

Meerilinga Podcast – Positive Childhoods

Episode 2 with David Walker

David Walker

The Fathering Project

Susie Perkins: Welcome to Meerilinga's Podcast series called "Positive Childhoods"

This series is to celebrate Children's Week 2021, and we're going to talking about the theme of Children's Week: "Children have the right to choose their own friends and safely connect with others". This podcast production is kindly sponsored by the Western Australian Department of Education and Lotterywest.

Belynda Smith: Kaya, wanjoo. Hello and welcome everyone. I'd like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land upon which we meet, and for us here today recording this podcast that's the Wadjuk Noongar people. I'd like to honour their continuing connection to land, waters, and community, and pay my respects to first nations people, past and present, in the spirit of reconciliation.

My name is Belynda Smith I'm a parenting facilitator with Meerilinga and I am really passionate about supporting parents so that families can thrive. My co-host:

Susie Perkins: I'm Susie Perkins. I also work with Meerilinga Young Children's Service and I manage the Meerilinga Parenting Service and the Southwest Metropolitan Parenting Service.

Belynda Smith: So Meerilinga is a not-for-profit organisation and registered charity that promotes the United Nations convention on the Rights of the Child; working with children, their families, early childhood professionals, planners, and the community to raise the status of children in Western Australia. Now I'll pass over to Susie to introduce our lovely guest for today

Susie Perkins: I've the pleasure of introducing you to our next guest, David Walker. David is a father of five and works for The Fathering Project here in Western Australia managing the Community Fathering program in Armadale. David works closely with 11 schools in Armadale to help create activities that help fathers and father-figures to build stronger relationships with their children via activities in the school. Welcome, David.

David Walker: Thank you, Susie

Belynda Smith: Thanks for being here, David

David Walker: Pleasure, thank you

Belynda Smith: So, we would love to start by asking you a really broad-reaching question: What brings you here? What's been the winding pathway for you to get to this point where you're working with fathers and father-figures to help families thrive?

D: Yeah, that's a good question. I'm originally from Tasmania, and the previous six years I worked with two primary schools in Tassie as their school chaplain and that introduced me to working with fatherless boys. So, I created a lot of activities in the school context where I could provide a positive outlet for the boys to connect with other father figures.

And then in 2013, we lost our family home in the Dunalley bush fires and that was the catalyst for change for us as a family. My wife and five kids, we jumped in the caravan and travelled Australia for two and a half years. What was on my heart was just to be really present for my children – we were separated from them during the bush fires. So that two and a half years on the road was a really concentrated period of just spending time with our kids, recreating memories – because we'd lost all our family photographs – and just a great time to explore Australia. And that route took us to arrive in Perth back in 2015.

Belynda Smith: I think that's an amazing story. Susie and I have had the pleasure of hearing this story a little bit before and I really admired the fact that you put that connection at the centre of everything after such a big upheaval. There's another element to this story that I feel like our audience would love to hear about, David, do you want to put that in there?

David Walker: Which part is that?

Belynda Smith: The Oprah part

David Walker: Ohh, okay! (Laughs) I suppose because the- the photograph that was captured of our children under the jetty with my mother-in-law, that sort of went viral across a lot of mainstream news outlets around the world. And it spruced some interest with some major interviewers around the world including Oprah.

There was a request for us to fly to America to participate in that program but we just politely declined that because, you know, our kids had been through a lot and the thought of travelling to the other side of the world to have that all reopened again – the trauma and the bush fires – was something I didn't feel lead to do. So, we just politely said thanks but no thanks.

Belynda Smith: I so admire that aspect of the story

Susie Perkins: Yeah, that's a great example of family resilience and mum and dad thinking about what's best- what is in their children's best interests.

David Walker: Yeah, that's true. And it was a tough period and still is in some ways – in working through the trauma of that experience. But you're right, hardship does create and environment to build resilience and pain is an aspect of that. I'm not sure how you can build resilience without life being uncomfortable.

