

GED_S01E25_The_Good_Enough_Dad_Joe

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Anonymous Female: [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 Joe Williams.

Joe Williams: [00:01:07] Our people, we are the oldest people on earth. With parents rushing back to work, the demand to get things done to earn more money. Our lifestyle is creating an ongoing traumatic cycle in the way we parent our kids. We need to return to and continue the paths of our old people for what we did worked. What we're doing now isn't.

Maggie Dent: [00:01:36] That's part of a keynote speech that Joe gave at the World Indigenous Suicide Prevention Conference in 2021. In it, Joe spoke about how childhood trauma and adversity impacts our behaviours as adults, but that's probably not how you know Joe, most people know him from his career in the NRL or in the professional boxing ring. Wow. Joe played [00:02:00] for South Sydney Rabbitohs, Penrith Panthers and Canterbury Bulldogs from 2004 to 2008 before transitioning to professional boxing. Today, he's an adjunct associate professor at the University of Queensland's School of Psychology who works in suicide prevention and mental wellbeing. Joe is a proud Wiradjuri Walgalu man, a dad of five; Brodi, 19, Phoenix, 17,

Rome, 12, Ari ten, and Frankie, six, and partner to Courtney. Joe, welcome to The Good Enough Dad.

Joe Williams: [00:02:34] I told you that I was an emotional wreck. I told you I was an emotional person, didn't I? Um, hearing in that stuff. You know, sometimes when I hear my bio read out, I'm on stage and you dissociate a little bit, you know, and you just go, you're in, you're in what you're supposed to be doing. And but to hear it back. I guess talking about the stuff that I do now, which is so much more important than throwing a footy around and getting punched in the head for a living. I can't, and I don't regret anything that has ever happened that that I've ever experienced because it's it's led me to who I am and what I do now. So. Um, I'm really grateful. To be who I am, to be on the path that I am. But I'm also extremely grateful, Maggie, to be here with you today.

Maggie Dent: [00:03:22] Ah, thanks for that. I just want to say, there's this thing that a beautiful woman called Alison Armstrong talked about the stages of boy to man. So you're a page boy. You're a knight. You become a prince. And often the prince is striving, you know, doing all the things you did. And then you become a king. And the king is where all the bullshit gets peeled away. And you actually realise you can make a real difference. And that's that's where you're at now. And you have to have all that other stuff sometimes to get to that which is committed to making, you know, making a difference that really [00:04:00] matters.

Joe Williams: [00:04:01] Well, I'll put it in the context of our old people is that we had processes from boy to manhood, but but they were also about responsibility and you go through all these different things as as a young person and as a young person or a young boy. That journey is about learning and it's about, you know, stubbing your toe here and there. But it's also about the grandfathers and the uncles and the aunties and they pull you into line. And and you'll notice how I said then I didn't mention mums or dads. I mentioned uncles and aunties and grandparents, pull you into line because the mums and dads were the authoritarians and they say, hey, you don't do that. Then the uncles and the aunties say, hey, you leave him alone. Let me teach him. Let me tell him what to do. The way that our family systems have been broken down over 250 odd years. It's been a real challenge and a lot of the challenges in our communities, and they're well documented, a lot of the challenges in our communities are the challenge of walking between those two worlds and having our old ways that worked for thousands

of years completely broken down, torn away, and to this point where we're so colonised and into this new world that we just don't fit. It's really easy to say, yeah, but, you know, this is the way it is now. This is the modern way, but when you've had storytellers for for thousands of years that just passed down these oral traditions and, and modelled these behaviours that we have, you can see how it's really problematic. And I'll go back to, let's call it the rite of passage of of our old ways. You know, it wasn't about our young boys going away and then all of a sudden, becoming an adult, like is what we probably see in the Western world now. You turn 18 and you go and get absolutely.

Maggie Dent: [00:05:48] You think an age defines you as a man, it's so not that.

Joe Williams: [00:05:50] It's like it's about it's about the responsibility that you learn throughout those times and when, when you're on those paths of those times of learning, those teaching moments, [00:06:00] it's about the obligation you come back with. And the obligations are who you are now and the way that community viewed you, but a way that you also have to have and hold up these responsibilities and obligations to yourself, for yourself, and for the young people.

Maggie Dent: [00:06:24] What was this morning like in the family home, or what does a normal morning look like for you? Getting them out the door. Is there chaos or calm?

Joe Williams: [00:06:32] What it was like to what it's like now is completely different. Admittedly, I'm not home a lot because of my work being on the road and so forth, and I'm probably doing my best to transition to that. I am at home more, but I've been away for for a week now. On the time that we're there, we're recording this, this chat. Um, and it's killing me to get back home. I really want to get back home because I miss the morning.

Maggie Dent: [00:06:56] You probably love a chaotic morning because you're home. You don't care what's going down!

Joe Williams: [00:06:59] I miss the morning ritual.

Maggie Dent: [00:07:01] What is your morning ritual?

Joe Williams: [00:07:02] So the morning ritual is dad and music. I like to wake my kids up, particularly my little boy, Ari. I like to wake him up with music and dance because he's a grump when he gets out of bed. So I try and wake him up with laughter. And me just being a clown and being a goose and sneaking into bed with him. And you know, if I've got a bit of stubble on my chin waking him up with that and and because he's a grump, you know, and then, you know, Frankie, I've been on the lounge for years. Right? So Frankie comes in and wakes me up, usually, on the couch. So she's and she's, you know, she's a ball of fun in the morning because she's the sort of kid.

Maggie Dent: [00:07:41] She's the lark.

Joe Williams: [00:07:42] She's the sort of.. Lark. She's the sort of kid that opens her eyes and goes a million miles an hour to the moment she goes to bed. Where Ari, Ari is is, um, you know..

Maggie Dent: [00:07:54] He's the owl, he's going to come good later in the day. I reckon you're going to find.

Joe Williams: [00:07:57] He's a he's a very sensitive kid. Yeah. [00:08:00] So if there's too much noise or if there's if you come in there screaming and get up, you know, you gotta get to bed. A lot of parents don't realize that we wake our kids up in the morning with this sense of immediate, that they have to get going, from the bounce and have.

