

# GED\_S01E30\_The\_Good\_Enough\_Dad\_Bruce

## Robinson\_240501\_MID23-22\_FINAL.mp3

**Anonymous Female Voice:** [00:00:02] A LiSTNR production.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:00:04] This podcast was recorded on the ancient lands of the Gadigal peoples of the Eora nation in Australia. I wish to acknowledge their rich and continuing culture, and especially pay respect to the elders past, present and emerging, and to acknowledge and pay respect to any First Nations people from anywhere in the world who may come to hear this podcast. We hope that we may all come to walk with gentle feet, strong minds and compassionate hearts in this global village.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:00:35] No dad wants to be a lousy dad. Aiming to be a good dad is great. But 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 my dear friend, Doctor Bruce Robinson.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:01:11] Okay, so I'm a lung specialist, and lung cancer is the commonest lethal cancer. And I have patients who come to see me, men. And this is one of them. Peter. He doesn't mind me showing his photo. And he, like many of them, said to me, when I chat to them, you know, I've only got six months to live. And I wish I'd spent more time with my kids. You know, that's what they. That's what men say.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:01:36] That's Bruce addressing an audience at the University of Western Australia, where he's a professor of medicine. Now, we've had many incredible and special dads on this podcast, but Bruce holds a very special place in my heart. Not only is Bruce a fellow born and bred West Aussie like me, Bruce shares my belief about how important dads can be in our kids lives and [00:02:00] why fathering needs to be valued more in our culture. And if he wasn't already busy enough as an AFL coach and club supporter, a dad to three, a grandfather to six, a professor, a medical teacher, a practicing clinician and a leading researcher in the field of lung cancer. Whoa. Bruce co-founded The Fathering Project about ten years ago to help support dads and to inspire

them to have greater connections with their kids. His work has been and is life changing for families across Australia. Bruce is dad to Simon, Scott and Amy, grandad to six as I said already and husband to Jackie. Hi Bruce, welcome to The Good Enough Dad.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:02:47] Thanks, Maggie. Great to see you, as it always is.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:02:51] Yes, just it always is. We love a good chat. So I want to start by going back to that reason you started this work. Can you talk to me a little bit more about the realisation that you got from those end of life regrets and how it impacted you?

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:03:07] I think the first few times people told me that, I thought, well, that's, you know, true and obviously in medicine, you see a lot of drug addicts and kids who have overdoses. I mean, you see the effect of poor parenting, in particular, poor fathering. But the most poignant moment of the lot, I think, was when I think it was Peter who you mentioned. He said, Bruce, here's the thing. You can't get the time back again. Time just travels in one direction. And once you've missed out, you've missed out. You've got to get to dads when they're young. That really made me feel sad. And it struck me. I think I thought about it for the next few days and thought, well, let's go and do something about it. Typical doctor, you know, make a diagnosis and then, you know, find something to fix it.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:03:52] And we're coming from previous generations where, like my dad, he would drop mum at the hospital and leave her there to have a baby. Like [00:04:00] there was no way that a father was welcome even at birth. So we have come a long way, and that's why we need to keep going in that direction.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:04:08] Yeah. It's actually a beautiful thing to see how things have changed. And, you know, dads tell me that. Everything from dad being in the delivery room to dad pushing a pram right through to now, men getting paternity leave and also men not feeling ashamed of doing equal parenting, you know, they don't feel ashamed or not as much as they used to. I think there is still a bit of that provider protector instinct in men that only makes them feel ashamed when they look in the mirror rather than generically. But it is a beautiful thing to see. Although I will say one thing. Men have realised, I think more and more that they are important, but they still quite don't know

what to do. What do kids need from me? And it's especially because a lot of things nowadays are things that the dads themselves didn't experience, cyber bullying just to pick one.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:05:03] In your childhood. You were one of three. Can you tell us a little bit about how you were as a kid?

