favorite memories, which is so strange to say, because like, almost every parent's like, you liked that? But I

loved, I loved [00:38:00] those times. So just relaxing and enjoying the process would be the biggest piece of advice.

Maggie Dent: [00:38:04] Were you aware when you first met him as a baby, something happening in your heart?

Scott Stuart: [00:38:10] Uh, that's a really interesting question. I felt really connected to him straight away. I felt a lot of love, but it felt different to any other kind of love I had experienced. And I think it took me a few years to realize that it was actually like unconditional, where there's really nothing that my son could do or be that would stop me feeling that love. Whereas any other love in the world, I mean, there's certain things that might put pressure on that love, but there's there's nothing that could stop that love, like pure, unconditional love. And I don't think I had felt that before in terms of giving. And so, yeah, I felt something, but I had no idea what it was. Yeah.

Maggie Dent: [00:38:57] So I can explain that because I've read lots of research around neuroscience and things as well, and that the moment that a man becomes a parent for the first time, the brain has to make a lot of massive new growth because it has to make sure that this man who has just been born a father, has what it takes to be able to keep this baby alive. Isn't that fascinating? So you were born a new human. And, you know, we often think it's just about the baby. But at that moment, both of you as parents are born and you and then if it's the first grandchild, you know, for grandparents are also born the first time they hold their first grandchild. So it's a massive shift, you know, in the brain, but also in us as humans and our capacity to love.

Scott Stuart: [00:39:43] I love that framing. Yeah.

Maggie Dent: [00:39:47] Hey, Scott, thanks for your time. Can you keep writing your awesome books?

Scott Stuart: [00:39:51] Yes, absolutely. Thank you so much for having me. It's been an absolute pleasure chatting.

Maggie Dent: [00:39:58] Scott Stewart, children's book author. [00:40:00] You'll find links to all his wonderful books in the notes of this episode. And Scott had so many

wonderful things to say that I think, yeah, they're worth holding on to. So let's grab a few now for our good Enough Dad checklist.

Maggie Dent: [00:40:18] I think the first one that we need to remember is that when you feel uncomfortable as a dad, when something's happening with your kids, it's probably your stuff rather than their stuff and probably reflects something that happened to you when you were a boy rather than what's happening with your child in the moment. Secondly, that naming of emotions and the modelling of emotions for our boys particularly incredibly important even if he wasn't feeling them himself. And it will help dads better understand their girls big emotions. We need to talk about emotions. And then the third one, how absolutely fabulous it is for us to, as parents, recognise it's time that we challenge the unhelpful social norms that say this is what girls do and this is what boys do and there's nothing in the middle. I think he did that beautifully.

Maggie Dent: [00:41:20] I'm Maggie Dent and this is the good enough dead. Follow us on the listener app or wherever you get your podcasts.