

# GED\_S01E24\_The\_Good\_Enough\_Dad\_Arne

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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 dad wants to be a lousy dad. Aiming to be a good dad is great. But you know what? Being a good enough dad is so much more important. I'm Maggie Dent, parenting educator and author and champion of boys and men. And this is the good enough dad where I chat with committed, caring, sometimes confused, and often funny dads about all the ways they've discovered to be good enough at this parenting gig. My good enough dad today is Doctor Arne Rubinstein.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:01:06] I also love working with teenagers, but one of the things that's always really disturbed me is how many teenagers I would see in my practice, and how many teenagers I would see in the hospital where I worked, who were really struggling, who were shut down, who were dealing with all sorts of issues, who weren't communicating, who were basically unhappy.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:01:26] That's Arne delivering his TED X talk in Byron Bay in 2013. What he's talking about is the beginning of his life's work. Arne is the CEO and founder of the Rites of Passage Institute, an organisation that helps our young people transition to adulthood. But before he founded this business, he was a GP for 15 years, a husband and a father of two boys. When his two boys were small, he and his wife separated. Jarrett and Jaden are now 33 and 31. Arne repartnered about eight years ago, [00:02:00] and in doing so became a stepdad to two of his partner Catriona's five children. Arne has also an adopted son in Sri Lanka, Mubarak, who was 14 when they

first met. Arne and I have crossed paths many times as we both believe in supporting our boys and our men. Arne, welcome to The Good Enough Dad.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:02:22] Thanks, Maggie. It's great to be here and lovely to see you. I'm always happy when I get to spend time with you Maggie.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:02:27] Let's just wander back into your childhood if we can. You have two siblings. Can you share some memories of your childhood then that you can remember?

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:02:35] Well, I shared a room with my brother until I was 18, 19 years of age. He's two years older than me, so we had the same desks back to back in the middle of the room, and then that sort of divided the room into his side and my side. So he and I had a very, uh, well, same room relationship, and we used to wrestle and tumble and do all that stuff, and there was nothing in the room that could be broken because it had all been broken. But then, interestingly, having said that, we both very much lived our own lives in that space which is interesting. And then my sister, who's two years younger than me, was down the other end of the house. And so whilst I was very close to my brother, my sister is like she was younger and she was growing up in another world, we certainly didn't have anything bad happen to us when we were growing up. My parents stayed together. We stayed in the one house. I went to a good school, but I definitely didn't find school a pleasant or positive experience. Once again, nothing terrible happened, but it just wasn't what I thought it could have been, especially high school. I went to an all boys school. I was on a scholarship to a, you know, top school. I was one of the so-called clever kids, and I just felt alone at school and I felt out of place. And I remembered about 12 years of age going to school. And there's all these big boys and and I remember thinking, I bet I'm the only [00:04:00] boy in this entire school of a thousand who still gets in bed with his mum and has a cuddle in the morning before school, and I remember feeling shame about that. So yeah, I just found school. Probably the most difficult time in my life, if I'm honest.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:04:18] What sorts of antics did you and your brother get up to outside of your bedroom?

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:04:22] Oh well. When Mum and dad weren't home, we were right in to bombs and guns and we had air rifles, and we used to keep our air rifles in the shoe cupboard in our bedroom. Today you have to have a proper gun licence and do a course for a few days and, you know, get a police check to have those guns. But they were just in our cupboard and we would shoot targets. We would shoot the next door neighbour's window because it was a long way away, and you'd shoot the air rifle. And then literally 2 or 3 seconds later we'd hear if you'd hit the window. And also my brother, who was a couple of years older than me, somehow managed to steal a bunch of, um, magnesium and gunpowder. We had gunpowder from our crackers, sorry, because crackers were still legal then, and so we'd make bombs. And as soon as mum and dad were out, we'd make these bombs. And if you put magnesium powder in they're phosphorescent, you know how we didn't blow our hands off or our eyes out I have no idea. And sometimes we'd set the backyard up and we'd put on protection, which is like a, you know, a diving mask. And we'd go at either end of the backyard, which is about probably 20m, and I'd be behind the wheelbarrow and he'd be behind a box, and we'd throw crackers at each other and shoot, um, sky rockets at each other. And, you know, it was we'd just create, like, a war scene out in the backyard. And then when we knew mum and dad were coming our way, we'd sort of pack it all up and go inside.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:05:47] So there weren't many trips to emergency department or anything in that time?

