



## Episode 10: Grace Tame

### Transcript

#### Grace Tame

[instrumental music] In a utopia, ideally there would be no child sexual abuse and, therefore, the world would be a better place because children are our future. You know? Children grow up to be adults. And I think, again, that's, that's easily forgotten.

#### Female voiceover

Welcome to Voices Towards 2050: Ending Gender-Based Violence, the official podcast series of the Domestic, Family, and Sexual Violence Commission. Please be aware that this podcast discusses topics related to domestic, family, and sexual violence, which may be distressing for some listeners. Support is available. If you need assistance, please contact 1800RESPECT or reach out to your local support services. Thank you for joining us.

#### Micaela Cronin

Joining us today for the podcast is a true force of nature. Grace, thank you for joining me for this conversation about our shared hopes for the future.

#### Grace Tame

Oh, thank you, Micaela, and thank you for that very generous introduction. [laughs]

#### Micaela Cronin

Oh, I haven't even started my introduction to you yet.

#### Grace Tame

[laughs]

#### Micaela Cronin

Give me a minute. I want to start though... First, I wanna start this conversation by acknowledging that today I'm in the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. It is a pleasure to be able to joyfully, I think, start every conversation with an acknowledgement. I live here, and I pay my deep respects to their elders past and present for the care of these lands and for the ongoing generosity and wisdom. My personal and professional commitment is to work and live as an ally, both in this role and always.

Grace, despite the fact that I think you need very little introduction, I just wanna take a moment to introduce you to our listeners. So for those of you who haven't heard of her, Grace Tame is a survivor, an activist, a marathon runner, an advocate for child sexual abuse survivors, and a genuine force for systemic change. Grace became well known after being named the Australian of the Year in 2021, which doesn't sound like that long ago, but Grace, uh, it really... It feels like longer than that to me.

#### Grace Tame

[laughs]

#### Micaela Cronin

And I'm sure it does to you.

#### Grace Tame

Oh, yeah. [laughing]



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**Micaela Cronin**

Yeah. Your impact, however, started long before that. As an active campaigner for sexual violence justice reforms, Grace featured as one of the 17 courageous survivors featured in Nina Fennell's Let Her Speak campaign to overturn laws that actively silenced survivors of sexual assault. Since then, Grace has become a powerful voice for justice and policy reform. She's a founder of the Grace Tame Foundation, a hugely impactful public speaker, having heard her speak many times, author of her memoir, and an illustrator. Finally, a fun fact, Grace is a practicing yoga instructor. Something that I have often talk about is what I would like to be in my next career.

**Grace Tame**

[laughs]

**Micaela Cronin**

Grace, thank you so much for joining me today.

**Grace Tame**

Oh, gosh, thank you for the... for, uh, for all of that. I am calling in from, um, the lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and I also pay my respects to elders past and present and acknowledge that the conversations such as the one we're gonna have today are still in need of better representation of, of, um, a diverse range of experiences. And our First Nations people all across the nation, in particular, have so much to offer us because sexual violence is, is very much tied to colonisation and-

**Micaela Cronin**

Mm-hmm.

**Grace Tame**

... yeah, there are so many stories yet to, yet to be told that are necessary for driving change.

**Micaela Cronin**

Yeah, absolutely, couldn't agree more. And, in fact, I think to date, more than half of the people I've interviewed for this podcast have been First Nations people because I agree, we have so much to learn from their, unfortunately, deep experience of these issues.

**Grace Tame**

Yeah, and for their healing as well.

**Micaela Cronin**

For their healing and the incredible practices that they have passed on for generations that we have a great deal to learn from, so very good practice as well.

**Grace Tame**

Agreed.

**Micaela Cronin**

So, Grace, let me start by asking you to tell me a bit about what motivates you to do this work, what motivates you s- to strive for a different future.

**Grace Tame**

Well, despite the landscape of, of child sexual abuse and child sexual abuse advocacy at times being pretty grim, um, obviously it's a-

**Micaela Cronin**

Mm-hmm.



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**Grace Tame**

... very heavy and complex subject, working with like-minded people, um, and for survivors and, you know, with the goal to, to safeguard children, who are our future, is ultimately a, a really rewarding pathway. And so, you know, when I get down and, um, sometimes frustrated with, um, how, you know, glacially slow [laughs] change can be-

**Micaela Cronin**

Mm-hmm.