Maggie Dent: [00:08:18] Kids actually don't have any concept of time.

Joe Williams: [00:08:19] We're screaming at them from the moment they open their eyes, and then we, and then we wonder why they don't have a bad day, like a good day at school. Like that's what they're being woken up with. And for me, I guess the real beauty of who I am continuing to grow into as a man and as a dad is understanding that we need to wake up with a soft and really gentleness with our kids to try and put them off. We cannot expect our kids to have a good day at school if they're triggered the moment they woke up.

Maggie Dent: [00:08:51] One thing I love about that, that you probably don't know the science around it, is that music and song, um, is incredibly soothing for the nervous

system. So one of the things that can help is playing nature sounds gently in the background will actually help all of them regulate into a nicer space. So you intuitively have done something that science.

Joe Williams: [00:09:11] I'm well aware of the science in that as well.

Maggie Dent: [00:09:13] Great. So there you go.

Joe Williams: [00:09:14] Because it's about education, educating myself. And I'm aware of the science of dance as well. So I wake the kids up with music and dance.

Maggie Dent: [00:09:26] Can you paint a picture of your childhood in a way before playing football as a young teen, did you have siblings? What do you remember that you did most as a boy?

Joe Williams: [00:09:35] Footy was my job for a lot of years, but also footy was everything I wanted to do and be as a kid, you know? And I was lucky that in our house I had my older brother and my two younger sisters and, you know, other other siblings as well, because my dad played in the Winfield Cup, you know, like so it was always I just wanted to be that. And I wanted to, I wanted to be everything, like my big brother, if I'm honest. Um, and it was, you know, I was the annoying, the annoying little kid that hangs around [00:10:00] the older, the older siblings and that. So I wanted to be like my older brother and, and his friend's dad played footy in Sydney first and then went back to the bush and in Cowra, I guess we were a recognised family and name within Cowra. Probably like the country a lot back then, and we're a lot more progressive now. But the racial divide within the country. But footy at times was the great leveller, but it was the great leveller. When it was working for you, when you were going against teams.

Joe Williams: [00:10:31] There was also the quick racial jibe to try and put you back into into your place, you know. So we're a sporting family. Um, but we were a communal family, because of the sport, because of the community, because we're an Aboriginal family. There was always gatherings, always things like that. So I was really lucky to have a big mob, big mob around us. And. Like. Yes, it's shaped who I've become, without a doubt, as a dad now. But everything was about sport, but everything without knowing it, you know, we probably talk about how we. We don't have a lot of didn't have

a lot of culture growing up, but when you look back and you look at the depth of it, we really did have culture, but it wasn't the cultural dance or ceremony and things like that, but it was culture of kin gathering and kin families and being connected with country, those sort of things. So we had a hell of a lot of that. And the values of how we were raised, I think was important and has helped me to be who I am now.

Maggie Dent: [00:11:33] Well, who would you say was your main role model as a male? I know you've talked about your dad. Were there were other significant, you know, because we talk about one of the big indicators at the moment in the Western world is boys raised without fathers and father images, and that leads to a whole lot of social challenges. So who else?

Joe Williams: [00:11:54] Well, I was I was lucky to be around sport. So I was always in a team environment. And whilst I was [00:12:00] playing, you know, as a young kid playing, I, I was I signed my first NRL scholarship contract at a very young age. So I was, I was thrust into this elderly environment because of, you know, I went from playing a season in the under 13s to the next year, playing in the under 18s, and I had my first first grade trial at 13 year old. And then the next year I played under eighteens again and then come off the bench playing in first grade.

Maggie Dent: [00:12:29] So with the coaches, the old school stuff, shout shame stuff. Or did you have a bit of the ones who were...

Joe Williams: [00:12:35] Because I was 14 at the time, right. Because I was 14 at the time I was one, I was still a kid, but there was expectations as well. And the other thing, I played with my dad.

Maggie Dent: [00:12:43] Wow.

Joe Williams: [00:12:43] So I had a couple of seasons playing, playing next to my dad, and my dad was a bit of a cult country, he'll hate me saying this, but a bit of a cult country hero with, you know, he was an aggressive man on the field. Nobody would cross him on the field. So that kept me looked after really well on the field, you know. Um, but I'll tell you the following season that I played first grade there and I was only 15, mate ... Dad was working away a lot. So they got hold of me. And when they got hold of

me as a 15 year old, they really made sure, like, let's not see if he's good enough or old enough to be out here. Let's see if he's tough enough to be out here. Yeah, and I copped it. Um, and that was just that. That was, I guess, the way of the land as far as the game goes at that point. Like, I was raised in footy teams, and the people that I looked up to and loved as a 15, 16 year old, I still know and and and hang out with those guys now. So I was, I was and we, we go back to as well Aboriginal family, Aboriginal community, a lot of Aboriginal people in our team. So a lot of the parties after footy was Aboriginal people as well. So it was like the village then. You know that, that I was raised in um. And I wouldn't, you know, because everyone knew who I was at that point as [00:14:00] well so I couldn't, I couldn't do the the mischievous stuff of sneaking into pubs at 14, 15 because everyone knew who I was.

Maggie Dent: [00:14:06] Was that, was that a big weight for you? That. Yeah, you know, the expectations on you. We know that positive expectations can be really helpful, but ones that are a bit too big can actually do the opposite. But it was, it worked for you?

Joe Williams: [00:14:20] Oh, I just didn't know what it was. Right. We talk about expectations or pressure. I just didn't know what it was because I'd always done it from a young age, I probably didn't feel it as much until I moved to Sydney. It was like the expectation of he's going to play in the NRL, like when you hear all that, as a young bloke, sometimes the challenge of what that can bring is you start to believe it. Um, so that was.

Maggie Dent: [00:14:45] Or you can get terrified of failing in such a public space.

Joe Williams: [00:14:49] Yeah. Which. And I was lucky. I was lucky that I got to go on and play at that level. But in my own terms, by my own expectations, I didn't get to where I believe I should have.

