

GED_S01E19_The_Good_Enough_Dad_Matt

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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 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: [00:00:36] No one 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 Matt Formston.

Male TV presenter: [00:01:04] Now Matt Formston grew up outdoors. He riding skateboards, climbing trees, and playing backyard cricket. Now in his 40s, he's been a world champion in two sports cycling and surfing.

Maggie Dent: [00:01:15] As you heard there, Matt is a professional athlete and while the challenges to become the top of your chosen sport are big, Matt has had a few more obstacles in his way than most. When Matt was five, he lost 95% of his vision. He has a condition called macular dystrophy, which is effectively the opposite of tunnel vision. He only has 5% peripheral vision, which means he cannot see a vast proportion of what's in front of him. He's husband to Rebecca and dad to Max, Elsie and Jake. Matt, welcome to The Good Enough Dad.

Matt Formston: [00:01:51] Thanks for having me, Maggie.

Maggie Dent: [00:01:52] So ... Just a bit curious, but what's more challenging? Riding a 30 foot wave or getting three kids ready to get out of the house in the morning?

Matt Formston: [00:02:00] Uh, [00:02:00] they've both got their own challenges. But yeah, the kids are always throwing more variables at you than a wave does.

Maggie Dent: [00:02:06] So you grew up in the northern beaches of Sydney. So what are your happiest memories of the childhood there?

Matt Formston: [00:02:13] Just freedom. I lived on Narrabeen Lake. My dad, my parents got me my first boat when I was ten. I'd go rowing out on the island. I'd go sailing by myself with my dog, and I could just explore the world safely and make mistakes and learn. Um, we went camping on the island across the road from our house, which my parents could sort of see our tent from the backyard. And just the freedom of being able to do that was just, yeah, an amazing upbringing that I don't know is achievable in today's society. Yeah.

Maggie Dent: [00:02:42] So true. Yeah. So you were only five when you lost 95% of your vision. Do you, do you remember that?

Matt Formston: [00:02:49] I don't know I don't remember the degeneration. I've got one memory of, uh. It's like as a kid, you don't know if the memory is a real memory or if it's a made up memory, because sometimes we, you know, we create our own memories based on what stories that we've been told. But I remember seeing stars, and it was on Christmas Eve. We were having a barbecue at a friend's house, and some of the dads were pointing up in the sky and they said, look, it's Santa in the sky and a shooting star. I believe it was either a shooting star or it was Santa or something. And I remember that detail of the of the line going through and all the thousands of stars around. And that's the only memory I have of clarity of being able to see. So now I just see through soup. Basically, I can see dots and lines and on a good day, and then when I go from light into dark, I can't see anything.

Maggie Dent: [00:03:33] So you would have known other kids can see better than you didn't make you feel less than or.

Matt Formston: [00:03:39] No. My parents, the way they approached it, they, uh, said like, it's just who you are. They never really talked about it. It was just, you know, we do things differently. When I went to play rugby league, rugby union, ice hockey, there was just let's just go and do it and we'll work out a different way of doing things. And at school, you know, I had to ask lots of questions I couldn't read and I just did things different to the other kids. [00:04:00] You know, I'd get picked on a bit like there was lots of obviously lots of bullying, but I was very physical. Like my way of dealing with bullying was probably not ideal, but it was just the way I managed it. So I was probably more physical than the other kids that wanted to be a bully and they stopped being a bully. It was a different upbringing, but the main, you know, thing that I remember was I knew I wasn't going to get my license so I could do most other things the other kids could do professionally, like surfing, ice hockey, rugby league. I could do all those things, and I did most of those things to a representative level. But then I knew I couldn't get my license, so I knew that that was coming. And when that came, it was a bit of a challenge, but I'd been dealing with it for over ten years by the time my friends got their license. So it all just came and went and yeah.

Maggie Dent: [00:04:41] Yeah, now I am going to make a suggestion here that I think regardless of your disability, you were already going to be a rooster. So in my world there's these roosters and lambs and roosters are go getters from the get go. I think you were going to be that anyway. Because. Because seriously, you were already doing stuff like that beforehand.