Susie Perkins: Yep, agreed.

Belynda Smith: But also, fundamentally, life being uncomfortable but having those amazing parent figures who have your best interests at heart and who are 100% on your team, doing exactly what's best for you at that moment is really powerful.

David Walker: Yes, it is. And my wife, Bonnie, and I we're very committed to raising our five children. They were quite young at the time, our youngest, Charlotte, was barely two and our oldest, Matilda, was 12. So that's coming up to eight years ago now.

A lot has transpired in that time but, you know, we're a very close family and I suppose we have a heightened appreciation and awareness of each other because of that experience. We really try hard to keep our relationships intact because that is more important than anything.

Susie Perkins: Absolutely, completely agree.

Belynda Smith: And in your trip around Australia, I'm just curious, what were some of the highlights for you as a family?

David Walker: We spent about 12 months in the Northern Territory

Belynda Smith: Oh wow

David Walker: And we spent three months on a watermelon farm on the edge of the Tanami Desert

Susie Perkins: Wow!

David Walker: About 400 kilometres north of Alice Springs in a place called Ali Curung. I'm from a farming background, I grew up on an apple orchard in southern Tassie. So, I spent my early years learning to drive a tractor. Finding myself on the edge of the Tanami Desert with huge blue skies and just working on a watermelon farm for three months was just the tonic that I needed to reconnect with nature I suppose.

And also, for our children, they've all been very inquisitive. We've predominately home schooled our children, and so this was a great opportunity to teach our kids about geography and life on the land. And we did many trips through central Australia just exploring. We did lots of walking as a family and that just built memories – positive memories – and family connection, which I can honestly say has borne really positive fruit because we've got great relationships with all our kids.

Susie Perkins: Fantastic. Inspiring

Belynda Smith: It really is, isn't it?

Your role with The Fathering Project, want to tell us a little bit more about that and what you do there?

David Walker: Yes. I started with The Fathering Project in September 2017, and it was a program especially set up from The Fathering Project to try and engage dads in a low socio-economic area. So predominantly early on, in the early stages of The Fathering Project – we established here in Perth, WA, but our head office now is centralised Sydney because we're having a big impact not only in schools right up the eastern seaboard. Australia-wide we've got 670 schools now engaged with The Fathering Project. And here in WA we've got upwards of 170 active dads' groups.

My particular role in Armadale is to help schools, and especially the dad community, to form dads' group in those schools. So, I work with 10 schools just in the City of Armadale to help those schools run one activity per term. That activity can be something simple like [a] making paper planes and pizza night, where we have upwards of 20, 30 dads come to the school with their children, make paper planes, have pizza. And it's a way of helping the dad come into the school community – which some dads have never been on to school property before.

They're coming into their kids place and that validates the child in that "Dad's just come to school!". I remember back in Tassie when I was going to Franklin Primary and my dad came to our local school, to my local primary school, to participate in a working bee to build our local cricket pitch. I can still remember to drive there, I was only about eight at the time, I can remember driving there with my dad in the ute, dad building the cricket pitch, pouring the concrete. He climbed the top of this huge, big pine tree in the middle of the school yard. There are so many things that are etched in my memory just because my dad came to my school.

So that's what I'm passionate about – bring dads into the school, to participate in activities that build stronger relationships with their kids, create positive memories, and to build relationship with other dads in the school community.

Belynda Smith: I was going to ask about that because that's [at] my children's school. We have the fathering group active there. It's been wonderful, they've done all sorts of amazing fundraisers as well, and really, I can see these dads building a community of connected supportive relationships. It just seems such a powerful thing, what's your experience with that?