Maggie Dent: [00:15:03] Okay, you take you out of Cowra and out of the country, into the city. Did you have a network where they ... Did have family? Because that's one of the big challenges in AFL, because I come from Nicky Winmar country. That can be really hard. If you've had that great kinship of all your own mob to suddenly be placed in, you know, it's a wonderful opportunity. What? How was that for you?

Joe Williams: [00:15:25] Yeah, it was probably that was the biggest challenge, right? The only family I had was football. The only family I had was the team environment. And I didn't know anyone when I came down.

Maggie Dent: [00:15:36] And what were you 15?

Joe Williams: [00:15:38] No, I played at the Roosters. We'd moved in Wagga at that point. So we're living in Wagga and I stayed in Wagga till I was uh, I think it was a couple of weeks after turning 17.

Maggie Dent: [00:15:47] Still so young.

Joe Williams: [00:15:48] Until I moved to Sydney and, and I didn't, I didn't know anyone. So again, I was, I was raised and I was hanging out with guys who were 21, 22 that were playing competitive [00:16:00] footy. Even some of the guys that played in playing first grade at that point and that you want to hang out with and you know that the stuff that comes with that of, you know, trying to big note yourself a little bit. So it's a dangerous cycle.

Joe Williams: [00:16:16] I actually said to somebody recently who works in the NRL, I said, and I haven't said this out loud a great deal, but the most disconnected I've ever been as a young person were the years that I was playing in the NRL, because I couldn't, I couldn't authentically be who I was. It was also a time where Aboriginality wasn't celebrated like it is now. And, you know, there's the judgments or preconceived ideas of what we think that that is. So it's I was probably dissociated a lot of the years of my life, while all of the years of my life playing in the NRL, I wasn't truly who I was, who I authentically was until I probably put my head on the pillow at night. And that's dangerous. It's dangerous when you're trying to be something.

Maggie Dent: [00:17:03] Unhinged and untethered.

Joe Williams: [00:17:04] Trying to be something you're not.

Maggie Dent: [00:17:05] It's a search for identity is exactly what.

Joe Williams: [00:17:06] One hundred percent that's what it is. The challenge of what that is right, is that when it all falls away and this is where, you know, I speak with a lot of players now that have challenged post their career is that sport becomes an identity. And then when they don't have that anymore, because we want to do it since we're yay high, when we don't have that identity anymore, we go, who am I without this? So I was very lucky that I transitioned quite seamlessly from rugby league, then into boxing, then boxing into the mental health space. But now I can look back and really reflect and go, those were just jobs. That's all they were. And you're a transaction like anyone else. Once you start to get to the end of the career, doesn't matter who you are, how big you are in the sport, you get emptied out.

Maggie Dent: [00:17:55] So I'm just wondering that you had your first child at 21, so you're obviously [00:18:00] in a relationship at that point. So that's probably something that would have been factoring into what you're talking about, feeling disconnected and not my normal self. Do you remember what fatherhood appeared to be for you at that time when you know, because you're also an elite athlete?

Joe Williams: [00:18:16] I was also still fairly disconnected from the identity of being a father, because my priority, and this is something that's just come up right now in this moment, in reflection, um, my priority at that point was probably my job. Yeah.

Maggie Dent: [00:18:34] To provide.

Joe Williams: [00:18:35] Because that was putting money on the table, was putting a roof over our head.

Maggie Dent: [00:18:38] Provide protect.

Joe Williams: [00:18:39] We weren't we weren't in a relationship. Yeah we weren't in a relationship for a long time either. And that was that was with the mother of my my first two kids. She was only young as well. So it was all very new to us. And, you know, she was away from her homelands as well. I was away from home. Both didn't have family. The only family I had was a footy team as such. And it can be really challenging because those environments then of way too much money, too much profile at a young

age where ego is kicking in and the challenges that that brings externally to your football career or your or any type of job that you have can be really problematic. So my early years as a father.

Joe Williams: [00:19:24] I reflect on now and I just go, ah, I cringe a little bit at who that guy was.

Maggie Dent: [00:19:29] But you did nail the biological stuff that we've given in the patriarchy. That is your job only to defend and protect and provide. You are nailing that bit. Weren't you with nobody to actually let you know? Quite. Hang on a minute. A big open hearted dad connection to kids. It wasn't a thing, was it?

Joe Williams: [00:19:50] Oh it wasn't, it wasn't. I guess the last year I was at, I was at Souths. They had a, um, it was like a I won't say it was like a, like a, a creche, [00:20:00] you know, where the, where the mums could take the kids and then somebody would look after the kids whilst the mums could watch the game. That was the first time I remembered anything like that.

Maggie Dent: [00:20:09] Yeah, that's a big shift, right?

Joe Williams: [00:20:11] So, um, that's when the partners and wives could actually go to the footy without worrying about their kids, because mums have this innate sense that, again, protect and look after their kids first. Um, whilst dads do too. I was out on the footy field, you know. Um, so that was the first time. Now that that again reflection, just thinking back to that point was the first time that there was any type of family environment in the early years of my football career.

Maggie Dent: [00:20:43] In the elites. Whereas if you're back in Wagga and you're back in Dubbo around the rugby matches and football matches, families and people everywhere around, what year do you reckon that was? That shift was starting to happen?

Joe Williams: [00:20:55] Oh seven. Yeah, it was my last year at Souths. Oh seven and you know, that's when that's when that that club as well took a real turn around professionalism and the transformation of athleticism. There was a real transition of

when I was at the Rabbitohs from pre Russell Crowe - Peter Holmes a court dates to then post. I was before and after those times. So you really saw that shift. Yeah, just the cultural shift then around family and and events with family and things like that, which is, which is good.

Maggie Dent: [00:21:37] We've all mucked up as parents so I want you to dig into your memory bank and think of one specific failed parenting moment you've had as a dad.

Joe Williams: [00:21:45] I'm very protective because being an Aboriginal man, we get polarised and really, , really um, what's the word for it? Judged

Maggie Dent: [00:21:56] And shamed.