Matt Formston: [00:04:59] Yep

Maggie Dent: [00:05:00] So there's this. Get up and go. Kind of. I can have a go at anything. Yeah. Um. Your poor parents. Have you ever spoken to them as an adult about your experience, or is it just kind of all this? This is the normal life for us that you have this.

Matt Formston: [00:05:14] I mean, since I became a public figure, we talk about it because I've had to do interviews, obviously, and we've done this, a movie being made at the moment and stuff. So having to go through that process makes you talk about things and get asked those questions. So it was very confronting for them. So I've just told you my experience as a child, their experience as a parent was very different.

Matt Formston: [00:05:30] They were told by the experts that I would, because I acquired a disability, I would wouldn't be able to have many friends. I wouldn't really get an education, I wouldn't be able to play sport. And they basically gave this doom and gloom prognosis that my life was basically over. The way I started playing rugby league was, you know, I was five years old. I just lost my vision. Um, and dad was having a beer with a few mates and they said, Does Matt have any friends that might want to play footy? Because the footy team of one of my friends, they didn't have enough players and dad said, well, Matt, Matty will play. He catches the ball, he plays with his brother in [00:06:00] the backyard and he's and you know he'll love it. And they looked at him and said, well Don, which is my dad's name.

Matt Formston: [00:06:05] Like Matt's blind, he can't play football. And rather than saying, well, that's amazing, you're a dad who's giving you a child with a disability a go. The way they looked at him was saying, well, you're a bad parent because you're putting your child with a disability in harms way. Um, and that went on throughout my whole life where any time they tried to let me do things that weren't the way the world sees people with disabilities, they were treated like they were bad people, but they didn't tell me any of that. That experience was never shared with me until I was an adult. And now they go back and tell me these stories about certain things that happened. I had a teacher in high school that rang, that told my principal that I was lying. I didn't have a visual impairment because he saw me play rugby union, and because I was so good at that, he figured I should be able to read the textbooks in history class. So there was, yeah, there's all these really bad experiences that they had, but they sheltered me through through all of that because they knew that was the best way for me to just get on with things.

Maggie Dent: [00:06:54] All right. So your eyesight has really not stopped you doing the ... Other than driving a car and having a license. Yeah, that's not saying there's no risk or no fears because every single child can muck up, can't they?

Matt Formston: [00:07:05] Correct.

Maggie Dent: [00:07:05] So are there any risks or fears for you when you became a dad? Like it's different if you're just you, but if you're a dad now and you're going to do something crazy does tell me, was there a difference in the way you saw things?

Matt Formston: [00:07:16] Yeah. So I get asked a lot like because obviously big waves, like I surf 50 foot waves, you can die, right? And that's if you're sighted or not sighted. That's it's a serious thing. And so I've always taken risks. That's what I've done. I've made my whole, my whole career on taking risks. And that's in business and in sport. And a lot of the times it's been about risk management and understanding what the real risks are, mapping that all out and then, you know, and then pulling the trigger and getting things done. People ask me, do you have fear? And I've never really understood fear because I think growing up I just did things. My driver as a, as a young kid was to to prove to the world that I didn't have a disability, because I was embarrassed about my disability.

Maggie Dent: [00:07:52] Yes.

Matt Formston: [00:07:53] So that that took away the fear. I didn't have fear because I was more I was more fearful of people seeing my disability than I was of breaking [00:08:00] my arm. So I had 20 years of experience of doing that and being fearful of people knowing that I was blind. So the breaking arm thing and, you know, stitches and all that stuff was just didn't care because I was that was that was easier to deal with. And people knowing that I had a disability or bullying me because I was different. So then that gave me this whole thing where I don't care if I hurt myself like I physically. I know that if you break an arm, it heals. If you get stitches, it heals. Pain's not really a thing that it worries me that much. You know, as a cyclist, I was a Paralympic cyclist. I set a world record because I'm so good at managing pain. Like I can just tell my body to turn off. So when they said, you know, I get asked now in interviews, do you have fear? I didn't really have fear until I had kids.