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:05:52] I remember I was using my dad's pocket knife and I nearly cut my thumb off. And I remember my brother came round and it was hanging and he said, oh, we've got, I've got to pull it [00:06:00] off. I've got to pull it off. I said, no, no. And my dad was also a doctor. And he stitched me up. He actually stitched me up a number of times. And that was the first time I ever got in trouble for having hurt myself. Prior to that, when I'd walked into a cupboard or slipped next to the swimming pool and he had to stitch me up, I was like, you know, oh, poor Arne. But this was a sort of a self-inflicted. And it was like, 'no, you can't do that with knives'. We also did a lot on our bikes. I mean, we really got on our bikes and went as far as we could. And the rule was you had to be home by dinner or dark, and that was the only rule. And there were no mobile phones and nothing like that. And if our bikes got a flat tire, I carry the bike home. I never got rescued in my life when I was out on my bike. If I hurt myself, I got myself home and we'd often take crackers and we'd go down the river and throw

crackers at things or try and blow things up. Um, yeah. I mean, we were nice kids, but we still liked blowing things up.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:06:59] So all three siblings in your family have grown up to be high achievers, and you're all quite prominent careers in medicine and psychology. And you were a GP for 15 years. Do you attribute those kind of outcomes to the way that you were parented, do you think?

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:07:17] Uh, yeah, I do. I mean, we had dinner together every night. My dad was a doctor and we'd wait for him to come home. We're having dinner every night. And, um, uh, if he got a glass of wine, we'd have it. We'd get a tiny sip in a glass of wine. I know some people would say that's not a good thing. I don't know, I don't drink, I have no desire to drink 99 days out of a hundred. And we would always have discussions about school and things like that. We'd go to my grandmother's every Friday night for dinner, and she'd want to know what we'd been up to and what had been happening. And my mum always used to say, you know, I'd come home and I'd tell her the mark I got in an exam or a test and I'd say, but everybody else got such and such. And she'd go, I'm not interested in everyone else. I'm interested [00:08:00] in you. And there was an expectation that we would do something. Actually, there was, that expectation was pressure also. I was on a scholarship and, you know, I was lucky to get a good mind. Uh, I can't sing. I can't draw, I'm not great at sport. All the things I'd love to be able to do. But I've got a good mathematical and logical mind. And so there was an expectation that I would do something. And, um, I think that expectation was on all of us. And, uh, yeah, my brother's a really top, top plastic surgeon. And my sister is a high level organisational psychologist who's done very well. And I was yes, I was a general practitioner. I did emergency medicine for many years. And, and then I did this weird thing called rites of passage, which my parents never really understood. And I think my dad, who's 93, to this day wishes that I would come back to Melbourne, buy a house in the street where he lives, and get myself a real job, which is basically becoming a specialist doctor and all of that.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:09:07] I think that dilemma of having high positive expectations that are realistic for our kids and too much parental pressure is something that, you know, where's the line? And it can be different for everyone.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:09:21] I think it's a mixed bag. You know, whatever we do to our kids, whatever we do for or to our kids, if we've got more than one kid, they're going to have a different response to it. And for some kids, the being pushed is exactly what they need. And for other kids, it's a disaster. And it really does come down to every kid is different. And we need to find what is right for that kid. I mean, my brother and I, we used to go to the pool and we used to have to do laps. So I always say whenever I go to a pool, I do laps, because that's what we did as a kid. My brother says when we had to go to a pool, we had to do laps. So when I go to the pool, I don't do laps. Same experience, same pools, but we just responded differently.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:09:59] I love it because [00:10:00] there is still in our education system the perception that's one size fits all and every single child is a one off. That's why parenting can be tricky, because we think, oh, we did that, that'll work. And the next one and you try .. I had four and they're all different. So I can agree with you very hardly there Arne.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:10:17] Yeah I think it's the opposite. And key part of my work is actually that every child is different and every child has their unique gifts and talents, their unique genius and their unique spirit

**Maggie Dent:** [00:10:27] And their unique challenges.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:10:29] And their unique challenges.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:10:29] What do you think you've taken forward from the way that you were fathered by your dad? And what have you chosen to do differently?

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:10:39] Well, my father was a strong character and he was an adventurer. He used to ski at the mountains before there were ski tows, and they had to walk up and down. And he was a diver back in the early days of scuba, when they were still sort of working it out. And many of those things. I learnt a lot about that, about the natural world and about adventure. And he was always trying new things and had an insatiable curiosity. So those things I learned. He was also a hard worker and definitely provided and looked after us children, and we had all of our needs. So that I learnt and that I hope I've taken forward. Where it got tricky was that he probably did no better than

me and wanted to keep telling me what to do, and that was okay when I was little. But for about 13/14 I didn't want to be told what to do, and if I'd asked him a question about something, I'd sort of felt like I was getting a lecture. And so I basically stopped asking him questions and stopped talking to him because, you know, I just found it too difficult. And so what I've tried to learn on that level and not taken forward with my dad is I try whenever I can, to ask my sons, what do they think they should do? What's their idea, to get their thoughts first and to try and discipline myself, which doesn't necessarily come naturally, but to discipline myself [00:12:00] not to be telling them all the answers and how to live their lives. Because I feel it when it goes badly and all of a sudden they're defensive and they feel like we've dropped into that sort of space.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:12:17] So you were married to your Canadian sweetheart, Karina, and were on your way to becoming a dad at 25, which is pretty young. Do you reckon you were ready for that experience?