Joe Williams: [00:22:00] Right, around [00:22:00] abuse, and I'm so mindful of what I'm going to say next, because I don't want to be judged because everything I did at the time, and it was that. That era of being a parent around discipline and what we thought discipline and given, given the kids a bit of a kick.

Maggie Dent: [00:22:17] Carrots and sticks.

Joe Williams: [00:22:17] And stuff like that. Yep, I actually said to a childcare worker. 'If he sounds like he's being a little bit spoilt, just give him a clip'.

Maggie Dent: [00:22:30] Yeah isn't that horrendous?

Joe Williams: [00:22:31] It's horrendous Maggie. But and it was normal. Like it was everything I thought was right.

Maggie Dent: [00:22:39] Mhm. Well it's, it's been ingrained culturally for years that if you, you know, you spare the rod you spoil the child. So that shift is one of the biggest ones that's happening. And it's also around being firm. And dads were the disciplinarians. And so look how many dads had to do the growling instead of necessarily connecting and loving. It's one of the biggest cultural shifts that we've had.

Joe Williams: [00:23:05] That's the biggest thing I can take out of being a being a parent. You know, you don't have to you don't have to clip a kid to get respect, like the kids don't respect you. They just get scared of you. Yeah.

Maggie Dent: [00:23:15] So punishment doesn't teach. Punishment damages a relationship and it pushes usually the behaviour underground. That's why discipline. It's one of the biggest challenges I have as a parenting educator is you're still not letting them get away with stuff. But how we handle those moments is very different.

Joe Williams: [00:23:31] So a lot of that old school crew would also say, well, no, punishment teaches you because they don't do the same behaviour anymore.

Maggie Dent: [00:23:39] It also teaches them to hit!

Joe Williams: [00:23:40] Yeah, exactly.

Maggie Dent: [00:23:41] And hurt others. Right. Hello.

Joe Williams: [00:23:43] The normalized behavior around that is just ... I'm grateful that ... the biggest challenge with me parenting now in those moments because we still get triggered by that.

Maggie Dent: [00:23:56] Oh gosh yes.

Joe Williams: [00:23:57] The biggest challenges for me now isn't about [00:24:00] me holding back in what I do or say. It's about me finding the words and trying to articulate in a moment of trying to connect when I'm triggered.

Maggie Dent: [00:24:09] You're dysregulated.

Joe Williams: [00:24:10] Not when they are. Like they're trying to communicate through a way as well. They're trying to have their needs met through a way as well. The biggest challenge for me as a parent in that moment is to articulate and communicate what I'm trying to say without losing my top.

Maggie Dent: [00:24:27] Now, you posted something really interesting and absolutely fabulous on Instagram the other day about fatherhood, so can we have a listen to it? Because I think it just was raw truth.

Joe Williams: [00:24:38] During the pandemic, I come to one of the toughest realisations of my life. That was I'd been a father for 18 years, but a dad for about 2 or 3. Now, that forced me to dive deep into who I am, my behaviours and how they impact other people.

Maggie Dent: [00:24:57] So did that just land on you, or did it just all of a sudden gradually appear? And how does it play out now?

Joe Williams: [00:25:04] I'd also been sitting on it for a few years. This parenting gig's hard, man. And, um, the biggest people we get judged by isn't externally. It's our own kids. Um, so, like, it's it's a hard gig and and, you know, like, one of I'm really lucky that I'm a communicator. I can speak and I can articulate things well for people to understand and sometimes for them to sit with and and so it lands with them. I'd been sitting on that for a few years. And it was during the pandemic, right, during the lockdown periods where, you know, Franki was only 18 months old. And the things like the morning tea break with the, with the, with the, the morning nap, with lunch with zoom meetings with ... And [00:26:00] I just went because Courtney was Courtney is a childcare worker. So she was she was working and I just went, Holy smokes. Like this is a hard gig. And I hadn't been there for so many years prior because one, I was a footy player and the early years was when I was struggling with addiction challenges. And, you know, I've been lucky to be sober now nearly 18 years. But those early years of doing that was just complete dissociation from my responsibility and roles as a dad.

Joe Williams: [00:26:30] And then there was separations and family breakdowns and then repartnered and another child and then separations again. So I'd never been at home with my young people when, when they were young, because the two oldest ones was when I was playing footy. And then the middle boy was when our, our family separated. Right.

Joe Williams: [00:26:47] So this was the first time I'd actually sat in these moments and gone, oh what's this? Yeah. And it's, it's this is going to sound horrible. But Court got

really unwell and she had to spend a week in hospital. And whilst it was extremely challenging, you know, for her I'm grateful for that week happening because it was during the lockdowns because my eldest boy was back, back home with us. I could not lean on anyone else to do it and I would, for so many years, I would shirk responsibility, not because I didn't want to do it. Not even because I didn't know how to do it. But because it was probably, it was probably that. I didn't, I didn't know if I was doing the right thing. I didn't know if I was doing up. No, I didn't want to mess up.

Maggie Dent: [00:27:38] There's no game book for dads.

Joe Williams: [00:27:40] So when Court was in hospital for that week, I had to do it all and I'm going to bed at 11:45. Maggie I'm going to bed at 1145 going, oh my gosh, like what? What is that? So I've just got ... Which then takes me to the amount of respect I have for [00:28:00] solo parents and the mothers that raised my children by themselves. And whilst those times were challenging and relationships are challenging throughout these times, all I can do is just show immense gratitude for them doing it themselves. Because it's a hard gig.

Maggie Dent: [00:28:18] In that week, you know, when you were double guessing everything and trying to muck on through and work out how to do it ... Did you get a couple of those moments where suddenly there was this magical moment of connection with any one of them, that you suddenly got the unpaid reward that often parents doing the full load get ... There's that moment where, you know, they crawl on you and snuggle into you because you made them a great piece of toast and you cut it the right way.

Joe Williams: [00:28:48] I honestly don't recall because I was so run off my feet, like like I just didn't have time to sit and have those connecting moments because, like, there's people at home that are going to be going, yeah, Joe, that's what happens. But like I'm going, I'm making dinner. And then, you know, we're putting all the all the dishes away and then I've got to wash up and then I've got to get everyone ready for showers and bed and, and you know, and then I often laugh at, at Courtney and people who are close to us laugh at her as well. She's a serial vacuumer. She'll vacuum at 1030 at night, okay? Because she, she just. But that's her routine. And I went through that process of going, like, if I, if I don't do it tonight, it's going to be twice as bad tomorrow.