Maggie Dent: [00:08:39] Yeah.

Matt Formston: [00:08:39] And now now I look. The way I risk profile things is different because I'm. I didn't want to die, but my probably dying for me was even probably less

of a concern than people seeing me as being disabled. So now it's like if I die, my kids don't have a dad, so I, I yeah, I temper. Yeah, it's a little bit different.

Maggie Dent: [00:09:05] Do you think, Matt, the fact that you're a boy also would have driven because there's that whole thing that, you know, boys particularly are not supposed to be weak or less than. Do you think that helped to drive that passion in you, that you didn't want them to see your disability?

Matt Formston: [00:09:20] Yeah, absolutely. My dad's very old school as well. So growing up there was no pain, no gain, all that type of behaviour and analogies. So I got taught it. When I grew up. It was someone hits you, hit him harder and get back up. Don't let them see your pain and all that stuff. So you know it was can.

Maggie Dent: [00:09:36] Be tricky if you can't see them.

Matt Formston: [00:09:38] But they once they get close enough to hit you, you can grab them. And then I learnt to do that really well.

Maggie Dent: [00:09:42] I bet you did. I have just enough vision to line up your head. Yeah.

Matt Formston: [00:09:46] I don't need to line it to see it. I can just grab your arm. And I know if I've got your arm. I know where your head is.

Maggie Dent: [00:09:50] Yeah. It's attached. Yeah, that's that's pretty good. Yeah.

Maggie Dent: [00:09:53] What has overall been the most challenging situation you think you've faced in being a dad? Where you go, oh [00:10:00] heck, what the heck do I do now?

Matt Formston: [00:10:02] It's nothing to do with my disability. It's just, I think the same as anyone else. It's to do with like as a as a high performing human. I'm like, what's the quickest way to get to this thing? Like, I want to make this business go from here to here in the quickest possible time. How do I do that? Get everything out of the way. As

an athlete, I want to do this right. And then I'm trying to put that into your children. It's not realistic.

Maggie Dent: [00:10:24] No.

Matt Formston: [00:10:24] They need to learn their own. They need to have their own path, their own business process. And they're different. They're all different personalities. Like my three kids are all so different. And so learning that, tempering back to going, actually just let them ask questions, don't tell them things. Yeah. Um.

Maggie Dent: [00:10:40] That frustrating a bit though because you already got this way and it works. Why don't they do my way?

Matt Formston: [00:10:45] It's not. No it's it's. It's really exciting to see them. It's a new challenge for me as well. Like I love a challenge and it is really challenging for me just to sit back sometimes and not give them the the solution. It's the most rewarding thing I do. I like being a dad is my favorite thing in the whole world and I yeah, everything, every part of it's great.

Maggie Dent: [00:11:04] Now, you've also shared with me how helpful they are. Come on, tell me how your kids help you navigate this world where sometimes other grown ups might not be quite so good.

Matt Formston: [00:11:13] Well, there's like, they're just getting to the toilet that I can't see. We're at the pub. I don't know where the toilet is, so someone has to take me. So they learn. That's the first thing they learn is how to see the men's and the women's, so they can take me to the toilet. And most of the time they need to go to the toilet a lot more than I do. So if we if we go into the right one, it generally helps. They've taken me into when they're very young though. I've been into a few women's toilets and they've been screamed at a few times by women. So there's that. They they tell me, hey, dad, there's a pole coming up and they'll help me, shepherd me around or there's a step and they're really helpful. But then reading as well, like we, we learnt as a, as a family, we read every night and they learnt to read. So I can't read the books, they read them to me. So first of all it starts off as evolution. If we just tell it, my wife would read a book and I'd memorise it, and then I'd just read the same book over and over, and then I'd get

that wrong. And the kids say, no, no, that's not what happens on this page. And [00:12:00] then they and then we go through it just reading ad lib, we find a book and they'll, that we've both never read before and they tell me what the pictures are on the page. And then I make up a story about those pictures and then we go through that together. So it's a really creative thing that we can do together.