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:05:09] Sure. Um, yeah, a working class kid. Dad worked in a factory, and I worked in that factory when I was a teenager as well, to earn some money. Yeah, I mean, a typical working class family really. It was so hot in Perth I remember that we never had any air conditioning at all as a kid. Couldn't afford a car and a TV, and my dad was actually a pretty good dad. But to be fair, I got to say that he did have some drinking issues at various times and depression. And, you know, he was in the Second World War. Rsl guy, I don't know, it's just not uncommon, I think, amongst my mates and their dads. But honestly, I ran feral around the suburb. I mean, we basically just rode our bikes everywhere. A lot of mates played cricket and footy, swam in the river, chased the girls, never caught them. You know, all the girls too sensible and uh just one more thing. In answer to your question, my dad was unusual because [00:06:00] he talked to his kids and he took me and my brother out camping, and he picked up a kid from down the street who had no dad, and he sort of became a father figure to him, became like a big brother to me. Went camping and swimming early in the morning and but he talked to us, he sat us down and gave us the birds and the bees, and I didn't think too much of it. It's a bit embarrassing, actually, but my mate said, I wish my dad would talk to me like your dad's talking to you about sex and, you know, stuff. So I'm pretty fortunate, in retrospect.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:06:30] I think he's sewed a really great seed that's germinated later in your life, because that wasn't common in those days. So you're a bit like me because we're so young. We grew up in the 50s and 60s where, you know, it was pretty traditional how we disciplined and punished kids. So was your dad the hands off disciplinarian or was he? What was his role around that sort of stuff?

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:06:53] My dad had an interesting strategy, actually, because he, you know, he was close to his kids. Like I said, he talked to us and did stuff with us, but he never belted us. Well, occasionally I remember I stole my sister's pocket money once

and got a belting. I think dad hated the idea of stealing and lack of integrity, etc.. He was a very values driven guy. Like a lot of people from that generation. And he would say things to me like, I'd be going out with someone, you know, going into the city. And I did, as I say, live in a working class area. A lot of people got into trouble, including me. Some people would call this psychological manipulation, I think it's more a question of trust. He'd say to me, now look, mate. When you go out, there'll be all sorts of things going on. And, uh, on the one hand, you're free to live your life, but on the other hand, I want to say something. If I get a call from the police or your school headmaster that you've been getting into trouble, I'll be very disappointed in you, because I think you're better than that.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:07:51] Oh, I tell you, I have told so many dads that little tip, you know, when your kids come home boozy from the rugby event [00:08:00] and you know, you've been worried and your partner's worried and, you know, you think they're dead in the streets by the time you've finished worrying and they get in, it's a great moment to say the wrong thing. You stupid idiot. I told you not to do that. I mean, just the wrong thing. But I quote my dad. I say, look, mate, okay, you've fallen foul of this and we have talked about it, so you're grounded. But I want to say something, we're going to go out tomorrow. We're going to have milkshake because I believe in you. You're better than that. It's a great way to discipline a kid.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:08:29] That is profoundly fabulous. And I hope that a lot of dads have just heard that and and mums as well, because when you give a lecture and when you tell them what not to do, they don't want to listen to us, because that means, you know, I'm going to disappoint you. But yours is different. Yours is saying you're better than that, and if you're not there yet, you're going to get there. Because we make mistakes.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:08:52] Yeah. I mean, of course you've got to you've got to strategise with them. Like I would say, next time you go in the rugby club, here's some things to think about. Because kids, in the end, a bit like dads, I mean, it's not much point going talking to a room full of dads and saying dads are important and by the way, if you don't do X, Y, and Z, you're a bad dad. Everyone feels guilty. I mean, I haven't been a great, perfect dad myself. I find it better to a) encourage the dads with things like that. Ways that you can help. Affirm them. I mean, if a dad is, I take this view, Maggie. If I go to a school and I've talked to over 20,000 men in live audiences, you know, at

school, and I always start by saying, I honour you for being here. I mean, you love your kids enough to be here. And people say, oh, yeah, well, their mothers would have pushed them there. It's not true. They actually love their kids enough to be there. They want to be a good dad, and I honour them for that. And I also say, look, I know there's dads who aren't here. I'm not criticising them. They might be a way for work or whatever, but I honour you and let's all talk together about how we can be better dads to change the future of our kids, rather than criticising and making them feel even [00:10:00] more guilty than they already feel.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:10:01] So, Bruce, when are you talking about giving your kids strategies to go forward? Can you give me an example of something that would be a strategy that a dad could take on board after something has gone down, not so good?