**Grace Tame**

... I'm lifted up by those around me who are equally dedicated and, and, and passionate, but also knowledgeable. You know, I think that child sexual abuse is something that still isn't well understood, the nature of it in particular. You know, there are statistics that have become, um, more common knowledge now around the prevalence, that it's one in four, so 28.5% of the Australian population, that will experience some form of sexual abuse by age 18.

**Micaela Cronin**

Mm-hmm.

**Grace Tame**

But in terms of the, the nature and the evolving nature, especially now that, uh, we have become a d-digitally dependent society, remains unknown and that feeds into our inability to frame the issue properly, I think. It's, you know, often seen as a social issue, um, when really it's a crisis of public health and-

**Micaela Cronin**

Mm-hmm.

**Grace Tame**

... you know, child sexual abuse doesn't, doesn't happen in a vacuum. Um, it's easy for us to, to sort of conceptualise an, an, an issue to do with a child as, you know, being isolated to childhood. But, of course, as, as you know, um, and those of us in the sector know, child sexual abuse is a leading cause of homelessness, of drug dependence, of suicide, of chronic illness, of mental illness, and it also, [laughs] uh, in many cases, can lead to further violence, different forms of violence. Um, that's a- another difficult conversation that perhaps the public isn't ready to hear that, you know, if we look at statistics around perpetration of the men who have offended against children, they're six times more likely to have experienced child sexual abuse themselves.

**Micaela Cronin**

Mm-hmm.

**Grace Tame**

Um, you know, and four times more likely to have experienced domestic violence or some w-... other form of de- destabilising childhood experience, and so there's not necessarily a clear divide between v- between victim survivors and between perpetrators.

**Micaela Cronin**

Mm-hmm.

**Grace Tame**

Um, you know, this is a generational issue, an issue of generational trauma and I still don't think that it is properly treated as such. Um, and so I have, you know, a lot of motivation around really giving child sexual abuse its, its proper categorisation and its proper, the gravitas that it deserves, you know?

**Micaela Cronin**

Yeah.



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**Grace Tame**

Uh, when we have discussions about gendered violence, child sexual abuse is just a footnote, even though it accounts for over 50% of all sex crime prosecutions in this country. Um, and yet we've got a 0.3 conviction rate-

**Micaela Cronin**

Mm-hmm.

**Grace Tame**

... um, for offenders. And I think that also speaks to the, the crime type. Um, you know, someone who's offending against a child, and, uh, in particular, someone who's offending repeatedly against a child, is, is very different to an adult harming another adult. There are maybe similarities, um, in terms of the coercive tactics, but really it is... It's a socially stigmatised thing. And so s- someone must be aware of that, and they're necessarily subverting systems that are in place to safeguard children. So there's this awareness and this manipulation that is inherent in child sexual abuse. There's an almost inherent sadism to it. And so I don't think that's properly understood either, at least within the general public. And so I have, you know, motivation around, uh, again, reframing that and understanding that, that offender cohort and, and sort of shifting the common response, as you know, as well, when we hear about these things in the media is still, "Oh, but that was a really nice person."

**Micaela Cronin**

Yeah.

**Grace Tame**

"And how did they... How did they do that?" When, when really it should be, if we understood grooming and how grooming doesn't just apply to the child victim that is targeted, but to the entire environment, all the people around the child, you know? I want the reaction to be more one of why... Oh, that like- of anger of, "Oh, they manipulated me as well." Not, "Oh, that's a nice person," because by, [laughs] you know, by definition, if you are harming children, that negates any- anything, you know? Nothing can trump that. That's... There's no equaliser to that. Yeah. And I mean, i- I also think that there's a... can be a kind of common- commonly defeatist attitude when we think about something as prevalent as child sexual abuse to just go, "All right, well, we know we need to chuck all of our resources at, um, response measures 'cause there's sort of, you know, there's a guaranteed number of cases we're just gonna have to mop up." But I'm not resigned to that belief. I think that, you know, I'm really motivated by putting more focus on not just primary prevention, but interventions across the board. Not just education, but other... other practical measures, um, to actually stop children from being harmed in the first place, because as soon as a child is harmed, it's too late.

**Micaela Cronin**

Yeah, completely agree, Grace. And I think that motivation to prevent and to really drive so that the future is different, it's not just that we are continuing to do more of the same, um, is very much what motivated me to start this podcast and these conversations. So I, I wanna, I wanna move to... I, I really wanna hear your view, because of the way you've described that of if, if all of these efforts... And, and you've made a huge contribution to this conversation. I think you're spot on when you say that sexual violence, incest is often a footnote. It is not given the same attention that family and domestic violence is. And even that isn't given enough attention. But our thinking about if, if our national plan... So we have a national plan and a national commitment. Every government in this country has committed to ending gender-based violence in one generation. If that's successful, what would your vision of 2050 be? What would it look like?