Maggie Dent: [00:12:13] Love it.

Matt Formston: [00:12:13] And then they get to a point where they can read and then they read to me. So that's just one example. But there's so many different journeys that we go on, but gives them opportunities too, because my son had to read to me from the age of four, he had to learn how to read for us to read a book together.

Maggie Dent: [00:12:24] We met just when you were launching the book with Vision Australia, where you're combining text with Braille. Yes. Now you can't do Braille, so you can't read. So you kind of double whammy, but you've now created something for those families. So no wonder you're doing a creative way of well, I just I'll make it up. And memorise it.

Matt Formston: [00:12:43] Yeah. Well, you just find a way, don't you. I think that's been my whole life, if you want to do something, you find a way. If you don't want to do it, you can sit in a corner and feel sorry for yourself. But if you really want to do something, you just you just find a way.

Maggie Dent: [00:12:53] Alright so how do you find a way helping with Lego or something like.

Matt Formston: [00:12:57] Um, well, Lego, you can feel it. So I love building, I love engineering, and I love, you know, physics. And at a young age, I'd always be building Lego because I could build bridges or I could build anything and work out what works, what doesn't work. And my kids, for us, when they're drawing or they're being creative, they have to tell me what they've drawn. Or they can say, look at this, dad. And sometimes I'll just lie and say, oh, that's amazing. That's great. And I have no idea what they've just drawn. Um, just obviously just trying to be encouraging and not wanting them to feel like I'm not including them, because if they have to explain it all the time, it's

hard for them. But with Lego, they can build something and I can have it in my hands and feel what they've built so they can feel, even with the little eyes they built on some characters last week, I can feel the little eyes on the front of the character, and the way they've spaced out a dragon that goes under the ground, and it's something that we can do together. Um, and yeah, I can help them build it. And even when they're like my youngest now, when he was four, started building Lego off, there's not a lot of free building going on these days with kids. It's, you know, they get the pack and they have to build it from the instructions, and.

Maggie Dent: [00:13:53] That's only the first time. And then they lose the instructions and and then it becomes creative.

Matt Formston: [00:13:57] Not for my eldest son. He's got it. It [00:14:00] has to be built off the plans most of the time anyway. He can get stuck on a part and he shows me, he tells me what the picture says, and then he hands me the two pieces and then I'll work out for him what it is by feel. So it's a great, yeah, great inclusive piece of equipment.

Maggie Dent: [00:14:14] Awesome, I love it.

Maggie Dent: [00:14:24] I have read that your dad banned the word can't, which I think is a great thing to ban out of every family. Yes. And that he took you surfing out the back to teach you how to feel the waves on that body board, and he helped you to use tools and saws. So how important was all of that in shaping who you have become today?

Matt Formston: [00:14:45] Oh, look, it's made me who I am. So dad couldn't surf. Dad grew up in Bankstown and moved to Narrabeen when he was an adult. So he would just take me out the back swimming and push me into waves on a bodyboard. And I worked it out so he didn't know anything about surfing. We just worked it out together as a family. And then he became my ice hockey coach and he couldn't ice skate. And we ended up becoming premiers and, you know, winning the State Cup. So he's been there through everything I've done and just found a way to help. But then the drop saw things a great one because he taught me through that. He taught me about business. So and

about anything in sport. So it's people say he used the drop saw and in their head they're like a blind person drop saw fingers.

Maggie Dent: [00:15:20] Yeah. Not good.

Matt Formston: [00:15:21] But when you break it down this is what I say about risk, like perceived risk and real risk. When you break it down with a drop saw, there's two buttons. You press one to pull down the blade and the other one to turn on the motor. If you don't put your finger anywhere near the motor, the button that turns on the motor, there's really no risk. I mean, there's a risk that it might just turn on and something might happen in the ether where it turns out that's probably not going to happen. So I would measure a piece of wood with my finger. So where it needed to be cut because I can't use a tape measure. And then I'd run the blade down. I'd put the piece of wood under the drop saw and run the blade down next to my finger so I'd know exactly where it needs to be, and then remove my finger from the, um, like. So. I've pushed that trigger where it comes down, the blade comes down and touches my finger. Take that hand away, [00:16:00] and then I put my other hand up and pull the trigger, the motor trigger. So then I cut the piece of timber. So when you do the right process, you remove all the risk.