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:12:29] No way! I had no idea. I was a kid. I was a kid, you know. I had no idea. And it was a it was a massive growing up experience. Karina and I met at my brother's wedding, and I was the best man. And she was the maiden of honour. And she was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen in my life. And I fell head over heels with her straight away. I mean, I'm 25 years old, and six weeks later we were living together in Australia, and six weeks after that we were pregnant and I was doing final year medicine, and I had about three different jobs and completely had no idea how to manage it and didn't have anyone who I could talk to, not really talk to. I just had people telling me what to do, and it was very challenging for my parents and very challenging for me. And I used to say, I feel like I'm being pulled by wild horses, you know, in two different directions and have to choose between my wife and my family. And it shouldn't be that way.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:13:27] The concept of looking into the eyes of that first born son. Do you remember, do you remember that moment when you've met this precious child, even though you had all the drama around the edges?

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:13:39] The day that my son was born was, you know, probably the most beautiful day of my life, along with the day when my second son was born. And, you know, it's astonishing how there were all these issues going on, and they just

melted away. And I remember my parents, who were so aghast that I was marrying an older woman who was from [00:14:00] overseas and, you know, the drama there. And then as soon as Jarrah was born, they were in the hospital and they just instantly fell in love. And that was extraordinary and beautiful. And then there's another story I've never told, and I'm going to tell it here, and I'm going to try not to cry. And that is that my grandmother hadn't spoken to me basically since we announced we were pregnant, and she was very angry about it. There are some other factors. Anyway, so we had our son in a birthing centre, they let you out within 24 hours. So let's say 18 hours after Jarrah was born, we could drive home and we lived about an hour out of Melbourne, and I drove via my grandmother's place, and I took Jarrah out of the car, and I went up to the front door, and I knocked on the door and Nana opened it, and I put Jarrah in her arms.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:14:49] I said, Nana, this is your great grandson. He wants to know you. And I left and I went. I got back in the car and I went for a drive around the block a couple of times with Karina, and then we came back. We went into Nana's place, and it was the first time Karina had ever been in in Nana's place, and Nana was holding Jarrah, you know, completely in love and, you know, beautiful, beautiful. And we stayed there and we had a cup of tea and and then as we left, my Nana, bless her, who passed away some years ago, she pressed into my hands a jar of her homemade pickled cucumbers. And that's when I knew that I was back in the, you know, the sort of the okay books. It was a high drama for me. High stakes moment. This is my son. This is my grandmother, who I adore. At 25, what do you do? And my my answer was to go there and give her Jarrah and she and Jarrah were very close for for the entirety of her life.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:15:52] That was just a brilliant, brilliant motivation that made you do that. Because words can't always work when experience [00:16:00] can, and I, I've still got a lump in my heart with that beautiful story. So when you were 28, three years into your marriage, there was a significant breakdown in the family. Can you just walk us through what happened with that time of your life?

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:16:15] Oh, look, it was just difficult. The truth is that from our meeting, yes, we fell head over heels in love at a wedding. But it was just a difficult time. And we were both young and we were both ill equipped. And we didn't have the the backup or the training. And we'd had a second child by this stage. And I was working,

you know, as a doctor and doing huge hours. And Karina was having to look after the kids. And we always said, once both the kids can sleep through the night and feed themselves at the table, then things will get easier. And basically we got to a point where they slept through the night and they could feed themselves, and clearly things weren't easier and Karina just felt she needed to go back home. And she did. And she left me with the kids, and I had the kids on my own. They were 18 months and three and a half years old. So one and three years old, both in nappies. And I'll just pre-empt because I've heard, many times people have said to me, oh, how could she do that? How could she do that? I never felt that way for a moment. I always felt she looked after the kids for three and a half years and being pregnant before that, and it was always hard, and I was absent a lot of the time, and she just needed to go and find her...