And it was just such a, it was such a learning moment for me for them to go, hurry up and get home.

Maggie Dent: [00:29:41] Yeah I know and I'm glad it was a week. So it wasn't just a day or two, like a day or two would have been able to rock through it, but a full week you would have been absolutely exhausted.

Joe Williams: [00:29:50] Because in that full week, the learning moments of that was, okay. If I don't do the washing up today, then it piles up tomorrow. If I don't wash the kids clothes tonight, then it does pile up tomorrow. [00:30:00] So then I was just chasing my backside. So I'm glad it was a week. Yeah, because I got to have those moments.

Maggie Dent: [00:30:06] And then you have a different lens. You can't go back and see it if you haven't experienced it like that. So is that what's happened? I can see it now with so much more appreciation than I possibly did.

Joe Williams: [00:30:17] So you know, what it is for me as well? Is that, like, I've had arguments. Disagreements in my relationships and probably people may connect with this. You don't need to be asked to wash up, Joe, to wash up. So now if there's some stuff there, I'd go and do it. Yeah, it's the teaching moments. Whilst that isn't a big thing, it isn't a big thing. But if you've never done it and never seen it, then it is. I also had a mother that did all that sort of stuff for us kids.

Maggie Dent: [00:30:47] It is a subtle conditioning.

Joe Williams: [00:30:49] Of course it is.

Maggie Dent: [00:30:49] That we can, you know, we will do it. But I can tell you now, having raised four sons, I had to let go of my whole thing about tidiness because otherwise I'd be screaming at them all the time because they're just not wired particularly good like that. We were hygienic, but I had to relax how often I did vacuum. Right, because it was just going to make everything more difficult. So I had to lower that bar a little. And I know there's a lot of women who struggle with that because somewhere in their whatever, whether mum was the tidy one or the fact that the Insta

world has convinced them, if it's not looking like House and Garden and immaculate, you're failing as a mother and a woman.

Joe Williams: [00:31:32] I also think with our mob that there's some conditioning there that if your house wasn't clean, you're going to get your kids taken away.

Maggie Dent: [00:31:39] Yeah, absolutely.

Joe Williams: [00:31:40] So a lot of our older people, you walk into the joint and it's just spotless for that reason. And also like the generational behaviours that you learn from that.

Maggie Dent: [00:32:00] What [00:32:00] do you reckon, looking back, you learnt from your dad about being a dad that you consciously brought forward into your even more aware fathering now than you were?

Joe Williams: [00:32:12] Dad and my relationship has got better as I've got older. And it probably talks back to that narrative that I was saying around how it was, you know, grandparents and aunts and uncles that looked after us because he was also raised in that model as well, you know, around, you know, grandparents. And, you know, my dad lost his dad at a very young age. So there's got to be elements of that where you don't learn certain things because no one's there to teach you. My dad and I have got gotten really close as as I've got older. And his relationship with my older boy is rock solid. And I'm okay with that because, that's how it was always that that's how it was always happened. You know, like the only thing that challenges that in that moment of him listening to my dad rather than listening to me is my ego. Because it happened for thousands. It's for thousands of years.

Maggie Dent: [00:33:10] Why question it 60,000 years it worked.

Joe Williams: [00:33:10] At least. At least.

Maggie Dent: [00:33:14] So what may be something of your dad's that you've chosen definitely to be different rather than something you may have kept.

Joe Williams: [00:33:23] My dad is someone who is is a serial exerciser. Like he's fitness and condition now is he's on par with any young bloke around. Um, so that's probably one thing I, I don't do well, but there's a real connector piece with that, with with dad and his grandson and his nephews, and that's the real connector piece. And, you know, I also I also acknowledge that a lot of those older people don't like to sit in those vulnerable moments and have those conversations. But there's been some really beautiful times where we have done that. [00:34:00] Um, so I'm like, for me, it's I can't wait to be a grandfather.

Maggie Dent: [00:34:04] Oh, it's the best I can tell you now. So do you get out there with a rugby ball like your dad and, you know, with your kids, are you are you encouraging them to follow along or are you just cool. Like there's a big, that was big in your childhood.

Joe Williams: [00:34:19] It was big in my childhood, but I can't remember it being there a great deal from my dad. Okay, this is just some reflection right now. I can't remember or recall. Without doubt he would have. Yeah, but I can't remember or recall. In my early childhood, he was a coach of me at a young age. So I remember times of that, you know, when I'm talking, you know, 12, 13, um, teaching me about different things like recently, um, you know, people have said to me, do you coach your boys with footy? And I was like, no. One I think it's important for them to learn off other people because they hear it off me every night anyway. But two I don't think cognitively they're ready to learn the stuff that they need to learn. To go on to the next level. At six, seven, eight. I just know, go out there and have fun. Go out there and have fun. Where Rome, he's he's going into the under 13. So he's just at that point where he starts to learn how to play the game properly.

Maggie Dent: [00:35:19] Totally different. It's different. There's a lot of pressure today that we push them so quickly into, you know, the next team and what we're doing is by 13 or 14, we're losing so many of our kids that just don't play sport anymore for the hell of it. And that's that's not good.

Joe Williams: [00:35:32] They don't want to do it anymore when the parents push them so much. So I've always been that, that parent that I won't push them. And now they're coming to me going, dad, can you teach me how to do some boxing? Yeah I can, yeah.

Maggie Dent: [00:35:44] That's okay.

Maggie Dent: [00:35:48] You already had a big parenting win that we've talked about, and that's the fact that you use music and singing around home. I want to know another parenting win that you can go, yeah, I did that. I'm their dad and I did that, and I'm proud of that. [00:36:00]

Joe Williams: [00:36:02] One recently. My daughter, she's 17 and our relationship has gotten really strong lately. And there was, you know, different challenges around, you know, breakups and family separations and things like that where you ...