Matt Formston: [00:16:07] So that was one of the things he taught me is like, there's all these things people in the world just say can't, can't, can't. And it's the first thing, as soon as people see something they don't like, they put barriers in their own way. So by removing the word can't, we just went, okay, how how do we do this? And then how much? What's the perceived risk and what's the real risk. And that just took away everything. So I went from being a kid that was supposed to be able to do nothing. That's what the expert said to just doing everything because we just found a different way of doing things.

Maggie Dent: [00:16:30] So when you became a dad, were those the main things you wanted to give your kids, or what else did your dad instill in you felt like, yeah, I'm going to take that with me on my journey as a dad.

Matt Formston: [00:16:42] So I've sort of had the like of, you know, dad, I don't know where he learnt that from because people have asked me, where did your dad learn

that that no/ Can't thing from what I've got. I've asked him and he doesn't know. He just came up with it. He was a sales guy, I think. I think there's a lot of, you know, being told no all the time in sales. I think you learn to just find ways to get things done. But I think for me now, just the next evolution for me is it's not just can't you need to find ways to say to to say yes to things. And I've learnt as obviously as a businessman, as a business executive, when we recruit people, I try to recruit people based on their values and their behaviours as opposed to the amount of skills they have. So if I can teach my kids to have the right values and behaviours, they can learn any skill. So when my kids go to sleep at night, they all say I am brave, I am inquisitive, I am kind, I am grateful, I am happy. They're values that we sort of, as a family condense down and we think they're like they're really core values that if they can get all those right, they can be successful in whatever they do. So we don't just say those words either. So at the end of that, so they say, I am brave, I am inquisitive, I am grateful, I am kind, I am happy, I am Elsie Formston or I am Max Formston. So they're yeah, they're owning their name, who they are. And then I'll go through with them. Like, what does inquisitive mean? How are you being inquisitive? How are your friends being inquisitive? Is your teacher being inquisitive and just getting to understand each of those words and each [00:18:00] of those, those behaviours so that they can become experts at behaviours. Because if they're experts at behaviours, then they can be experts in anything.

Maggie Dent: [00:18:07] No, dad's perfect and we know there's, you know, the shifting of the ways that fathering has. But is there anything you've chosen that your dad kind of did that you've thought, nah, just leave that one there.

Matt Formston: [00:18:21] Look, he was very and I think it's just a different time. But he was very harsh. It's not acceptable anymore to be as hard as dad was with me, as much as I saw it as love. And I think it's absolutely made me who I am. And I don't have any issues with how I was parented. I'm probably a little bit more gentle, and I probably use more of a conversational way of leadership than, "Do it, because I've told you to do it".

Maggie Dent: [00:18:42] My way or the highway. Yeah, yeah. Okay, now we know that siblings can either add good stuff and or awful stuff to your life, but you had a brother who helped nudge you along as well that helped you stand up on a surfboard at 11 because he might have been a surfer. Was he because your dad wasn't? So tell me. Tell me about your brother.

Matt Formston: [00:18:57] Um, my brother is actually my half brother. So he was from dad's first marriage. He's 13 years older than me. He was playing first grade footy when I was when I first started playing. So he was because he was, you know, 18 when I was five. So he would play with me in the front yard. He was the first person to break one of my limbs.