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:17:33] She just needed to do what she needed to do. And I made a decision. And this, it happened very quickly. It did happen sort of over a very short period of time. I just made a decision that my role was not to question her actions if I was going to be a man, my role was to support the kids as much as I could. And, you know, I feel like I've made, say, maybe 3 or 4 really fundamentally important good decisions in my life. [00:18:00] And that was one of them, that my job was to look after the kids and do everything I could for them. So the entire time that we were on our own together, which was about six months, I always just made it just like mum's gone to the shops or gone to visit someone. She's coming back. I was always just, mummy's coming back. It was never, oh, woe is us and we don't have mum here and all of that. And, um, you know, the truth is it was the hardest six months of my life. The whole dream of or belief that you have one wife, one house, one family. You know, all that stuff evaporated overnight. And I spent a significant period of time curled up on the ground in a ball over the first weeks. It was incredibly difficult. I had to sort of completely change my work, and I was a doctor and I owned a practice and all of that, but it was also one of the most beautiful times in my life.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:18:52] Like I felt all the mother energy in me coming out. I started cooking, I started cutting out little fairies and gnomes from magazines and sticking them in the kids rooms. It was the first time I had to put someone else's needs in front of mine. I couldn't just go to the gym or go surfing if I wanted to. Like we'd be all packed up in the car ready to go, and Jarrod would say, daddy, I left my something behind. So it doesn't matter. We're going, daddy, I have to have a wee, I'd say we'll do it when we get



there. Daddy, I'm gonna have a poo, right? We have to go. We have to get in the house. And I'm. You know, I just can't race out if the kids need something. And how many times I got called away from work because I had to do something. It was actually a really, really special time for the three of us. Yeah. And every morning they'd be in my bed cuddling and, you know, all of those beautiful things about little ones. We had great adventures together. If I want to go out somewhere at night, I'd have to take them along if I wanted to go. And just lots of beautiful things happen.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:19:56] So I think there's two things I want to pick up there. And the first one is that beautiful thing [00:20:00] that you just said, we know from the science of child development that for a child to thrive later in life, they need one secure attachment with a minimum of one human. And that that was you for that patch. And secondly, I love that you've just said because remember, we were conditioned for centuries that really it was women's work that men couldn't. But you're right, that there's a drive within caring parents, regardless of gender, to be able to do the mothering. If we're put in that position. I see that happening with a great big shift, that that's what men are stepping up with these big hearts, and they are capable of loving deeply and caring. And so I, I love that you own the fact that: I was able to shift and see and meet the needs of my little ones. In that moment when Karina came back, she took the boys to Tasmania. And ... While you were in Mullumbimby. So how was that after being full time? And how did you kind of be a dad from a distance.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:20:59] Well it was very challenging. You know, Karina came back and for a while we sort of shared the parenting and, and lived around in different parts. And then, as you say, she moved to Tasmania and all of a sudden the boys weren't with me. And so, you know, I could call them and I'd try and go there on holidays or have them come to me on holidays. And it was very difficult. And I discovered that there's a thing that happens at airports at the end of school holidays, where you go there and you drop your kids off and you watch them walking off to the plane, and there's another 6 or 10 parents doing exactly the same thing. If you're a single parent and you've done it, you'll know what I mean. If you're not, you'll miss it. You won't see it. And we'd all be standing there and crying as our kids are walking off. And what I was happy about is that the kids would walk and I'd see them chatting on the tarmac, and they wouldn't even look back at me. And I thought, well, actually, that's the best. They're not going away crying. But it was very difficult and I'd go down there when I could. And then I

remember being challenged by a friend [00:22:00] who said, you know, you do all this work, you need to do more. And I thought about that, and I was initially quite offended by it. And then it's like, yeah, okay, I do need to do more. So I made a commitment that I would get there more often.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:22:15] And if they ever had any big events, like a first football game or something that I could get to, I would just go down there to be there. But it's not an easy thing and you can .. I don't think we had zoom then, we had phone calls. But phone calls aren't the same. They're just not the same. The kids have got something else going on. So it was challenging. And then as they got older, my youngest always used to say to me, oh, you know, come and live down here with us. And I'd say, look, I can't. I've got this work, I do. I'm really busy. Here we go. You know, I'm busy. I can't just leave. And then when I actually left that work and Jaden was in year 11, I was like, wow, I have no excuse to not go down and live with them, so I'm going to do that. I made a decision on the moment, so I actually went down and lived with Jaden for a year when he was in year 12 and got a house in Hobart, and I had a room for my other son who would come and stay with us during the week and live with them, just supporting them. And in a way that was a real bookend from the beginning, when I really put in for them and at the end of their school time, when I spent a year away from home, didn't know anyone. Just living with them in Hobart was also very difficult and very special.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:23:34] Interesting how that is an age that you work with now, isn't it about consolidating that relationship? I think that's beautiful because that's what you end up doing.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:23:34] Being a stepdad can be very different to being a biological dad, and [00:24:00] you've been one for almost a decade. Can you share some advice for those other dads out there who are who are being that bonus dad?