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:10:15] The first thing, as I say is to say, you're better than that, and I believe in you. And I think that's probably the best foundation. I believe in you rather than that you're a silly idiot, you know, putdowns don't work. Secondly, I would work with them to say what? Like what? What happened last time? Like there was probably a drinking game on. Hey, I've been an Aussie Rules footy coach for six years at university level and, you know, drinking games and I understand exactly how it all goes on. But it's actually better to give them strategies to get out of it. Let me give an example. We talk about methamphetamine, ice, being handed around at a party. The worst thing a kid can do. Well, the worst thing is to participate, because unfortunately, it's highly addictive. Well, let's just say they don't want to do it. They got a better idea than that. Not do it. The worst thing they can say is I'm not doing that, it's bad for you, no one should do that. Because then you're just going to goad them into it. The best thing to say is to give your kids a strategy. Where they can peacefully avoid it. Say look, sorry I got to work in the morning or sorry, I've got to, I'm not well or

**Maggie Dent:** [00:11:21] Sorry I'm just sticking to beer.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:11:25] I think give them a job to do the next day so that they can truthfully hand on heart say I've got to work tomorrow. I've got to work tomorrow, and so I can't. And then it's much easier for people to pass. The third strategy is about peer pressure. And I learned this from a guy in America, a friend of mine. He said, if your kid's friends, they got some friends who are bad influences. There's a reason for that.

So instead of saying, I don't want you to spend time with them because they'll go around their place and they'll avoid you, is actually invite those kids around, have a barbecue and say, hey, how are [00:12:00] you? Tom, Dick and Harry, and how are you going? And how's life? And, you know, lovely, you know, love the fact that you're my son's friend. And by the way, you know, at some point, say, look, he came home a little bit boozy and, you know, his mum was really upset, and so was I, to be honest. Can I ask you guys to look out for him a little bit? That kid who lived down the road from our parents house, he's two years older than me. I heard my dad once say to him, can you look after Bruce when he goes out so he doesn't get into trouble? And I think it made my friend feel like \$1 million that my dad believed in him. And that guy says, that my dad made the difference in his life. A father figure who bothered. You know, once they know you, then they're not going to want to do that. You know, once they know that you care about them as people. That's a great strategy.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:12:42] You're exactly right. There is something good inside everyone and all our teens will make mistakes. But if we just want a turf away, some friends because they might, you know, swear a little more, or as soon as you call them in and say, can you watch out over my boy? They get to feel like, really? This is because they tend to want to watch out for their mates, but you've invited them to look after your son, and that means you trust them enough to do that. That is life changing. Thank you.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:13:11] You may be the only one in their life that believes in them.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:13:15] That's what I call a lighthouse figure that shines light instead of just darkness. Okay, so is there anything that your dad may have done that you would choose not to do as you became a dad? Bruce?

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:13:28] Oh, sure. He was quite an anxious guy. And he did use alcohol to sort of like a lot of young people do, as a sort of chemical self-therapy, if ever I, you know, find myself drinking too much. I don't do it much now. But I would always remember that. And dad, although he could talk to his kids about things he wanted to talk about, was not a very good sharer, you know, with his mates and I, I used to watch him down at the RSL because we, we went as just the whole family went to the RSL Hall and they all drank and danced and mucked around and [00:14:00] they weren't real big sharers. They sort of understood each other. They'd all been through the Second

World War, and they all understood each other, and they cared for each other in that way that soldiers do. I do respect that. But it was like an unspoken understanding of what it's like to be in a war. Not just fighting, but just losing people and the whole psychology of it. Uh, I think I'm much better at sharing. I'm not naturally good at it, but I've learned to share.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:14:25] Yeah. The power of a story. I heard almost nothing from my pop, who was in the First World War, and just a few tiny stories from my dad of his experience, again, because it was; they didn't want to share stuff that could be painful.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:14:39] Well, I think also just to jump in there, if I may, Maggie, one of the things I've noticed as a doctor and it's this thing people say, oh my, my grandfather, my father didn't share about the war and nor did mine or my grandfather. And it's not just that it's painful.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:14:54] There's two things that enable a man to share. And if it's a policeman who's been to a school bus accident with dead kids or someone in the war, or anyone who's got cancer or whatever, there's two things that you have to give a bloke for him to share, and that is you've got to really care. And the worst thing is he says something, you say, oh yeah, my grandfather had that, right? That's the end of the conversation, because you don't actually care about what their story is. But the second thing is you have to be safe and to be unsafe, you say, oh, snap out of it, Princess. You know that's weak. Move on. Time to move on. Those things are very unhelpful.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:15:31] So you've got to care and show them that you care and you've got to be safe. And once as a doctor, the veterans found out that my dad was in the RSL and I was very respectful, you know, Dawn services all my life, etc. then they would tell me their stories and I heard some shockers. My goodness, Burma Railway, the whole, you know, the whole nine yards. But you've got to care and you've got to be safe and then blokes will share with you.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:16:02] Bruce, [00:16:00] you had a near death experience in 1988 that shifted the way that you looked at your family life. Can you share something about that?