David Walker: My experience with that- dads, when they're alongside other dads [and] doing an activity, that's how relationships start. Because dads, generally speaking, feel more comfortable doing a parallel activity, whether it's with their child or next to another dad. And that just creates an environment where dads can start connecting with other dads though a shared experience. I can already see in some schools I've worked with in Armadale for four years, the dads starting to communicate with other dads. They've got- they can share common stories about an activity they've done. So, when they're outside the school context and they run into another dad in the community there's that connection, which is part of what I try to create with the community fathering program.

Belynda Smith: Beautiful. Lucky dads

Susie Perkins: Absolutely

Belynda Smith: I'm curious about a sort of more personal angle now, what are some of the great joys for you about being a dad, if you don't mind sharing how it is for you as a dad personally? What's the beautiful things about it?

David Walker: Yeah, look, that's a good question, and for me one thing I really enjoy doing, and I got into the habit of doing early, in connecting with my kids was sharing a bedtime story.

I used to have fox terriers when I was a kid- fox terrier dog. And so, there was a story called *The Two Nippies*, where it was just an introduction to my life. I used to tell stories about my fox terrier and a little boy, and the little boy was me. The kids would request that every night. That gave me an opportunity to reminisce about my own childhood, tell my children about where I grew up, some of the things I experienced: whether it was fishing, whether it was hiding behind a bullrush, dodging plovers that were trying to bombard us, walking through the apple orchard picking apples. It was just a way of introducing them to my life more personally, especially now that we're here in Peth, I still want my children to have that connection to Tassie because they were all bore in Tasmania. Keeping those memories alive by sharing personal stories has been a real highlight to my fathering.

Belynda Smith: Yeah, that's beautiful. My understanding as well is that research has shown that that kind of cohesive narrative of your life and experience really has a powerful impact on outcomes for children. So, I think it's a natural thing to want to do, and then it's completely backed up by science as a great thing to do!

David Walker: And I feel it invites our children into my life, they get to know me better, and also its setting a pattern that hopefully one day when they have children, they'll be able to introduce that to their kids. It's really important as dads, and as men, that we are emotionally honest. And we're honest with how we feel. Sadly, for a lot of men they find that an uncomfortable space to enter into because it requires being vulnerable, but it does take courage to go there.

But what I've found working with dads in in the local community is if you create a safe place, they do want to enter into that. They do want to share their struggles. Also, to address the myth that I'm the only dad struggling with something, the truth is, all of us dads are struggling or something.

Also, it's an opportunity for us to validate other dads in the role they do, because all dads are doing the best they can, and they do want to have a stronger relationship with their children. Hopefully through the work we do with The Fathering Project. We can increase their capacity as dads

Belynda Smith: Lovely.

Susie Perkins: David, can you talk to us about one of the most challenging things for you about being a dad?

David Walker: Look, I would probably say finding other dads to walk the journey with me. Finding other dads that I can be emotionally honest with, and transparent with, to feel safe with, to build that sense of community that we're on this journey together.

That's been a challenge and also probably on a personal level, in connecting with my own children. Now we've got five children: they've all got different personality types, some of them are more conducive to my personality type. It's a challenge not to gravitate to the child that that you find easier to get along with.

Obviously, there are some personality types that I find easy to avoid, but the truth is, as a dad, they need my love as much as the child I find it easy to get on with. They need love from me as well.

Susie Perkins: Really good point.

What do you think dads and dad figures need in order to be able to show up for their children in ways that make a difference?

David Walker: When our first daughter, Matilda was born – like, that's over 20 years ago now – I was there at the birth, which was an absolute privilege. Yeah, it was daunting. Yeah, I felt clumsy. Yeah, I didn't know what I needed to do to support my wife.

But I stepped into that space and changed the first nappy, I just got in there early.

To address some of those fears and inhibitions about not knowing what to do, you just gotta get in there and make a start. Yeah, you will make mistakes. You will learn. But it's such a great place to enter into. One thing that just worked for my wife and I was now once their children had finished breastfeeding and I took on the nighttime role of monitoring their sleep, getting up in the middle of the night if they woke up.