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:24:09] Yeah, well, I found step fathering quite tricky. So my partner's children, when I met them, her daughter was 12, 13 and her son was 11. And I've always felt being a stepfather is different from being a father, so I can't discipline them. I can't make them do things, but I can talk to them. And they were also very different. So with my stepson, one of the first things I said to him, you know, I'm spending time with your mum and I just want you to know, I'll always look after her. And

just for you to know if there's anything you want to ask me or any way I can help you, you can do that. And whether or not he understood it, I took him outside. We were sitting under the stars in the country. And, you know, it was important that I said that to him. And my stepson, who I always consider as a super talent, also tends to get himself in trouble. And so I've had a number of opportunities when he's been in trouble just to sort of try and support him. But every now and again I'll say to him, hey, I'm going to have a stepfather conversation with you. Going to the farm? Great. But rolling the car, you're better than that.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:25:22] Not okay, and it's dangerous. And, you know, just whatever it is, if there's something I feel I need to say to him, I'll preface it and I'm going to have a stepfather conversation, you know, and I'll say, look, I can't tell you what to do, but this is what I think. And I feel like my relationship with him has become closer and closer. But I was also very aware, you know, definitely for the first few years I was not their father and at times they were very resentful of that.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:25:46] No matter how good you are as a stepfather, most of these children want their father at home, want their father in the bed, not some strange man. So it's not about logic. It's about their emotions and their emotions [00:26:00] are they want mum and dad together at home. So you just gotta be in there for the long run. And the long run is many, many years. And then with my stepdaughter, it was completely different because when I met her, she was a really gorgeous, sweet, loving, organised, caring child. And then, I don't know, there's about maybe 4 or 5 months after I met her, when she was about 13, she went to bed one night and she woke up in the morning.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:26:25] She was a monster and she was angry. And my my partner Catroina used to say, when you come in the house, don't talk to her, don't look at her. Just keep walking. She wants to approach you, that's fine. But you don't approach her. Just leave her be. And that was very difficult because occasionally she was very sweet to me. But then on other times she was outright rude or just ignore me or just have a phone in front of her face while she's talking to me, or that, you know, that was difficult time. And then at about 17 or 18 years of age, one night she went to bed and she woke up in the morning. She was beautiful, sweet young woman, and it stayed that way. But I've got a degree of post-traumatic stress still from that period of time. But,

you know, she also knows that if she has trouble or a problem, that she can approach me and I'll support her, but it's just, yeah, it's time and it's challenging. Yeah. And you're not, I'm not their father. And I can't pretend to be their father.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:27:25] No, they've already got one.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:27:26] Correct.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:27:26] It's a really important thing to remind them you've already got one. And I think the biggest thing that worries lots of kids when, you know, parents have separated and partnered, if it was a, you know, what they remember was a positive experience, they want them back together. However, what they really want is they want their parent, whoever they partner with, to be happy. That's actually what they really want as they grow forward. And often that coincides with the teenage years, which isn't always with great clarity. So, um, you're absolutely right. Just honoring ... I'm going. I'm here to look after your mum. Is is probably a [00:28:00] really good step as a step dad.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:28:01] Yeah. And they, actually it's interesting you say that, very pertinent that you say that because I think what has sort of got me over the line, so to speak, and they've said to me, you know, we know you're good for mum.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:28:18] Arne what motivated you to become involved with running the camps that you now run for boys and young men in their dads on your property?

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:28:27] Well, at the time I was working as an emergency medicine doctor, part time and part time in general practice, which made up about full time and a half. We're talking like 1993. It's not long after I became a single dad and come back and I had a few days free, and I actually ended up going to a men's program and it was four days. And I was astonished to find that all the men, basically, were dealing with the same issues. And there were five issues that I identified in the men, and the first was unresolved stuff with their fathers. The biggest one, their fathers hadn't recognised them or acknowledged them, or told them they loved them or proud of them. You know, they always felt that their fathers were judging them and negatively. So that was the first one. The second one for the men was, what am I supposed to be doing with my life? I know it's not what I'm doing now. What's my what am I actually here for? What's my real

mission? The third one was, when am I going to feel like I actually am a man, rather than a boy in a man's body? The fourth one was how in the world do I be in a relationship in a healthy way? Because I've never had any education in that and had bad role modeling. And the fifth one was for those who are fathers, how do I be a good father? What does it even mean to be a good father? Then someone said, like, imagine if there'd been something for us when we were teenagers, how different our lives could have been.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:29:52] And I'd noticed during that time in general practice, after my wife and I separated, instead of spending 10 or 15 minutes with the patient, I made [00:30:00] 2 or 3 appointments each day for an hour. And I'd really get into people's stories, especially the older ones. And I realised that so many of the issues the older ones were dealing with actually started when they were teenagers, and they were compensating and had been compensating ever since they were teenagers. Anyway, back at the men's thing, someone said, imagine if there'd been something for us. And that was when I first heard the word rites of passage and doing something to support boys in that transition from boy to man. And from that gathering, they decided to run something for boys and men. And they asked me along, I think, because I was a doctor and they wanted to be a credibility or something, and we took 27 men and boys out in the bush for three days, some with their fathers, some with mentors, and something profound happened in those few days. It wasn't just a good program, it was profound. Those boys sitting there listening to the stories of men being able to ask them questions, all of these things was extraordinary.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:31:00] And so I started organizing one of these rites of passage camps every year from then on through the 1990s, and I started reading up and researching rites of passage all over the world and found that every community, every traditional indigenous community, would always create a rite of passage for their boys when they would be becoming young men and their girls when they were becoming young women. And I could see that this work was changing people's lives, literally changing their lives. And I was getting more and more frustrated with medicine because medicine is a noble profession, but the system is not noble. The system is, I'm sorry to say, nowadays, corrupted. And a lot of it's about making money and all of that. So I just made a decision, another one of my "big decisions" to leave medicine and, um, see if I could set up rites of passage around Australia and start running these camps, which I