Speaker5: [00:19:14] He brought the team home and they all had a couple of beers and we're playing footy in the front yard. And as a five year old I thought it was a great idea to, or actually I was about eight, but yeah, I got stuck at the bottom of a pile of some big humans and got my arm snapped. And that was the example of dad where he like, there's no such thing as can't. My arm's broken. I'd been out in the boat that day. Our house was on the on the lake, so and it was if you are going to use something you put it away. So whatever it is, you put it away. If you want to use it, you put it away. So I hadn't put the boat away yet. And then I'm trying to pull the boat up to put it, lock it up to the tree where it is chained up to, and I just my arm just wouldn't cooperate, and I didn't have enough strength to do it with one arm. And he's saying, you got to just do it. Just stop complaining, just get it done. And mum came out and said he doesn't complain that much, maybe something wrong. Maybe he needs to go to the medical centre. So I went to the medical centre. I had a broken arm and that [00:20:00] was how hard he was. Like, it's yeah, it doesn't matter if you've got a sore arm, just get it done. So my results as an athlete show I'm a pretty hard man, but also very proud of being a very gentle man because of what my mum gave me as well.

Maggie Dent: [00:20:10] Exactly.

Maggie Dent: [00:20:16] We all muck up as humans and I just want to know if you can share with me one of your notable parenting failures.

Matt Formston: [00:20:24] Yeah, look, this one's easy for me. It's. And it's it breaks my heart. Surfing is obviously my biggest love apart from my family. Um, and because of that, I got so excited when I had my first son that he would learn to surf. And at the age of two, I took him out surfing and he got scared of the surf and then I tried to keep pushing him. Um, and now he surfs really good. So he's he's got through to like the finals at Lennox, at LE-BA, which is Lennox Head Boardriders one of the best clubs in

Australia. So surfs really good. But he's scared of the ocean because of what I did to him as a young, as a very young child. So really good lesson for me for my other two kids to just let them choose to do things and let them if they wanted. Like dad surfs, they're obviously going to be at the beach a lot, so when they're ready to do it, they'll tell me and I can help them however they need.

Maggie Dent: [00:21:09] So the child led rather than always the adult led. And yet he's still got there, didn't he? He still surfs.

Matt Formston: [00:21:13] Sometimes. Yeah. My daughter says she only surfs at Noosa.

Maggie Dent: [00:21:19] What would be your biggest fear when it comes to your kids raising them in today's world?

Matt Formston: [00:21:27] Just getting lost in the world. You know, there's obviously lots of drugs and bullying and that's my biggest fear that they would they would get lost or disconnected from us as a family. So, um, and it's once again, I don't have an answer for how we don't do that. We'll do the best we can. I've had some friends that have had that happen to them recently that I observed from an externally that they were a great family. Um, and that's a deep fear.

Maggie Dent: [00:21:51] So there's that whole thing that is driving you as a dad is connection. All the things that you are doing when you're there, 110% connection [00:22:00] is the buffer that will be there always as a safe base they can fall back on. So it really, really strengthens their capacity to fly. So there's a metaphor about I want my kids to one day I want them to be able to fly the nest. However, um, we don't want them to fly the nest without the, the skills or the attitudes and the values which you are really strong about. So that that is going to be a big part of why there's a pretty tiny chance that any of yours ..

Matt Formston: [00:22:36] It's still my biggest fear.

Maggie Dent: [00:22:36] Untethered. And it's absolutely okay to be your biggest fear.

Maggie Dent: [00:22:46] Now's your big brag moment. When have you really knocked it out of the park and done something that you're really proud of as a dad?

Matt Formston: [00:22:54] I think the values thing, like just teaching them values and behaviours and getting them to really understand what they are and how they can demonstrate those things. I think that's something that's really helped them as they go through challenges. We can go back to that. So if they're having a bad day at school, go, you know, at night we do our "IMS", we do. You know, I am brave. Like it's is this being inquisitive or are you being brave? Are you truly you know, is it. And talking about empathy with other people like if, if you go into this place where you're you're not loving yourself, how can you help other people? And you say you want to help other people. So I think that values piece is what I'm most proud of. Also, just giving the kids exposure to maybe not my child, but my son is a really good football player. My oldest son, right. He plays reps. He's really, really good footy player. I coached his team this year. They were undefeated all year. I coached them through behaviours, the same thing like in structures and talking through what they need to do and help them lead themselves as a team as opposed to. I see a lot of other coaches saying, you need to do this, you need to do this, and they don't know why. But part of that team, we had one of the kids from the community who has down syndrome play in the team, and Max, my son and a few of his close mates. They sheltered him. They helped him play. They [00:24:00] included him how they needed to, but also there was just lots of empathy. And to be a dad, where you see a child, my son, who's such a good athlete and his friends are amazing athletes, but they still included Jacob and brought him on that journey, and they saw that as as important as scoring tries or as winning the game. That makes me very proud.

