

Ep #1: How We Make Parenting Difficult for Ourselves



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Lisa Candra

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Do you fear you are not doing enough or the right things for your child with autism? Do you terrorize yourself with thoughts about their future? Do you put off caring for yourself because you think I'll be okay once they are okay? If this is you, keep listening.

Welcome to The Autism Mom Coach, a podcast for moms who feel overwhelmed, afraid, and sometimes powerless as they raise their child with autism. My name is Lisa Candra. I'm a certified life coach, lawyer, and most importantly I'm a full-time single mom to a teenage boy with autism. In this podcast I'll show you how to transform your relationship with autism and special needs parenting. You'll learn how to shift away from being a victim of your circumstances to being the hero of the story you get to write. Let's get started.

Hello and welcome to episode one of The Autism Mom Coach. I'm so excited to be here and to get started. My name is Lisa Candra and I am a single mom to a teen boy with autism. My son, Ben and I live in Connecticut with our two cats, Ray and Finn. You will hear more about me and Ben in future episodes as I teach concepts and provide examples for my own life and the lives of my clients.

But this podcast is not about me or my son, or even my cats. It is about you, the mom raising a child or children with autism. The mom who is walking on eggshells hoping to get through the day without another meltdown. The mom who is white knuckling it trying to do all the things she can to help her child while paying little to no attention to herself. The mom who can't enjoy the quiet days or minutes because she is bracing herself for the next thing. If this is you, I got you. I've been there and I know how it feels.

In this podcast I will share the strategies I have learned through life coaching and that have supported me in letting go of the idea that autism is in charge of my life, that I should have all of the answers and just know what to do. Or that my love, advocacy and resourcefulness will somehow spare myself and my son from the pain of uncertainty.

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Before I get into what I teach I want to share with you what you can expect from me and this podcast. First, autism is not a problem to be solved. In this podcast I will not be discussing the causes or possible cures for autism. There are researchers, doctors and scientists who are focused on finding answers to these questions and for that I am glad.

My focus will be on how to support yourself and thrive in your life right now as it is regardless of what caused autism or whether there is a cure for it because right now you are struggling. Right now you are suffering and for that I want to support you.

Second, we are not here to fix our kids. They are not broken. They are different. This is not a problem. The problem is how we are thinking and feeling about those differences and what we are making them mean about our child and ourselves. The problem is that we think it is our job to fix it but it isn't. Our job is to unconditionally love and support our children in becoming who they are even if it does not look the way we thought it would, think it should or what the what to expect books led us to believe.

By the way, can you imagine a what to expect series for kids with autism, a real raw preview and validation of what we experience like year two your child doesn't talk. You bring it up to the pediatrician but they tell you it's because he's a boy, or because he's the first born, or because he's the second born, or because she's the youngest. And then year four your child may or may not speak, you will begin to learn charades as they point to things, yell, scream and pinch you while you try to interpret what they want. I think it would be a bestseller.

Third, we are making it harder than it needs to be. Parenting a child with autism is hard. And we tend to make it harder than it has to be, a lot harder. Let me give you some examples of what I mean when I say we make it harder. First, we should ourselves. We tell ourselves things like, I should know what to do, I should stay calm, I should be able to go to Target without my 10-year-old melting down.

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For example, during virtual schooling in 2020 I lost my cool with my son many times. He had outbursts throughout the day due to his fear and anxiety and I kept my cool most of the time. But when I lost it I went all in, yelling, screaming, and behaving in the same ways that he was. And afterwards I would feel so guilty telling myself I should stay calm, I shouldn't get angry. I should be able to handle this. And the more I told myself this, the more I believed this, the harder I made it on myself.

Second, we time travel to worst case scenarios. I can't tell you how many times I cried on the car ride home from a birthday party, family event, or a trip to the zoo thinking things like if he is like this now, what will he be like in five, 10 or 15 years? How will I handle him when he's older, bigger and stronger? And if I don't get him under control now he will never have friends.

Guess what? In all the years I've been doing this, terrorizing myself with worst case scenario thoughts it has never once helped me. For instance, last year I lived a worst-case scenario twice, when I made the decisions to admit my son to an autism inpatient hospital for treatment. And from living a worst-case scenario I can tell you that the reality of it was hard, it was really hard but it still was not as hard as I made it with my worst-case scenario thoughts like he will hate me, I have lost him forever and our lives are over.

Third, we don't ask for help for ourselves. We are not an afterthought because we are not a thought in the first place. All of our focus is on our children and their needs. We think if they're okay then I'll be okay but it's just the opposite. If you are thinking, please spare me the oxygen mask analogy, I get it. I used to roll my eyes at this analogy the first few times I heard it applied to special needs parenting.

But I need to tell you, I've learned the hard way that it is 100% true. Here's why, you are your child's greatest resource. No doctor, therapist, teacher or medication, none of it is more important than you are. If you burn out your child loses. By contrast, if you take the time to care for yourself and nourish your resilience you will have more ability and capacity to care for your child.

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So, these are just some of the ways we make parenting a special needs child even harder on ourselves. We should ourselves, we scare ourselves with worst case scenarios and we don't take care of ourselves. If this sounds like you and you want to find a better way, keep listening. In this podcast I will offer you practical actionable steps you can take and apply to your life right now to bring some ease to the challenges of special needs parenting. And I will be there alongside of you.

As I said, I am a mother of a teen with autism and we are in the thick of it right now. I work on these skills every day and some days are better than others. I still lose my shit. I still have should thoughts. And I still time travel but I recover faster. I don't hang out with these thoughts as long as I used to and I have the ability to redirect myself in the direction I want to go instead of staying stuck.

With that I want to teach you a tool called powerful questions that you can use when you are having a difficult time. Powerful questions are positive thought provoking and proactive questions. They send us searching for our own answers. This simple tool is so effective because our brains do not like open loops. And an unanswered question is an open loop. So, when you ask yourself a powerful question like, what can I do in this moment to bring some ease to this situation? What can I do right now to make this a little bit easier on myself? Or, how can I support myself?

When you ask yourself powerful questions like this you put your brain to work on finding answers. Maybe you can pause and take deep breaths. Maybe you could walk away for a moment. Or maybe you can tag in your partner. Whatever it is when you ask yourself a powerful question you are no longer stuck in negativity or victimhood. You are finding answers, you are moving forward and you are no longer making this harder than it needs to be. Give this a try and let me know how it goes.

To celebrate the launch of the show I'm going to be giving away self-care packages that will include handmade soaps, soothing lotions and some other goodies to help you relax and indulge just a little. These are from Duross & Langel, one of my favorite places in Philadelphia and a place I

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have gone every year since my son was four to purchase unique gifts for his support staff.

I'm going to be giving away three packages to three lucky listeners who follow, rate and review the show. It doesn't have to be a five-star review, although I sure hope you love the show. I want your honest feedback so I can create a show that provides tons of value. Visit theautismmomcoach.com/podcastlaunch to learn more about the contest and how to enter. I'll be announcing the winners on the show in an upcoming episode. Thanks for listening and I'll talk to you soon.

Thanks for listening to The Autism Mom Coach. If you want more information or the show notes and resources from the podcast, visit theautismmomcoach.com. See you next week.