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:16:13] I had I was using a circular saw and I cut through my legs with it, you know, doing something stupid and nearly bled to death and cut through my legs and it was a terrible experience. Three weeks in hospital, plastic surgery, etc.. But when I got home. I thought I could have died. So I thought, because I love to go to work early before the phone rings, especially in a hospital environment, you start getting called. And I used to go to work early, and then I thought, you know, that early time of the day is pretty precious. And the school where my oldest son, who was then just in year two, is on the way to work. So why don't I walk to school with him and then say goodbye to him and then chat to him and then walk on to work? And I did it, and I ended up doing it with all my kids. And here is the brilliant thing, Maggie. Honestly, this is the thing I learned. I did that because I thought I should. This would be a good idea. You know, I've nearly died. I'm going to do this. You know I should do this. You know? Soldier on, I loved it. And my whole experience, there are other examples too, you start doing things because you should, and then you start enjoying it so much and then you say, oh, in the end, my daughter, my youngest, when she was in year seven, that was my last primary school child. She had some friends who lived in the street and they would she want to walk to school with them. And I would beg her, please, can I walk to school this one day a week? Went from should to being an absolute joy. And of course, if I hadn't done it, I would never have realised. So when we in the Fathering Project tell dads, give some ideas or say.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:17:48] Start doing it because you should, even though you don't know whether you're going to enjoy it. And I guarantee you will get joy from it and say, I'm so glad.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:17:54] Did you work with a fathering project? Did it change, other than this walking to school, did it really change the way [00:18:00] you were looking at fathering in general?

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:18:04] Absolutely. I mean, I didn't set out to start the Fathering Project. I was so sad when these guys and they said, you've got to do something about it. So I wrote a book. I honestly and I, this is true, I expected to sell 12 copies in my first book, Fathering From the Fast Lane. And then I got a phone call from the publisher saying it's become a best seller. And he waited for me to jump up and down. And I said, he said, you don't sound all that excited. I said, look, I don't want to. I'm not interested in

selling books. I'm interested in making a difference, getting to dads. Anyway, so I started getting invited to schools, etc. and like a lot of people who gradually became involved in this, just grew and grew and grew. We learn more than any dad in any audience. It's amazing. Um, I'll just picked one example. I was talking about father figures, and I've just explained how my dad was a father figure to Neil down the road. I realised the power of being a father figure, so I started spending more time doing it. And so my kids' friends, I would actually begin to engage with them differently instead of just mucking around, I would think about them. And I was coaching footballers and it changed the way I, I functioned as a football coach. So these are young people between say, 18 and 20, 28 and pretty, pretty serious football, top level in amateurs. But, you know, I'd spent a lot of time with them at the club and they spent hours and hours in our house.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:19:25] They all know Jackie and the kids, and I was being introduced by one of them at one of these university functions. And he said, Bruce coached me about 30 years ago, and I'm going to tell you something. He didn't just coach us at footy, but he and his wife, Jackie, invited us around in small groups for meals, and we were forbidden to talk about football. We talked about what we're doing and what we're interested in life. It made us feel so special. We had a nice bottle of wine, three course meal. Because we realised we were special to them and it was just wonderful.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:19:55] Anyway, my point is, being a father figure, a better father figure that [00:20:00] can actually make a difference rather than just having fun. We're all father figures. Men are all father figures. To their nephews and nieces, to their kids, friends, to the people at work. Whether you like it or not, you're a football coach or a basketball coach or a school teacher. You know, you're a youth worker, you're a massive father figure. And the question is, do you do a good job and make a difference in those kids lives, or do you not? And there are ways that the Fathering Project talks to dads to say, you are a father figure like it or not. Think of those kids in your school where you are that don't have a dad or dad's a bit of a drop kick. You are a father figure. Learn how to be a father figure that makes a difference.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:20:39] When Dads and Daughters came out, your the second book, and I remember reading it just because it related to me so much, because I have a