Maggie Dent: [00:36:17] Things get messy sometimes.

Joe Williams: [00:36:18] Sometimes it does. Right. And, um, you know, I, I, I didn't get to have intimate, close relationships with my two older kids for different reasons. And it was Phoenix. Lately. She put up a post. That. It was, you know, paraphrasing here, but it's like, dad, I see everything that you do, even when you think I don't see it, I see it. And she talked about the, you know, how we've rebuilt our relationship and, and things like that. And a sister girl of mine, she rang me and she said, all we want to be as a parent is to be seen.

Maggie Dent: [00:36:56] Absolutely.

Joe Williams: [00:36:57] And in those moments, the times when she won't pick up her phone, the times when you're worried sick around what they're doing and they're just like, ah, it's all right. I was just out with friends, dad. All those times that you sit there and worry and you're concerned, and then you just. Hey, darling, just checking in. You know, those little texts like that that don't get a response that happened with teenagers. To have that and her publicly post that, not just not just say it to me, but to have her publicly post that. And sometimes that can be a bit problematic, too, you know, like I'm not looking for validation off the wider world I'm looking for. I'm looking for validation off her and for her to do that, because I have conversations with a lot of people all the time around; how many times do you hear your parents tell you they love you? And then the conversation of okay, let's go one deeper. How many times or how many moments have

you had where you felt [00:38:00] your parents love you? And they're two different conversations.

Joe Williams: [00:38:05] So whilst I can tell my kids I love them a great deal, it's the moments where they feel loved that's the most important thing for me.

Maggie Dent: [00:38:14] So there's another layer to that too. That Phoenix has now got a little older and seen the journey from where it was. And she also knows what you do, what you're dedicating your life to. So she's really proud of the man you are who is also her dad. And I'm going to say that that's a two way gift, but she's mature enough to be able to see that and recognize it. She didn't do that to blow your trumpet. She didn't do that at all. And you can hear it. And that's why it's such a big thing.

Joe Williams: [00:38:47] You know, also, I've been in the trauma space now for a number of years. And when you dive deeper into trauma and understanding it and, and the more you learn about it, the more you understand that you've got to work on a deeper and lower. The age has got to be younger and younger and how it forms in those early years of their life. So the reason I went and studied trauma and continuously an avid learner in that space and people might go, that's great, will you do it for community and learning about all that sort of stuff?

Joe Williams: [00:39:17] I learnt about trauma and the impacts of trauma for one reason. For my kids because of family separations and the impact of that and the ongoing impact that it has if you don't mend those relationships. And looking at the insecurities that they'll have with relationships that they will carry for their entire life. Looking at rebuilding those attachments. Healing those wounds. That's why, and particularly with Phoenix, because she's a little girl, she won't bounce [00:40:00] from one relationship to the next because she's attracted to idiots. It's because she's yearning for the love of her dad.

Maggie Dent: [00:40:07] That's it.

Joe Williams: [00:40:08] And a lot of the work that I've done on myself as well, around looking at my past around relationships and why I couldn't stay faithful in relationships and all of that is all because of attachment and looking at what that is. So that's why I

went down that path of learning about that. And then once you learn more and more about it and you start to uncover what it is, you also start to have a look at, Holy shit, I've got a lot of work to do, but it's all like it's all worth it when one little social media post says, I see you, dad.

Maggie Dent: [00:40:46] Yeah, yeah. And I needed to do it, and I did a lot of therapy early on and it was interesting because I thought, you just have to do a few things to sort out some of the wounds that you could identify from your childhood, but it is a big onion. I'm nearly pushing 70. And I was, something else happened not that long ago that I've recognised the little girl in me is still holding on to a story that isn't true, and that she needs to let it go. She needs to cry about it and be angry about it and let it go because it's not true.

Joe Williams: [00:41:16] One of the most important conversations I ever had with my dad was, was the day after he found out about my suicide attempt in 2012. And he come over and he said, I want to tell you about the little boy that lives inside you. This is like profound knowledge about all this stuff, you know, over ten years later, talking about healing the inner child and parenting wounds and things like that.

Joe Williams: [00:41:40] My dad said, I want to talk to you about the little boy that lives inside you. If you're going down a dark corridor and there's a door at the end of the corridor, you need to get through it. What do you do if you're the big parent? Now, if you're the if you're the big version of you now, what are you going to do? That little boy? I said I've got to kick the door down. He goes, no, no, no, you don't need to show vibrato [00:42:00] or or or toughness or. He said, you just need to hold that little boy's hand and show him how to walk through it. And like, encouraging that you don't have to be scared. Like then ten years later, I'm learning about all this stuff and I go, dad, do you realise the psychology behind what you told me ten years ago? And and my dad's an avid learner. He's a serial reader, so whether he read it or he didn't read it, whether he was told or whether he's done the work on himself, I don't know. But he told me that story ten years ago, and it's still the most profound, profound advice that I've ever had.

Maggie Dent: [00:42:43] I want to go back to your keynote address where you said, we do need to look to the past to see how we can parent better today. What did your ancestors get right when it comes to raising kids? Because we know the traditional

kinship ways values, village. Everyone's child belongs to all of us. There was always a warm lap, pair of hands. You never parented alone. What else? In that space. And how do you think can we can we recreate it in today's crazy world?

Joe Williams: [00:43:13] Well, I spoke with some old people recently around what it was and all of that, you know, notion of the village and so forth. But as around how they never put the kids down. Kids wouldn't feel the, you know, the dirt or the grass under their feet. It was almost until they could walk because we never put our kids down to be left alone. And so much around that, around the formative years of attachment. I talk now in communities with people who are challenged mentally and emotionally, but really the depth of it is just. They're struggling with the early attachments in their life, and so they're bouncing from one relationship to the next. And there's anxiety and there's depression. [00:44:00] And we all know the science around all of that stuff. But it all comes back to the village and making sure our kids are raised in secure and safe environments. And that's the thing that we can learn from our old people. If we look at it, we don't have a village anymore. We don't. I don't even know my neighbors. Sorry. I know them to say hello, but I couldn't have a in depth conversation with them. As a community, we don't sit at the table anymore with our kids and have dinner. Like we're sitting off like we've got a rule about no phones at the table. You know, Franki is the person who pushes that, and she's the six year old with her iPad and all of that stuff. You know, like there's a great book by Gabor Mate called Hold On to Your Kids.