Maggie Dent: [00:24:16] Absolutely. That's the behaviour. The values lead to the behavior that can influence others. Matt. That's gold. Absolute gold. All right. This is a bit of a tough question, but there's only one thing you can choose. What is the one thing that you want your kids to learn from you other than what you've already shared? What's one thing say, look, this is what dad gave me. This is this is what he's the gift he's given me as our dad.

Matt Formston: [00:24:42] I want them to be. Just be tough, but be gentle while you're tough. So I know that you could probably cut my arm off and I wouldn't cry. But if I, if I watch a an ad that's got fluffy puppies..

Maggie Dent: [00:24:55] Puppies?

Matt Formston: [00:24:57] I'll cry Um, I can't watch The Biggest Loser because I cry. I have to leave the room. My wife says, here he goes again because I have to walk out of the room all the time because I get a frog in my throat. But I think if I can teach them to have that balance of being really tough and being resilient physically and emotionally, but also being gentle and kind, that's that's something I'd love to pass on to them in the world.

Maggie Dent: [00:25:14] That's beautiful. And you've taken your journey into this journey as dad, and I've added the bit that maybe I wished I'd had a little bit of when I was a boy. That's beautiful. Yeah. Okay. Final question. If you today could go back to Matt before you became a dad, is there any advice that you would like to give to yourself that before you become a dad?

Matt Formston: [00:25:39] I was always super excited to be a dad and just get into it. And I think that parenting fail of being teaching them by saying parenting led as opposed to child led. I don't think it can be understated. Like you just you don't know when you first start as a parent. You just don't know and you want to give them everything. And that's that's really tricky to just sit back and let them learn. But [00:26:00] by giving, I think by putting the Lego in front of them and letting them, you know, if the Lego is the world and letting them create and helping them as they and giving them guidance on maybe they should do something different with the Lego, as opposed to just saying you should do this with the Lego. It's a thing that I've learned that works, but so hard to be told that before you have kids.

Maggie Dent: [00:26:19] So I'm just giving a little bit of a reflection about how it might be to be your lovely wife. If you can't see too much, you're a bit useless at helping. So she amazing?

Matt Formston: [00:26:32] She's amazing.

Maggie Dent: [00:26:32] Right? Am I right? She has to be. Tell me about her and how she supports you.

Matt Formston: [00:26:37] Yeah look, I'm not I'm not going to lie. It's a bit of the disability, the blindness and the maleness as well.

Maggie Dent: [00:26:42] Yeah, yeah. Pretty sure. Yeah.

Matt Formston: [00:26:44] So, uh. Yeah. So let's not get too focused on the disability. My wife is a superstar. I'm away a lot as an athlete, as a speaker, as a businessman. I'm, you know, I travel a lot. And when I'm home, I'm 100% home. But when I'm away, I'm just not there. So she does everything. She's looking after the kids. She's driving them everywhere. I do help out around the house a bit, a little bit, but it's mainly the driving. Like she's driving them to sport every night. Yeah, she's a rock. She, um. Uh, she's just always, uh, with my disability. It's never been a question. Like I had partners in the past. Like one lady in particular that said that she didn't want to be intimate because I couldn't look her in the eyes. Right. That sort of stuff's heartbreaking. Yeah, whereas she has just never been an issue. It's just been part of who I am and we just get on with it. So she's a bit like my parents, you know? It's not if I bring it up, she's like, well, why? You know, it's not it's never been an issue in the past. Why would it be an issue in the future?

Maggie Dent: [00:27:35] Exactly.