**Grace Tame**

[laughs] Um, well, the climate will be cle- would be cleaned up. [laughs]

**Micaela Cronin**

Yes, good.



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**Grace Tame**

Um, and, and liveable.

**Micaela Cronin**

Yes.

**Grace Tame**

And there would be... [laughs] This is the socialist in me coming out right now. There'd be no billionaires. [laughs] Um, maybe billionaire corporations, but, um, there'd be some serious wealth redistribution, um, if I had anything to do with it. And that would help. That would also help because violence begets violence. And violence is also bred in, in conditions of extreme instability and inequality.

**Micaela Cronin**

Yeah.

**Grace Tame**

What would my vision be? It's hard to say, um, because I am also a realist. But ideally, no child would be harmed, but then we'd also see a reduction in, in some of those other socioeconomic issues that I mentioned earlier, you know? Like if you treated child sexual abuse properly and you, and you prevented it, you'd probably remove two-thirds of the patients in the mental healthcare system, you know? You would reduce rates of, of alcoholism and drug dependence and suicide and homelessness and unemployment. All of those things I think would be improved significantly, and you would red- reduce rates of domestic violence-

**Micaela Cronin**

Mm-hmm.

**Grace Tame**

... um, and, and other, and other forms of crime. So I think that let's give it a shot and really let's go back to the germination point. Let's go back to the very beginning of, of the, of the child who is, uh, who is having these experiences imprinted on them that are carried at that cellular level that don't go. But also when I say that, I also think it's really important that like, you know, in cases where a child has, has been harmed, they're also like at that point of development more receptive to treatment. You know? And it can just be even one positive adult in their life can make a difference between, you know, healing well and, and, and not healing well. Um-

**Micaela Cronin**

Absolutely. So, Grace, so absolutely.

**Grace Tame**

[laughs]

**Micaela Cronin**

So tell me what you... If you, if you could travel forward in time to this vision of the future, what would you... What questions would you have? Like if you were there and you, and you were able to investigate and, and ask and spend some time talking to people, asking questions, what would you be interested to find out about what was different? What's happening in this future?

**Grace Tame**

I'd be interested to find out how much resources, um, have been properly invested in, in education-

**Micaela Cronin**

Mm-hmm.



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**Grace Tame**

... um, and, and healthcare. And yeah, I'd be, I'd be interested in the socioeconomic structure, and I'd be interested in what, what are the, what are the rates of child sexual abuse. I'd be interested to know in 25 years how much that would all be reduced. I mean, in a, in a sort of like utopia, as I said before, ideally there would be no child sexual abuse, and therefore the world would be a better place because children are our future. You know, children grow up to be adults, and I think, again, that's, that's easily forgotten.

**Micaela Cronin**

Yeah.

**Grace Tame**

Uh, it's, it's, it's so hard to say because it's such an open-ended question, but yeah [laughs]-

**Micaela Cronin**

It is an open-ended question, Grace. I'm trying to-

**Grace Tame**

You know, like... [laughs]

**Micaela Cronin**

[laughs] I'm trying to push you to get what are the, what are the, what are the details? So, given that you, you do do a lot of thinking about this and what, what we need to do to get on that, to get to that future, if you had the ability to make any change necessary right now from your perspective and the things that you know are important, what would you do? What's the one thing you would do? And I know it's not one thing, but what's the, what's the one thing that you think would, would help get us on the path towards achieving a v- a violence-free 2050?

**Grace Tame**

So, something that I do think is missing is a proper and pivotal understanding of what child grooming is. You know, I think that there's a pretty solid understanding or, or at least a belief that is shared between most of the community, besides maybe people who willingly, uh, and, and joyously harm children.

**Micaela Cronin**

Mm-hmm.

**Grace Tame**

Thankfully that's a minority. But I think that there's a belief that to contact offend against a child is wrong, to, to, to sexually engage with them is wrong, um, whether that's groping them or, or in, in the most extreme cases, violently raping them, um, and over a long period of time. I think those things are understood to be wrong. However, again, when I come back to that question that's often asked of how, how did this happen because this person was so nice-

**Micaela Cronin**

Yes.