There are so many beautiful moments, even at 3o'clock in the morning, of just being able to be there for your child. I can comfort them, put them back to sleep. My encouragement for dads out there would be just to get in there, just to start the process, and you will learn so much along the way. Just by doing something you'll just gain confidence.

Parenting is, you're growing all the time, and the earlier you start it – in terms of building relationship with your kids and being hands on – the easier it will be in terms of navigating the teenage years where it's all about relationship. Because without that relationship we don't have influence.

Belynda Smith: I think you've hit upon some- you know there's some really interesting research too that says that early paternity leave is profoundly important because of exactly what you're talking about: when dads get in the mix early, when they get to forge that connection early, when they're a part of the day to day routine early, then that sense of competence, that sense of being involved translates overtime to a completely different trajectory for your relationship and for outcomes for your child. So, so important.

David Walker: Exactly. And it's also a way of expressing your love for your partner because it certainly does share the workload

Susie Perkins: Yeah, good point.

David Walker: Look, there are some aspects that obviously my wife is better at than I, but you know me just entering into that space, and helping, and being hands on certainly helps our marriage to be stronger

Susie Perkins: How does your organisation support children's connections within their community and family?

David Walker: Specifically talking about my role in the Community Farthing program. As I mentioned, the schools I work with, I create an activity per term per school. So, the dads in a particular school can have four activities throughout the year they can attend, you know Australia wide. And our dads' groups function like that as well. And it's about bringing the dads into the school and the children feel supported in that environment.

And the dads feel supported in that environment as well. Because through that we can resource to dads with a tremendous amount of resource we have available to the dads whether it be online or through our tips for fathers and father figures. So, that's the way that we can engage the dads, and interact with the dads.

And you know that our research clearly shows that the more a father or father figure is engaged with their child the better the outcomes are for that child.

Susie Perkins: And I think in terms of, you know, the context of this year's theme for Children's Week, what you're doing in your role, and The Fathering Project more broadly, is role modelling to dads about friendship and relationship. So, having an organisation with that mandate encourages then dads to build friendships and relationships with one another and show their children how that's done.

David Walker: Yeah, and I do that practically as well because most activities that I run in the schools in Armadale I take one or two or more of my children along with me. And my two youngest daughters, they love coming to the Lego nights. So, that gives me an opportunity to spend an hour building Lego. (They secretly love to come along to get a better pizza as well!)

Me being there with my children is an example to other dads in the room that I'm not just doing the talk. I'm doing the walk as well.

Susie Perkins: Yeah, I think that's really important, isn't it?

David Walker: Yeah, it's really important.

Belynda Smith: I love how authentic and open you are about the challenges too, because those discussions- it's so difficult for any parent to have in our society and culture when we're all trying to keep up with the Joneses and have this perfect life. When someone does open that door and say, "Oh, it's pretty hard for me sometimes, actually." it then allows people to be a bit more honest and connect in meaningful ways.

David Walker: Yes, it does, and I've had to face that reality myself in my own parenting where I had to reach out to some father figures that I respect to get some feedback and that was quite humbling to my honest. It was quite because here I am representing The Fathering Project and having to reach out to get help

But I think that's that sets the example for other dads to follow because we don't have all the answers and as our children develop and grow in age, we need to develop and grow our parenting skills as well. And being around a community of other dads and having a group of other men that you can reach out to ask a question: "Look, this is the struggle I've got. You've gone down the path a bit further than me. How would you address this?" is really important.

Susie Perkins: Absolutely.

Belynda Smith: Your organisation does this amazing job of supporting connections between dads, and between dads and their children. And now I'm thinking about, on a really practical level, [how] are you as a dad or dads that you work with supporting children's friendships? You know when there's a break in those friendships and things go pear shaped, what sort of strategies do you find most useful?

What sort of overarching frameworks do you use when your children are having a hard time or when you see children having a hard time?