really good relationship with my dad. And you wrote in it that some of the research was showing that that that warm, connected relationship with your daughter means that they can, you know, menstruate later or have sex later or and be more confident in themselves and be, you know, and I thought, gee, who would have thought? And that was a big message, because when I was counseling many girls, teen girls would sob, sometimes saying, my dad was really great, but now I'm a teen girl he's disappeared. Can you just share with me what motivated you for that? Because it was, you know, it's a different space. We know dads and sons, but dads and daughters, it it really matters.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:21:27] Sure. I was having my hair cut with this woman who, she's about late 20s, maybe something. I said, do you mind if I ask you a question? I'm thinking about writing a book about daughters and dads, but please don't feel obliged. But what do you think is important? She said, funny you should ask. I'm thinking about my dad right now. He was a good dad, to my brother. They did everything. 5:00 in the morning, you'd come and get him out of bed and they'd go and train the racehorse. And they're really good mates. Never bothered with me. And now we don't have a close relationship. But she said, I bet he thought at 5:00 I was asleep, but I wasn't. [00:22:00] I was wide awake, wishing and hoping that just once he'd invite me instead. He was a good man. He just didn't get the fact that he was important. Of course I then do the research I looked up all the studies about having periods, and every single study shows that a close relationship between a father and daughter, including hugs, etc., delays the onset of periods.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:22:21] And there's like 12 studies or I don't know, and you stop reading after a while because the question isn't the fact. The question is why. And the theory goes that it's about, in a biological sense, that is, you've got a protect a provider in your father you don't need to get another one, whereas if you if you don't, then you need to sort of you've got to start having a family and then you become an adult. And again, I'm not sure that the science behind that has been proven, but the fact is clear. I will say one thing. I had a temporary secretary typing up the text for this section of the book. She came in with some paper in her hand, weeping. She said, this is exactly true. This is my relationship with my dad. He didn't show any interest in me. I can't sustain relationships with men. I have trouble with intimacy and I've had counselling about it. This is exactly me. And she had tears pouring down her cheeks. So that was a very important book.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:23:27] What was the most challenging thing about raising your kids, or about being a dad in your own home? What did you find most difficult?

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:23:36] You alluded to all my jobs earlier on, and I do think what I found most difficult and one of my, one of my many failings, was to come home from work and not enough leave enough petrol in the tank for the kids. So I would come home and I would try to get home. It was in those days it was 6:30 p.m.. And I felt a little bit self-righteous because a lot of my colleagues in medicine would get home [00:24:00] at 8:00 after the kids had been bathed and fed and all that sort of stuff. But that self-righteousness was misplaced, because I remember once looking at one of my kids talking and I thought, I can see your lips moving, but I haven't got the brain power to listen to what you're saying. And of course, I'd read them stories at night, and I'd be the first one to fall asleep and they'd say, mum, dad's fallen asleep. But I didn't have enough petrol in the tank. And I admire a friend of mine named Jeff in Canberra who had the same problem. He was in IT, and he realised that he had to cut back on work to have more energy, more time, more petrol in his tank at the end of the day for his kids and his kids noticed it. And he said it cost me money. But, you know, in the end it was worth it. I do feel like I could have done better in terms of having enough emotional and mental energy for the kids at the end of the day.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:24:51] And that's something dads share with me a lot is trying to, I want to work really hard to make sure I can provide for the people I love, especially my kids. And I come home and there's nothing left, and then I'm grumpy. How do I get that right? So it is something we've heard already on the podcast.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:25:08] I could go on all day with my failures. We used to have this lounge suite that was made of cloth rather than leather, and I had my cup of coffee sitting on the arm. And my son, older son, who was about, I don't know, six or something, he came down to jump on my lap and he knocked the coffee off and it splashed all over the, all over and it was cloth. So it was a complete disaster and I lost. I lost it, and I still remember it was a catastrophe, but he's just a little eight year old or six year old, whatever he was. And anyway, he would have heard me angry at him. And it wasn't his fault, really. I mean, I said it was, he should have been careful, but. I still remember where I was sitting, you know, it just wasn't good enough. It became all about

me and my selfishness, my emotions, and not about him. Now, of course, he doesn't remember it, fortunately. And, [00:26:00] you know, I felt so bad about it, Maggie, that I, I always, from then on tried to modulate when I felt angry or something. I mean, it's not fair to project your anger onto the kids, but it might sound trivial, but it was a terrible thing. I still feel bad about it. And I probably did other things where I let my emotions dominate..