**Grace Tame**

... it speaks to this misunderstanding of, of grooming. And grooming is, is not something that falls under the banner of consent education. Um, and this is where there's been a really dangerous conflation, I think, in the, in the media and in the general public, because in cases of an adult harming a child, consent is irrelevant. It's a-

**Micaela Cronin**

Mm-hmm.



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**Grace Tame**

... an irrelevant part of the discourse in terms of the legal aspect of it, but it's also an irrelevant part of it in terms of, like, science, in terms of biology. Because as we know, a child can- cannot consent to sex with an adult for the fundamental reason, first and foremost, that they are still developing neurologically, as well as physically and socially. They don't, they do not have the same capacity as an adult to do anything. There's-

**Micaela Cronin**

Mm-hmm.

**Grace Tame**

... there's an inherent inequality. And there's, there's that aspect, but also, as I come back to the, the, this gap, this, this yawning gap, where grooming, which is such a specific stratagem of psychological manipulation and, and control, that once successfully executed by a perpetrator, does actually enable them to abuse in plain sight through this sort of process of desensitisation. And you find that many people around the perpetrator may be- may be unwittingly actually enabling-

**Micaela Cronin**

Mm-hmm.

**Grace Tame**

... if not participating in the abuse somehow, whether it's delivering a child to them or covering for them, um, without knowing what they're covering for and things like that. But I would really like to see, um, emphasis and, and focus put on this specific sort of dark, as I said, framework of tactics of... that does in some ways mirror coercive control, but has a really, obviously, a, a, a more bleak underpinning because it is, um, an adult doing it to, in every case, someone who is unequal to them.

**Micaela Cronin**

Yeah.

**Grace Tame**

I would love to see that put at, at the forefront of our priorities list when it comes to safeguarding children for the reason that it provides us, as a society, with not only the tools to identify and explain past cases of abuse and give the language that, in many cases, is often missing for a, for a person to describe what they went through, describe what, what happened to them, but also to identify existing, but also potential cases of abuse in order to stop them from happening in the first place.

**Micaela Cronin**

Mm-hmm.

**Grace Tame**

And again, if that sort of, if that sort of rigorous, thorough, and very specialised training was instituted, I do think that it would have a massive impact beyond that context in prevention of not just child sexual abuse, and not just raising awareness, but in preventing a lot of these other issues that stem from the experience of child sexual abuse. So, yeah, I'd like to see that. I'd like to see that mandatorily taught in every school, um, both in the public and private system. I'd also like to see it, uh, taught to anyone who works with children and for society at large.

**Micaela Cronin**

It's an incredible... It, it's such a vision, Grace, for a whole generation have their eyes opened to what's happening in plain sight and to be aware of and able to see it and act on it. That kind of... What you're, what you're talking about is really fundamentally changing such an important aspect of how, how it is that it's possible that we have such high rates of child sexual abuse. And as you say, then how much that then goes on to impact on all sorts of other sorts of violence-





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**Grace Tame**

Mm-hmm.

**Micaela Cronin**

... and family and domestic and sexual abuse in adults. I think one of the things that's really come through in lots of these conversations is the critical need to really start early having those conversations, which doesn't mean just with kids, but it's everybody around them. So, I think that's such a powerful description of a really practical thing that needs to be done and changed.

**Grace Tame**

Mm-hmm. Thank you [laughs]. There's obviously a few other things. I mean, child sexual abuse is very complicated and can be a bit disparate for that reason because it's, it's... It covers many things, um, including peer-on-peer abuse-

**Micaela Cronin**

Yes.

**Grace Tame**

...and therefore we, we require a suite of solutions as you know, for any of these complex-

**Micaela Cronin**

Yes.

**Grace Tame**

...issues. But, but I do think that that would go a long way. I think that's an example of a, a very clear and specific measure that would have a very large impact.

**Micaela Cronin**

Yeah. And I know, it's a completely unreasonable question to say what's the one thing?

**Grace Tame**

[laughs] Yeah.

**Micaela Cronin**

But I, but-

**Grace Tame**

What's the one thing? [laughs]

**Micaela Cronin**

Yeah. But if we get everybody's one thing, that is very, very sharp and focused like that, that we can, we can practically implement, that will drive real change.

**Grace Tame**

Yeah. Agreed.

**Micaela Cronin**

So thank you very much,-

**Grace Tame**

Thank you





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**Micaela Cronin**

...both for this conversation but, I know, for the, for the work that you so passionately put your heart and soul into, and bring all of both your experience, but also your intelligence and sharp mind to. So thank you, Grace.

**Grace Tame**

Aw, thank you.

**Female voiceover**

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[End transcript]