David Walker: Yes, I try to. You know if our children have fallen out of relationship or they've taken offence, there's always something to learn out of that. What is it about that incident that caused you offence and why have you responded like that?

Because it's not always about the other person that's caused the offence, there's often something that's potentially character building within yourself that you can look at that addresses the offence. And also, it teaches, or it creates, an opportunity where we can talk to our children through the reality that at times, they make mistakes and they need to be forgiven. And there are times their friends will make mistakes and their friends will need to be forgiven.

So, it's just trying to work from that framework. That it's not always about looking at the other person and what they've done wrong, but how at different aspects of all of our lives we will make mistakes, we want to be forgiven and to be able to move on from that.

Belynda Smith: Beautiful

Susie Perkins: Lovely, good reflection.

Belynda Smith: I love your stories, I'm really enjoying hearing your stories, so I'm curious if you've got any specific stories about dads and dad figures, or those who identify as dads [about] the short-term impact of that sort of responsive, involved dadding and then the long-term impact. If you've seen any, or if you've experienced any stories that you can share with us around the impact that that really has.

David Walker: To address the first one, the short-term impact: we've been fortunate through the WA Police Community Crime Prevention Fund to secure funds to run two camps per year down at Dare Adventures in Dwellingup. I ran two camps in 2019 and with all upheaval of last year we didn't do two camps but this year in June we ran a camp with Westfield Park Primary. We had 12 days and about 15 kids for a two-night activity-based camp at Dwellingup. Everything was based around activities, there wasn't a screen insight, the kids were just completely engaged with the activities.

We actually were able to capture, and we recorded on the video to capture, the impact that had on dads and kids with their experience through the camp. And there's one particular example to address that question about short term impact. There's a particular dad there that reflected on his relationship with his son and how he, at times, struggled having that physical connection with his son. The dad was open to having more physical cuddles, but his son wasn't. Through this camp, something changed, shifted in their relationship and they had a closer relationship.

They hugged more. They were conversing more. They were just more: how he described it was it's not just a father-son relationships, we feel like we're friends now. He said that was a major breakthrough for him so that was really encouraging and it's really exciting to see.

You create an environment for dads to step into with their children. For them to get something positive out of it that will impact not only them, their son, and future generations is really exciting.

And for the second one, for a long-term perspective, I use my own illustration because when I was growing up in in Tassie I used to play football and early on in the early mini league years I couldn't catch a ball to save myself. It was like my chest was rubber. The ball would hit me on the chest, would bounce off. And there's one day there, I think the umpire I felt sorry for me because I just sort of humbled and overhead mark, and I must have randomly touched it about three times and he awarded me the mark. I think I was more shocked than anyone else on the ground.

Anyway, at the three-quarter time huddle at the at the break, there was a there are lots of dads in the club. As I reflect back on my life now, I can see how many father figures there were at the football club that actually spoke into the lives of myself and other young guys at the club. This dad came up to me said, "Oh, that was a great mark, Dave." He said, "You've got the best set of hands in the Huon."

And I thought "That's ridiculous!" but I was actually naive enough to believe it. And as it turned out I went on to play senior footy in the local Huon competition. But that became the strongest part of my game because I really feel reflecting on it was because someone believed in me. As an encouragement to the dads listening to this: the words that you speak, as a father figure or as a father, into other people's lives [are] tremendously impacting. And that can be positive and also negative. So, we do need to be very mindful of the words that we use because, you know, especially if you're in relationship with people or in a sporting club context where we do have access to other people's children, the words that we speak are impacting and potentially they can carry you for the rest of your life

Susie Perkins: Wow, that's a wonderful story. Great, again, great illustration of how important we are to each other in ways that we don't often think about or understand, and particularly true for dads and dad figures.