**Maggie Dent:** [00:26:18] In the heat of the moment.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:26:20] And it's not good enough. You know, there's a reason you can say, oh, but, you know, I had a bad day at work. A reason is never an excuse. We say that all the time, a reason is never an excuse. Oh, we do this in courts of law, you know, say, oh, this kid belted an old granny in the street and stole a handbag. Well, he had a bad childhood. A reason is never an excuse. Our whole law system is based on that. And I tried to let myself get away with it, and it was poor. A reason is never an excuse. And I still feel a bit bad about that incident.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:26:50] What do you think is your biggest worry or fear? Um, when it comes to, well, yours are obviously out there being parents themselves, but about raising kids today in our world?

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:27:02] I mean, there's a standard list, if you like, that kids will feel like they're getting in the way, that your love depends on them based on their performance. And here we are in Perth. I'm looking down the street here, and this is the western suburbs, where a lot of professional people live. And it's pretty hard for a kid on Report Day to feel that their parents love them. When their brothers and sisters have got better marks, and so have their neighbour's kids and their brothers and sisters kids, and you know that. Or on Sports Day, you know, when they come last in the kind of third, the third level, I don't know their generic worries that kids have that their parents love is conditional on their performance. And, uh, kids, I think in every generation have felt what I call the sausage problem. They like a sausage coming out of the sausage factory. There's nothing special about them. I think they're the generic worries. There [00:28:00] are some particular worries today. I think cyber bullying is a big worry. When I was a kid at school, kids got bullied in the playground. There'd be a fight, fight, fight, fight. You know, sometimes I was involved and a crowd would form, and then you'd get

a few whacks and then the bell would ring and we'd all go to school and all go to the class.

**Bruce Robison:** [00:28:18] And it was a small number of people in a specific time, and then it was all over. But now cyber bullying can be lots of people 24 hours a day, and it can be anonymous and I think the hurtful nature of cyber bullying is that one big fear as much as you try, you can't like change. School's got to do this and that, etc. but you have to create resilience in your own children. Deal with the children in front of you, not trying to change the world. So teaching your kids resilience in the face of all sorts of bullying. Playground, particularly cyberbullying, is a great challenge for dads. I do think our kids are losing resilience and they are almost excused for not having resilience rather than being trained in resilience. But there are other things too, like pre-teens being hooked on pornography. I think the lack of exercise is a big deal. I mean, we've been working on that in the Fathering Project with sports coaches and stuff and trying to encourage parents about team sports and one thing and another. That's just three.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:29:18] That's just three. All right. Now it's time for a big dad brag. You've actually told us quite a few. But what's one big parenting win that you're quite happy to bang your chest about? Bruce?