did. And that was 25 years [00:32:00] ago. And we set up camps in about 70 communities and schools around Australia and probably 25 countries around the world now. And looking at something like 350, 400,000 people have been through the programs. And it's really about how can we make this mainstream, how can we make it that every boy and girl gets an opportunity to go through a rite of passage, rather than having something traumatic happen to them, which defines their passage from child to adult.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:32:28] So these camps, you know, and I'm just focusing on boys and dads. You've said it gives them an opportunity to connect deeply and to hear truth telling. And it is pretty ancient that knowledge. So why do you think, you know, father-son disconnection is so common, especially in the 21st century Arne?

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:32:47] I think for a lot of fathers we didn't get a lot of sort of fathering education. In fact, a lot of us, we sort of feel like how we want to be as fathers is the opposite for many men to how they were fathered. And I think, you know, it's the busyness. It's the men are out at work, kids are at school. Mum does 90% of the parenting or 95? You know, there's research out which shows that men get an average of eight minutes a day with their children or something ridiculous. I mean, how can you father, on eight minutes a day on average? And technology has just exponentially increased that because, you know, dads are so busy, their mobile phones are there with them all the time. They all work hard to provide for their children, and the kids are on their computers and in their rooms playing their video games. And a lot of the things that used to happen, it's getting harder and harder to do it between fathers and sons. And so we started running these camps. And it's interesting because in the beginning, when I used to talk about Rites of Passage, it was really hard to get support for it. But when I started talking about father-son programs, there were so many men who said, yeah, I want to do that, I'll support that. I want to be involved in [00:34:00] that. And also mothers who said, I want my son and father to do it, because I know that a lot of the problems of my husband came from his own father. So I want him to go on a program with his son. And so we started running these camps, and we've done at different lengths, but now we run a five day camp, fathers and sons. No one's allowed to take mobile phones or anything to do with work or computers or even reading material. They're there together. They're in a tent together. But about a third of the boys, by the way, come with a mentor, a grandfather, an uncle, a stepfather, because that's how

many the percentage of absent fathers we have. And one of the most beautiful things that we do is every day we sit in a circle around a fire. Man, boy, man, boy, man, boy, and we get the men to tell a story. And the first story they tell on the first night is what was life like for them when they were the age of the boy they've brought on this camp and what was their relationship like with their own father? And can I tell you, I'd say a half or so or more of the men cry these big, tough, successful, capable men cry because they had such unsatisfactory relationships with their own fathers, and about 1 in 10, 1 in 15 tell a beautiful story of having loved spending time with their father, who loved spending time with them about the things they did together, about how their father taught them things, listened to them, showed them things. Yeah, they're the stories. And the boys are listening to this. They're listening to all the stories. And at the end when we say to the boys, if you become a father and you have a son or a daughter, what would you like your child to say about you? And the answers we get from those boys have been sitting there for maybe two hours just listening. The answers we get are profound and beautiful and deep,

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:35:57] And that's how we pass on the wisdom and knowledge. [00:36:00] Not by telling them what to do, but by sharing our stories. And it's equally as profound for the men to share their own stories and to hear the stories of other men. And so, yeah, it's a very powerful process.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:36:14] Do you think in some way that these camps and you passing on knowledge, do you think it's addressing what you may not have got from your dad or something that you may have got from your dad?

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:36:26] Look, I think it's different for everyone, to be honest. But what it does do, it's really powerful for the boys to hear it, but it's also really powerful for the men to think about how they are as fathers and to think about what do they want to do more of and what do they want to do differently? And also to think about the changing relationship. Because the other thing is, I think about my own boys until they were about 10 or 11. Daddy's a superhero. Daddy can do everything. Daddy knows everything. Got a problem? Tell dad all of that. And then around, you know, puberty, that all changes, and dad becomes, you know. Oh, dad. Oh, you're a goose. You're this, you're that. And friends are much more important. So it's also about how do we reset this relationship. And we speak to the men that, you know, when the boys are young