David Walker: Yeah, look if I could add this piece in: I was watching the SAS Australia last night and Sam Burgess was reflecting on his father. And his father said to Sam, "Hard work equals sweat." and he's always remembered that. You know, just one little phrase at the right time, can have such a massive impact. And that work ethic – because that was the question, where do you get your inspiration for your work, and that was his response.

That was something his dad spoke to him many years before that, but that was his work ethic that was his motivation to do what he's done in the Rugby World through what his dad had spoken to him.

So don't underestimate dads out there. The impact you can have with the words that you speak.

Belynda Smith: Beautiful.

Susie Perkins: Fantastic.

Belynda Smith: So, you touched very briefly on COVID, how are you finding that as a framework for life: for your clientele and for your own family, how has been the impact?

I mean here in Perth it's not quite so huge, but certainly it's this spectre that looms for everyone. So, what's been the impact for you?

David Walker: Here in Perth, as you said, we haven't been as impacted as currently over the East, but we did sort of get a glimpse of that last year. I think it was term 3 last year, virtually all the schools were shut down. And I did feel a sense of responsibility of, "How am I going to maintain these relationships?".

But in some ways, it created an opportunity to actually reach out to the dads one on one rather than just rely on them stepping into the school. So, while we couldn't do school-based activities, it did create an opportunity to connect with the dads more one on one. I did attempt the zoom approach or Teams meetings online... That had limited success.

But certainly, the one on one contact had an impact, just to stay in touch, and so that's been my experience with it here in Perth. And like at the moment everything is fully underway like last term we you know; we ran 10 activities in the schools and the dads are engaged and so hopefully that can continue.

Belynda Smith: Fingers crossed, yeah.

So, a couple of other questions for you, David. Co-parents and partners. What do we need to do to support dads to be their most confident selves? Because it's something that I have heard from dads, that they don't always feel as supported as they might be. What's what's the best thing for co-parents to know or partners to know in that space?

David Walker: I think I touched on it before about my early recollections of being a dad was stepping into that space and being hands on early. When you when you do that, you're actually feeling quite vulnerable because you feel like you're gonna not get it right, or you gonna muck it up. The truth is you will at times.

So as a as a partner looking on, my encouragement would be to be sensitive to that. If you want your partner to be more active with your children, be their best supporter. Be their encourager. There's always things we need to work on.

If that becomes the thing that's magnified, men generally will potentially step back and not be as involved. You know, some men need to get over that as well, and they need to actually go "Well, OK. Yep, that was a correction, but I'm gonna keep moving forward because it's the best for me, it's best for the child, it's best for our relationship.

Yeah, I suppose from my perspective, be your partner's encourager when they're stepping in, changing nappies, and they've got poo going everywhere; that's not the time to criticise, that's the time to say; "Would you like a baby wipe?"

Because I've been there.

Belynda Smith: So, we're almost ready to wrap up, but just curious about your wish for anyone listening in: early educators, dads, sad figures, mums, carers. If they take away one key idea from listening to you today, what do you hope that might be? What's your big message?

David Walker: To start the conversation around fathering, I think. One of the great things about my role within The Fathering Project, it's my work. I mean most blokes say what do you do? You know, when I was a surveyor, I would say "Surveyor", and that sort of puts you in into a category or "I'm a school chaplain". But now I work for The Fathering Project. I feel a lot more at ease meeting other men and saying, "How you going as a dad?"

And that really opens up conversation. A lot of men don't get asked that. A lot of men go, "Who's your favourite footie field arm?", you know, "Who do you follow on the cricket or whatever?" I don't want to be too narrow in that but, but generally speaking, a lot of men don't get asked: "How are you going as a dad?", and what that does, it actually opens up conversation. And be ready to listen because not everything you'll hear may be that comfortable but if you if you ask the question, be prepared to listen to the answer be present because you could be a real help to the person you just asked the question to.

It enables you then to potentially share some of your wisdom around your journey as a father. You just don't know what word of encouragement you can give to another dad that they may need to hear for them to have the encouragement to keep going with what they've committed to.