**Bruce Robison:** [00:29:32] Well, I know about banging my chest about it. I mean, I think from your failures, you can extract success if you look around and get the wisdom of other men, actually. One on one times with kids, I think is one of my favourite things. So dad dates and my wife did mum dates as well, but just dad dates where you take the kids out one at a time and I'm just trying to think back. I mean, I didn't invent this, I mean, someone, I looked at someone doing it and I thought, that's a good idea. So we would always [00:30:00] take the kids out one at a time. And I still do it. And my kids are young parents themselves. I still do one on one times with them. But one of my biggest wins again came from, came from a problem. I mean, I was traveling a lot, as you have to, as an academic. And I thought, this has got it's got knobs on it, you know, like you've got to always say goodbye to the kids. And again, I watched a friend of mine who would take his kids from Brisbane to Sydney, one at the time he had nine kids. And sequentially, he would take them one at a time to a meeting, and we'd all be, you know, having a meal and a bottle of wine or so at a restaurant, and he'd be sitting in a corner with his kid.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:30:37] So I thought, typical me. I didn't do it in halves, so I had to go around the world for a month, and I decided to take my oldest child the age of 9 or 10. Again, it was Maggie, it was one of those should things. This is a thing I should do. You know, I should do this, you know? Soldier on. It's going to be a trial, but I should do it. Talk about a joy. It was a complete joy every day. Went to the footy in Melbourne. Family, you know, Disneyland conferences, family in England, blah, blah, blah. It was a complete joy. And he remembered every single microsecond. Of course, the other kids don't mind because when they get to be the same age, ten years of age, they get to do it as well. And again, I did it because I thought I should. And talk about a wonderful experience for me and for the kids, and they still remember it because it made them feel special, that they were worth bothering with.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:31:32] I just love it.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:31:33] Dads, say to me, what about all these drugs? You know, we talked about ice being handed around. Best thing you can do for your kids is to do that sort of thing and make them feel worthwhile, because a kid who sits there at a restaurant, you're sitting there talking to a kid about school and music and footy or cricket or whatever it is, whatever they want to talk about, they look over the table and they don't say this, but this is what they feel. My dad has got plenty of mates, but he chooses to spend time with me and he's got lots of interests, [00:32:00] but he chooses to spend time with me. I must be worth spending time with, and that feeling of worth is something that they can then carry around in their heart for the rest of their lives, so that when the methamphetamine is being handed out, they say, you know what? I don't need this. I don't need it. Thanks, but I don't need it. Those one on one times with dads, I emphasise again that I'm not clever enough to have thought of these myself. I've just watched other dads and learned from them. But boy, it worked so well. So my deficiency turned into a strength.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:32:32] You applied yourself as a dad when your kids were growing up, and your kids now have kids. So do you see the impact of that input now in terms of what your family is like today? Just for some insight for younger dads out there that know it is a long game and that what we put in then will shine up in how they become parents later.

**Bruce Robison:** [00:32:56] I think the long game, I do think about that quite a bit. The long game as a dad. Now, my kids are all good parents. They've married wonderful people whom I adore. My three kids in law are wonderful people. I'm not sure how much I can take credit for that. I think my wife's probably got more credit than me, but together we've pulled together. I think that's the important thing, we have a, we've always worked together in terms of values and aspirations and tried to give the kids a sense of what's important in life. I think it's being manifested in their lives. I'm sure it is actually when I watch them now. There's another little benefit too. We have, at our house, there's a sloping path comes up from the road, and I tell you every time, without fail, every time I see one of my kids, my kids in law or grandkids walking up that path, my heart leaps with joy. Now you know that's a great benefit as you get older, that you can still have joy and a relationship with your kids and, you know, extended family now, that fills you with joy. And I think [00:34:00] that's a great benefit, if you play the long game, invest early on and you'll get it.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:34:09] I think it's about sowing seeds of potential in them when they're young. And. And your idea of being a father figure if they don't have one is another dad can sow those seeds of potential, but they can't germinate into being healthy, effective, resilient, grown up, safe adults. If no one sowed the seeds in their childhood for that potential to be loving parents.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:34:36] Now the Fathering Project has been going for ten years. What are you most proud of? The changes that you've seen over that time in Australia?

**Bruce Robison:** [00:34:46] What I've loved is what you said earlier on, that there's an awareness now that dads are important. That's the first thing. And secondly, dads are willing to do things that maybe they either weren't willing to do before or were discouraged from doing before. I have a friend who worked with his dad. He was an apprentice to his dad. In fact, his son is an apprentice to him in a factory, and when his daughter was like early teenager, he wanted to sort of spend more time with her because he realised he, you know, he's working long hours. And so he said to his dad, I'm going down to the school to pick up my daughter. He said, no you can't do that. I never did that. And he would not let his son go. And I think his son wasn't strong enough just to stand up to his dad. And I can understand why in that situation, because it made

the dad feel guilty that he hadn't done it. When his daughter was 14, she was going out late, coming home late, and he said he thought I'd better have a chat to her. He said, look, let's have a chat about boys, boys and sex. And he told me that, she looked at him and said, dad, you're too late. You're too late, dad. And he was totally gutted. But the thing is, he didn't do what he should have done. He felt he needed to do it. And that's one [00:36:00] difference today that men are saying, you know what? Whatever happens, I'm going to do it. I don't care what people think.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:36:05] Yep, so good to see. Okay, so this is a this is a biggie given how many wonderful gems you've already given us, but, if I asked for you for the one thing that you would want your three kids to have learned from you because you are their dad, what is the one thing?