Maggie Dent: [00:44:46] With Gordon Neufeld.

Joe Williams: [00:44:47] Yeah, we're outsourcing the way we raise our kids to other people who are insecure themselves. And the challenge that we have around that is just so layered with the way that we raise our young people and the the impact of what that has later in our lives.

Maggie Dent: [00:45:07] One of the things we do know is that exceptionally good early childhood educators can become secondary attachment people. The child knows because they're the ones who say, on a weekend, can I go to daycare because I miss that person, right. But it's it's not easy to get exceptional ones when we don't pay them enough. And also we we just keep on saying that, that the most important thing is all

about money and economies and the budgets. And if we can get more women back working, we'll be, yeah?

Joe Williams: [00:45:37] Maggie, the oldest existence of human beings started here in this country. And we did it with no money. So maybe it's not people that are sick. Maybe it's the world that's sick. Maybe it's the systems that are sick. Systems of what we are and how we do it. Like we're I'll advocate as well that childcare teachers don't get paid anywhere near enough, school [00:46:00] teachers don't get paid anywhere near enough. It's the reason why as well that I that that I founded this the new academy that that we founded Our Way Academy because we're doing things our way. We're doing things younger with our kids, 5 to 12 year olds, building solid foundations in what we want to do with our young people, and putting good role models and mentors in those young people's lives. Because the challenge we have as well is that because of the ongoing traumatic cycles that we've had, is that kids are going into our schools in a heightened state, severely traumatised, being taught by teachers. In a highly state who have been severely traumatised. That are taught and told and dictated to by senior management who are severely traumatised. Right. And it all comes back to the early years and of what we've got to do and how we've got to do it.

Joe Williams: [00:47:02] I feel for so many of our families because we, some families just don't have another way. And because they, they also don't know another way because it's all they've been taught. And that's what their parents have been taught. And that's what their parents have been taught. Like it's the ongoing trauma cycle that we face, the systems that have dismantled and oppressed those family systems that work for thousands of years are now removing kids from the families that they've oppressed and dismantled. And then we have an expectation of how we should be parenting in these communities. And we're sending people in to educate in these communities when there's a hell of a lot of communities that that the ones that I've gone to and potentially that you've gone to as well, that don't speak English until they're five and six year old and their third and fourth language that they learn.

Maggie Dent: [00:47:54] We're wondering why they don't do well at school, and they speak five different dialects, and not English.

Joe Williams: [00:47:59] That's the thing [00:48:00] that the very systems that have dismantled these family systems that have worked for thousands and thousands of years, we're judging them then on a system that they've never been introduced to before. I'll send anyone from Canberra in Parliament into these communities, they would struggle. And if I judge them on their behaviour in that community, like. When we start to put the shoe on the other foot. And again, it just comes down to these systems of assimilation that have been so problematic for our people. And the challenge that we have in our communities is that we're trying to walk in two worlds, and the amount of times that we code switch, like every day with our kids, you know, the way they talk at home and the behavior they have at home to then their expectations and obligations at school, like the judgment we have on those young people based on systems that are really triggering for them. It's just completely unfair.

Maggie Dent: [00:49:02] So, Joe, you work in the area of suicide prevention today. Do you think that embracing the idea of being more than a father and of being a dad and of being more connected and present will impact that area that maybe we might lose less of our young men, particularly in our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities, because the numbers are so high.

Joe Williams: [00:49:26] Yeah, the numbers are so high. But I also think that the work that I'm doing has changed a lot over the years. And, you know, it was early days, it was all about advocacy and talking about things. And, you know, the the old conversation of, you know, we must speak up. It's got nothing to do with not being able to speak up. It's got everything to do with how we silence our kids at a young age. And then it becomes ingrained into their psyche that they're not allowed to speak or show and share emotions when they're vulnerable. And then we wonder why on earth they won't talk to us when they're going through a challenging time, and all they do is put their head down the end of a bottle. [00:50:00] So my work has changed so much around that advocacy work because I understand that the stigma is just this facade of what's actually happening, everything of what's happening and why our challenges are so high in our communities is because of dismantling the family systems and dismantling the the village of what we did. So that's why I'm doing now an academy from five year olds through to 12 year olds. And if I could I, you know, like it's it's before school stuff. It's after school stuff.

Joe Williams: [00:50:33] Not just the, the years in the schools. And we're trying to create young leaders at a much younger age because they will have challenges in their later life, like we all do. So do I think that the work that we're doing, the work that around our academy and charity, that that we that we're doing? Yeah, I think it will because we're, we're building stronger foundations around identity and values. But there's so many of our kids that are walking around trying to be like an American rap star. And they don't actually know who they are. Without doubt, every single, every single school that I walk into or every single community I walk into, I say, put your hand up for your Aboriginal. Every kid puts their hand up. You put your hand up and tell me how you're proud of being Aboriginal. Every kid puts her hand up and says they're proud to be Aboriginal. Okay, well, tell me what you're proud of. And everyone just stops silent. And they don't know what they're proud of. Because their identity is just so mixed and matched that they don't know who they are. So many of our kids are trying to fit in a world where they don't belong. It's a world that's not created for our people.

Maggie Dent: [00:51:44] Tiktok has not helped that, particularly for our tweens and teens.

Joe Williams: [00:51:48] I think that there's so many challenges around all of it, how we're trying to be something that we're not. So what we're trying to do is create stronger foundations around who we authentically [00:52:00] are with our identity and teaching kids culture and teaching kids values and teaching kids all about how those values and them old stories that have been there for thousands of years influence our behaviours. How the birds got their colours isn't just about birds and colours, it's about the importance of helping people. All of those old stories, all of those old values creating a stronger identity for our people so we can live with a better now, not a better future, teaching our kids a better now. And that's what everything we're doing now, and all of the work that I've done, is completely transformed to working with younger kids to build stronger identities and authenticity in their life.