and you're the dad and they're the boy, you've got a legitimate power dynamic which is actually supposed to be there. We're supposed to set boundaries and show them things, but once they become teenagers and reach puberty, it's got to move to a much more, hey, I'm still your dad, but we're on a similar level in many ways.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:37:32] We're both men, and we have to walk along in life together and support each other. And then eventually, eventually, the boy may well end up supporting the father. You know, my dad's 93. I now, you know, take responsibility for him. So that option for you to have five days away from technology, really thinking about how you want to be as a father, how you can be the best father you can to support your son through these years, and also for the boys [00:38:00] to think about what sort of fathers and how do they want to be in their relationship with their own dads, and how can they actually start looking after and supporting their own dads? You know, we do a whole visioning session towards the end where they sit and they share about how they would like their relationship to be in five years from now. This is after they'd been out in the bush, and all sorts of things have happened over the days and incredibly powerful conversations. And then you see a man and a boy leaning in discussing, looking at each other about how they want their relationship to be in five years time. It's one of the most beautiful things you'll ever see.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:38:38] I have come across not only the men I've worked with, but also in the surveys I've done. How hungry a lot of dads were to hear their own father say they loved them. And it's such a fundamental thing. And I'm finding again, sometimes dads tell me. I just find it hard to say. But I know it's one of the things that definitely we both promote is that you need to hear those words out of your father's mouth at some point, and if you can't, I've encouraged them writing notes as a first base, and I've heard so many beautiful stories back from dads who have written the note to their son, because I couldn't say it, but the son read the note, and it was right there in that moment. And massive shifts happen in the heart when you hear those words from your father.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:39:23] It's a really interesting thing that you say there, because my father. So I'm I'm nearly 60, actually, my father and my generation, our fathers worked really hard, and their way of showing love was to be off at work, providing for the family and their generation didn't tend to say that they loved us. And so there's a lot



of men my age who that's what they really need. What we're finding is with the boys these days, the fathers do say they love them, and a lot of the fathers say it every single day because they never got it. But what the boys today want to hear is that their fathers are proud of them. That [00:40:00] as well as love what they really need to hear, that their fathers are proud of them. And we actually have a beautiful ceremony we do on our campus, which is called honouring, and it's part of recognising the unique gifts and talents and genius and spirit of each of the boys at the end of the camp, one at a time, the boys sit on a chair in front of everyone who's on the camp or the other boys, fathers, facilitators, everyone, and their father comes up and in front of everyone tells his son what gifts he sees, that he has, what he admires about him, what he's proud of, what he loves about him.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:40:33] And the fathers say a bunch of things that they see in their sons that they think are special and they are proud of and love about them. And that is a life changing experience for the young men and for the fathers. You see the young men, they sit up higher in their chair. Their chest swells a little bit. They're probably about five centimetres taller when they get off the chair, compared to when they get got on the chair. You see, the dads often get emotional and cry, and that for a boy, a young man, to sit there and be publicly recognised and honored by his father in front of his peers and other older men, that changes their lives. And when I go back to my first ever men's program in 1993, when the biggest issue facing men was never having been acknowledged by their fathers, and here we are in there, 15, 16 years old, 17 years old. And exactly what is happening is their fathers are acknowledging them. That can change the course of their lives.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:41:37] We all muck up as parents. So I'm going to ask you if you can share one of your parenting fails that you regret as a dad?

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:41:47] Oh look, I think probably my inherent selfishness where, you know, I put my work as a priority and I put my fitness as a priority, and [00:42:00] I would still go and do what I felt was important. And really, my kids couldn't give a rat's ass about how important my stuff was. They just wanted me around and they just wanted my one on one attention. And if I had my time again, so to speak, would be doing, I'd just be spending more time with them. And, you know, it's interesting my oldest son lives in Canada, and I go and visit him, and I get between five days and a

week, ten days with him in Vancouver. And now when I go there, I just do whatever he wants, whatever he wants, and he backs the Chelsea Football Club, and he loves movies and he loves fast food. So I just spend a week walking around with him and we go to the, there's a pub which shows all the Chelsea football games. We go and watch all the games that are on. We go to a few movies, we eat heaps of food, we have long conversations, we play disc golf every night because he loves disc golf and we had the best time in the world. I love it, he loves it. It's just going into his world and being there with him.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:43:07] Yeah, I think it's the greatest gift we can give our kids is our real presence, isn't it?

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:43:11] Yeah.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:43:12] We keep forgetting that. We realise it sometimes too late. Now we all have fears about our kids and your lads are now young men. What worries do you have for them now?

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:43:24] I have worries for them. Um, but I also acknowledge that they're now young men and I can't solve their problems anymore. I can be available if they want to speak to me, which they may or may not want to, because I can have a tendency to tell them the solutions, and they don't really want me to do that. You know, mental health is always a worry. From when they were young. It's like, oh, you know, what are my kids going to be like when they grow up? Are they going to have, you know, significant mental health issues? That's always been a fear of mine and just being happy, finding the right partner and being happy that they're the main [00:44:00] fears and things I want for them.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:44:02] So one of the favorite parts I have in these chats, Arne, is one of your biggest wins. What do you think is one of your finest moments as a dad?