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:36:25] I do love the notion of unconditional love. I do love that you know that my kids would love their kids regardless of how well they do academically or in sport, or if they behave badly, or if they don't believe the same things as they do about faith or anything like that, that they would love them anyway and they would make sure the kids knew that. I think my kids feel that. I mean, on the one hand, it's hard having a dad who's a professor of medicine and done pretty well, etc. but early on, it was really important that we made them realise that our love for them was totally unconditional, did not depend on any of their performance, and I think they felt that, they've learned that, because we said it. But I think they felt it. And I think I'm pretty sure they're passing that on to their kids as well.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:37:12] And it is one of the things that dads, when I'm with just a group of dads, some say to me how hard it has been for them to say that, because they never heard it from their own dad, but that's exactly what they're starting to nail now, because they they didn't get it. But I know it matters. And I've got dads writing love notes in lunch boxes and writing messages on mirrors and writing special notes, because if it can't come out of my mouth verbally, I'm going to make sure they see it and then they can hang on to that.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:37:43] I had a shocking moment a couple of months ago. I was sitting with a friend of mine who was visiting, and his son is an adult, lives overseas, and he went to visit him and his son said, sit down, dad, I want to talk to you about a few

things. And he unloaded on his dad about all the things that he never said. And one of them was what [00:38:00] you just said, love, I love you and I love you unconditionally. And he told his dad he never said it. Da da da da da. And this guy's a great guy. But here's what broke my heart 21 years before that, he and I had been in exactly the same spot out the front of our house, and I had strongly suggested to him that he should be involved in this kind of program. And he said, oh, no, you don't need to do that. I haven't yet reminded him of that fact. I haven't reminded him, but it broke my heart that his son said something to him that if only he'd got in 21 years before, his son would have sat his dad down and said, dad, one of the things I love about you is that you told me how much you loved me, and it didn't depend on anything, you know what I mean?

**Maggie Dent:** [00:38:46] It's gold. Okay, so your lucky last question, Bruce. If you could wind back the clock and pretend, you know, like with all this knowledge that you've gained over the last. We're not going to put a year on that because you and I are similar age, what advice would you give to your pre dad's self? So before you actually had kids, if you could go back and give yourself advice, what's a couple of things you would say?

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:39:09] I think I'd say to a young Bruce, look, start to read and think more. Start talking to people who actually have spent time on the road, some tribal elders, and stop imagining that where you are now is the way you should be. I mean, honestly, I remember going to first year university and they had a some group discussions. I had nothing to say. And I sat there thinking, how do you even know what to talk about? I mean, they were all thinking or not all of them, but there were people who were thinking about life and acquiring wisdom. I had absolutely zero. And I would say to a young Bruce, mate gain wisdom early on before you make mistakes. Fortunately, none of my mistakes were catastrophic.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:39:52] Bruce, can I just thank you for everything you've done for the dads of Australia? And yeah, may you, may you bide well and stay [00:40:00] around for a lot longer. Thank you.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:40:02] Thanks, Maggie. And thank you, too, for all you've done. As you know, you are one of my heroes. I mean, I was walking along the street into this studio and thinking about how many hundreds of thousands of children in Australia benefited from all your work, and I bless you for that.

**Maggie Dent:** [00:40:18] Thank you mate.

**Bruce Robinson:** [00:40:19] You're a gem!

**Maggie Dent:** [00:40:19] Doctor Bruce Robinson. Bruce is such a wise leading voice in this space and he had so many brilliant words to share. So let's grab a few for our good enough Dad checklist. Now firstly, when your kids muck up, remind your kids that they are still valued and worthwhile. And yes, they can be better than that and then work together on strategies for next time. Secondly, all men can be father figures, especially positive father figures, especially to those kids who don't have a dad or who have a lousy dad. Thirdly, start doing something because you should and watch it become something you love. And because this is the last EP for this season, we've decided to add an extra one, so forth. A reason is not an excuse. So if you come home cranky and grumpy because you've had a busy day at work, it is a reason, however, it's not an excuse for being grumpy at your kids. I'm Maggie Dent and this is The Good Enough Dad. Follow us on the LiSTNR app or wherever you get your podcasts.