Belynda Smith: Beautiful thanks. So, we've really enjoyed that deep dive with you and to finish off each of the podcasts in this series, we'd like to ask a series of quick questions. Susie's going to ask those

Susie Perkins: Ok, so David, name the book you loved most as a child.

David Walker: It was probably the Enid Blyton storybooks. I just used to immerse myself in those and just get carried- my thoughts would just get carried away in the in the storyline, so Enid Blyton.

Susie Perkins: Lovely. Who was the first friend you can remember having as a child, and what did you love about them?

David Walker: Ah, that's that was probably a kid just up the road called Terry, Terry Walker. He's one of my cousins. And I suppose he just had a little sense of adventure. He was always more skilled than I was so used to try and replicate, whether he be hitting a cricket ball or kicking the footy. And he used to have a real sense of adventure, whether we're building cubby houses, or chasing plovers around the back paddock. So, yeah, those are some memories that I got from Terry.

Susie Perkins: Lovely, that's nice.

In one sentence, what's your happiest childhood memory? (You can have more than one sentence...)

David Walker: Yeah, look, there used to be a little creek that was about a two kilometre walk from home and we used to get a little piece of willow stick and a piece of fishing line, and we used to dig worms in the backyard. And there'd be times that I'd go down there with my dad and would just catch these little trout and that that's a fond memory because dad was always so busy on the farm. And having dad to myself was really special.

Susie Perkins: Great, describe your favourite outdoor space or place.

David Walker: That easily be walking in the mountains of Tassie. I've done the overland track a few times, walked to the top of Frenchman's Cap. Just being in the outdoors, standing on a mountain, breathing in the fresh air, exercising, being with friends, sharing that experience. Yeah, it's great.

Susie Perkins: That's a great visual picture, thank you

Please complete the sentence: To help them thrive, children need:

David Walker: Unconditional love. A big principle of ours through The Fathering Project is the B.U.S principle. **B**e there for your children, **U** for unconditional love, and **S** for making them feel special. Kids will make mistakes, we make mistakes as adults, and they need to know that there's a separation between them as a person and their misdemeanour.

So, yes, what you've done, I may not like that, but I still love you as a person. So, it has to be unconditional love.

Susie Perkins: That's such an important distinction for all of us, isn't it? No matter what we do, separating the behaviour from the person is critical.

David Walker: Yeah, and I remember, a former police commissioner Carl O'Callaghan, reflecting on his relationship with his son. And you know that's a very publicised event here in Perth, but he reinforced to me the importance of unconditional love. He said, "Look, son, that particular thing you did, I don't like that, does not stop me from loving you."

And that was a really great example and a very bold example I think, yeah, our kids will muck up and they need to know that they're loved still.

Susie Perkins: Yeah, very important message.

Finally, how can listeners learn more about your work and get in touch with you and your organisation?

David Walker: By simply just Googling *The Fathering Project* and making contact through that means.

They can be in touch with someone who can put them in touch with myself if they're particularly interested in the in the work that I do in Armadale, because I will give that a little bit of a plug. I am looking for volunteers to step into that space, to adopt a school, to be a dad group leader in the school. So, if there are dads out there that want to give back to the community in a very fulfilling way then reach out to The Fathering Project

Just ask to get in touch with myself and I'll get back to them.

Susie Perkins: Lovely thank you.

Belynda Smith: Thank you so much David. It's been real joy listening to your stories and-

David Walker: Pleasure, thank you!

Belynda Smith: And hearing more about your wonderful life and wonderful family and all that you do.

Thank you for everything listeners as well that you do for your families.

If you like more information regarding Meerilinga, you can contact us at mycf@meerilinga.org.au, or you can visit www.meerilinga.org.au. Thank you for listening

Susie Perkins: Thank you, thank you, David.

Belynda Smith: Thanks, David

David Walker: Thanks ladies.