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:44:12] Uh, well, I made a decision together with my sons when they were young that every year we would have an adventure together and it would either be one on one or the three of us. And we've done things like go on road trips, go away surfing somewhere, go skiing in Japan, go hot air ballooning, all sorts of different

things. And we try and still do that. And I'll still get a phone call sometimes, and one of my sons will be on the phone and I'll be and I'll hear daddy. And they don't often call me daddy. So when they say, daddy, I know there's something up. You know, daddy, we haven't organised our adventure yet this year. What are we going to do? And so I still try and make it that every year I get some one on one time with each of them. It's just us doing something that we both want to do, and that's very special.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:44:59] So there's another side to that, that I learned from a very wise man who I worked with in Western Australia around wheat belt Men's Health. And that is, he says, when you make a promise to your son, whether it's a once a week catch up or it's a serious thing like you've promised, don't break the promise. And it is something really significant because it means something. And I, I just love that you're going to keep doing that.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:45:28] What is the one thing you would like your boys to have learned from you as their dad, as they move into life?

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:45:39] I hope, and I believe they will be just really loving present fathers who enjoy their children. You know, we had such a beautiful time when they were little and when they were growing up. But just that fathering, where they do things with their kids and they're warm and affectionate to them and, and are there for them, [00:46:00] they are present rather than some authority figure who's sitting at the end of the table and holding court, so to speak.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:46:09] And your last question, if you could wind back the clock to back to when you were, what, 25 just before you became a dad, what piece of advice would you give to yourself about the journey that you were about to embark with becoming a dad and a step dad?

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:46:25] Find older men and women who you can talk to as mentors, and hear their stories, and listen to some of the ancient mythology that came out of Africa and Greece and various places like that, because a lot of the issues that I had that were, I thought were completely unique to me are not, you know, that one I spoke about right at the very beginning when I said I felt like I was in a battle between my wife to be and my mother, I thought I was the first person, the first man who'd ever

had that issue. And then about a year after we separated, I heard a story, The Lizard in the Fire, which is an African story that speaks to exactly that. And the boy has to make a choice between his mother and his woman, and the one who he doesn't choose dies. And the answer is, actually, you're supposed to choose his woman because that's his woman, and that's who's going to, he's going to spend his life and have his children with. And in choosing his woman, it actually changes the relationship with his mother, which is what's supposed to happen. If he keeps running back to his mother every time he's got a problem, and every time he's having an argument with his wife, that's going to go badly on every level.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:47:49] And it's a harsh story. But, you know, these ancient myths, they don't mess around. It's about life lessons. And the life lesson there is, if you commit to a woman, she is [00:48:00] your number one priority. Doesn't mean you don't love your mother, doesn't mean you don't do good things for your mother. But in that story, your woman comes first. And interestingly, I'll just quickly finish, I did have another long term relationship and a marriage, and in that one, I remember when my mother started sort of saying a few things. I said, mum, this is after I've heard this story, this is going to be my partner and my woman. If you want to be in our lives, you have to accept her. And my mum became best friends with that woman and basically until my mother passed away, she always used to ask about her. How is she going? What's she doing? She loved her because she realised that to be in our lives, we were going to be a family. And this is the person who I've chosen, and that's how it's going to be.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:48:48] This is something that has come up a lot in the farming circles, when often the son marries and is on the farm and the folks are close by. And one of the things I kept saying is that we need to, when our boys leave home, they need to go with both their testicles, and that it's impossible for mum to be still holding on to one and expect that's not okay. They need to leave with both, and what they do with it after that is because they're on a journey to being a man in an intimate relationship. Absolutely right. They can still love their mum.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:49:21] Only you would express it that way. But I love it, I love it, yeah, I love it. Thank you.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:49:27] Oh, Arne I love chatting to you and thank you again for your time.

**Arne Rubinstein:** [00:49:32] My pleasure Maggie, and thank you for having me on your show.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:49:36] Arne Rubenstein, founder and CEO of the Rites of Passage Institute. Arne had some great ideas , it was a pretty deep conversation about fatherhood and being a boy and a man. So let's add some to our checklist.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:49:54] The first one is that every kid is unique and different, and they have different strengths [00:50:00] and different needs, and that you've got to help work out when we need to push a little more, and when we need to back off a little more. Secondly, stepping up and being a real man as a dad is probably more about putting your kids first rather than you being first. And thirdly, step parenting is about the long game and that you're not their dad. However, kids really want to know, are you good for my mum? Are you going to take care of her? I think that was such an important piece of gold from Arne today.