Maggie Dent: [00:52:50] If you have one big fear for your children, what might that be Joe?

Joe Williams: [00:52:56] The biggest fear that I have for my kids is that they'll wait until they're 30 for the penny to drop, like I did. We have these brilliant cultural teachers,

brilliant cultural lessons, brilliant cultural practices that will change our world incredibly. I don't want our kids to wait till they're 30 to go through these processes and practices. The biggest fear that I have. Is. I just want them to realize that they can be the best that they can, no matter what. And have patience and have some trust in the ancestors. Because we're all on this pathway. And we'll get pulled off the path every now and then, and we'll want something so bad that we'll do anything for it, but we won't get it. And then we think that our hearts are broken and then we get pulled off the path for it. Maggie, I thought my life was going to be about footy. [00:54:00]

Maggie Dent: [00:54:01] I thought mine was about teaching.

Joe Williams: [00:54:04] Football and then I went and boxed, and then I went through the hardest times of my life, mentally and emotionally myself, which rebirthed me to my purpose. They talk about the two most important days of your life, the day you're born and the day you find out why you're born. I had to go through those dark times to find my why and my why now is just about helping people to be the best version of themselves. I don't care if you are a garbage collector, be the best garbage collector you can be. It doesn't matter who you are, and you can't do that whilst you're continuously dissociating yourself, trying to hide away from pain without sitting in those discomforting times and understanding why they're here. Don't look at what, look at why.

Maggie Dent: [00:54:47] Here's a big question for you, Joe. Not that I haven't given you any big ones already. Okay, so if there's only one thing that you hope your kids will have learnt from you because you are their dad, what is that one thing?

Joe Williams: [00:55:04] I told you, I'm a sook.

Maggie Dent: [00:55:07] No, you're a man with a big heart. It's different.

Joe Williams: [00:55:12] I just want them to know. I want them to know, that I've done me best. And I want them to feel loved, not to know that I said that I loved them a lot. I want them to feel loved. Franki said to me recently. I think it even Brodi as well. They said, you say I love you a lot. So it's a hell of a lot of kids out there that don't get to hear it.

Maggie Dent: [00:55:42] That's it.

Joe Williams: [00:55:44] So I just want them to know if I can leave one thing, one I don't care about sport. I don't care about any of that. I just want them to know that I love them.

Maggie Dent: [00:55:55] Fiercely and unconditionally.

Joe Williams: [00:55:59] Conditions [00:56:00] sometimes, but fiercely. Always.

Maggie Dent: [00:56:04] Okay, so you're lucky. Last question.

Joe Williams: [00:56:07] Don't make me cry.

Maggie Dent: [00:56:08] No no no no, you should be. This is easier than that last one. That's a biggie. It gets every dad that I've ever asked. So if you could wind back the clock and go and talk to yourself as a 21 year old just before you became a dad. What advice would you give to Young Joe?

Joe Williams: [00:56:28] Be present. Yeah, footy doesn't matter.

Maggie Dent: [00:56:31] Turn up.

Joe Williams: [00:56:33] Just be there. And that was hard, you know, because, you know, you think that that your life is about this dream that you've had forever about sport and then, you know, there's family separations and breakdowns and stuff like that, but just be there and be the best you can. And I guess it probably links back to the question you asked me a minute ago. Is, is by showing up by being present, they'll know. They'll know that you love them. And I think reflecting back on that, that Instagram post that that we had earlier. It's a hell of a lot of people out there that don't know how to be a dad, because they weren't raised by one. Start to learn. This last probably 12 months for me, two years for me, specifically, I've read books, I've listened to podcasts. I have had this opinion of no one can tell me how to be a dad. I'm a dad, and I'm going to do it the way I want to do it, you know? But then I realised that the way I was doing it wasn't

particularly healthy. So, you know, it comes back to. Our kids are like, our kids rely on us. When they first come out of the womb. They rely on us for everything that we've got to give them everything. [00:58:00] And then they get a little bit independent. And then they think that they know everything, and then they go through teenagers and they push you away. And they push you away for a few years and that hurts like hell. As a parent, it hurts like hell. But then they eventually come back and look at, you know, the relationship with with my dad and my mum now, like, I'm I'm like, our relationship is great. But, but. I was probably not the best during my teenage years. So I think, you know. We just have patience and just learn how to be a good person, learn how to be a good dad and read that book. Yeah, listen to that.

Maggie Dent: [00:58:49] Listen to that podcast.

Joe Williams: [00:58:51] Right. Plug moment there

Joe Williams: [00:58:52] But but just work on yourself and have it and be honest with yourself. And the way you are isn't particularly your fault. But if you know how to be better than it is your fault if you're not changing. And that's something I'm really proud that I get to do, because that little trigger hits me sometimes. Let's just say I'm talking to the mothers of my children that I don't live with. That little trigger still jumps up. . But when you put the kid in the center and do only do what's best for them, the noise doesn't matter. Always just do what's best for the kid.

Maggie Dent: [00:59:30] Joe, thank you for your time.

Joe Williams: [00:59:33] Not too many tears, but a few, So I'm. I'm grateful that I'm a feeler. Yeah, I'm grateful that I can sit with these emotions now, because for a long time, I couldn't.

Maggie Dent: [00:59:44] Joe Williams, proud Wiradjuri Walgalu man and founder of The Enemy Within suicide prevention and wellbeing education. Now Joe has really come to understand what being a dad means and he had heaps of great [01:00:00] ideas, so let's add them to the Good Enough Dad checklist.

Maggie Dent: [01:00:08] Firstly, you can tell your kids you love them, but do they feel loved? I thought that was a real gem. Might need to check in with your kids. Secondly, wake them up with gentleness, music, singing, jumping into bed with them. Just wake them up a bit more gently. And thirdly, dads are often biologically and culturally wired to be the defender, protector and provider. However, don't be too hard on yourself if you've recognised that that's what you've been doing and you can still change to be more present, more connected and more loving, just like Joe. I'm Maggie Dent and this is the good enough dad. Follow us on the listener app or wherever you get your podcasts.