Matt Formston: [00:27:35] So yeah, she's she's my rock. She's superstar. And every time I win a world title or break a world record, I just think, you know, I didn't do any of that until I met her, so I didn't literally. I've got wow, I've got a bag full of gold medals now. I didn't have a single gold medal, international gold medal in my life until I met my wife.

Maggie Dent: [00:27:52] So that notion of the real team, you can get it even with these challenges. And if you had one, one [00:28:00] bit of advice to give to any other dads out there who struggle, particularly with a vision disability, other than you can solve any problem, what would it be?

Matt Formston: [00:28:12] Just be creative. Like there's always a solution. And if you get too fixated on the problem, you'll just stay on that. If you just move away from the problem and think, well, what am I trying to achieve here? And think about a few different ways of getting there, you'll probably find a way around over through the middle of that hurdle pretty quickly.

Maggie Dent: [00:28:35] You travel a lot, so there is less like in in the home space opportunities or in real time opportunities. How do you keep connected to your kids when you're on those big traveling trips, so that they know that you are thinking of them, and they're still a big focus of their life? How do you do that from a distance?

Matt Formston: [00:28:53] Uh, look, FaceTime is a great thing, so I obviously can't see their faces, but they want to see my face, so I try and call them before school, after school. If I know there's something big coming up that day, I'll call them before. I'm very conscious of the fact that they get anxious about certain things, so I'll call them to talk through that with them. And then if I know there's something exciting that's happened, I'll make sure I call them in the afternoon and, you know, I'm away. But just because I've been I've had the final at the US open that day and I'm excited because I just had a win. I'll definitely go and call them, spend half an hour put in the time because they've had their swimming carnival, which you know, is more important in my world than it is the US open is than their world. So I'd make sure I put that time in and then I go out and celebrate with the team.

Maggie Dent: [00:29:33] So family rituals are huge. What does everyone do when you finally come home, whether you've got a new gold medal or not? What's your reconnection time? Do you party, what do you do?

Matt Formston: [00:29:43] I just walk in the door. And look let's be honest, when I come in the door, they try and open my suitcase to see what's in there, what I brought home. It's like I haven't gone away, really. We're just straight back into it and my wife's basically. Here you go. You've been away for a week. I'm going to go out in the garden and chill [00:30:00] out for a bit.

Maggie Dent: [00:30:01] YMovie nights, no special kind of things that you've hung around together that are you can't see, so you can't have a movie night.

Matt Formston: [00:30:09] We watch, we watch movies, we watch movies. And I ask the kids what's going on. I can hear what's going on. A lot of the movies obviously are narrated very well, so you can work out what's going on just by listening to the story. But we're a very active family. We're out there doing sport all the time, so I'm going to sport with them. We're going out to the beach, we're going bike riding, we're playing with the dogs, we've got a big ridgeback and my daughter absolutely loves him. So I'll just go out the back and play with the dog and we'll go for a swim in the pool. Just we're always active. There's always something happening. And it doesn't matter if I go away or if I come back. There's no downtime. I'm definitely very active human. And my kids are little mini me's, so there's three of them that are all full on. So my poor wife's got, you know, she said she's got four kids.

Maggie Dent: [00:30:52] Yeah. Matt, thank you so much for coming and sharing your story with me.

Matt Formston: [00:30:55] Thanks, Maggie. Yeah. Lovely to be here.

Maggie Dent: [00:31:01] Matt Formston, Paralympian pro surfer and executive coach. Matt sure had some very valuable insights and wisdom to share, didn't he? So we're going to take a few of those from what he said and add to the good enough dad checklist. Firstly, being really clear about family values that matter by affirming them and articulating them really is helpful. Secondly, letting your kids lead the way in their passions rather than parents choosing. That was an interesting one on that little surfboard for the two year old. Thirdly, the insight was that Matt actually liked the way he was fathered. However, he wanted to add gentleness into the mix. How cool. I'm Maggie Dent and this is The Good Enough Dad. Follow us on the LiSTNR app or wherever you get your podcasts.