

Ep #5: Think-Feel-Act Cycle



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Lisa Candra

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You are listening to episode five of The Autism Mom Coach. Whether you know it or not your thought, feel, act cycle is constantly working in the background of everything you do, including your decision to listen to this episode. Stay tuned to learn more about the think, feel, act cycle and how it applies to the challenges of special needs parenting.

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.

Welcome everyone to the episode and thank you for being here. I hope you are doing well, enjoying the podcast and benefitting from the tools that I am sharing. Over the weekend I got a chance to catch up on some of the reviews that you have all written and I want to share one with you today. This review is from Mrs. Sherwood's Babies and it is titled, transform your relationship with special needs parenting.

Mrs. Sherwood writes, as the mom of a five-year-old daughter with Autism I am determined to take the best care of her and me. And Lisa's podcast is exactly what I need. The episodes are soothing, easy to listen to and the perfect length of time to take in, process and learn from, not overwhelming. And sometimes I feel like she's in my head. I love her approach of not trying to cure or fix our kids. Although she talks a lot about specifically neurodiverse children, many of the informative topics and action items carry over to my neurotypical children as well. I am so excited to have Lisa as a resource.

Well, thank you so much, Mrs. Sherwood's Babies for writing this review and I am delighted to be a resource to you and to anyone who's walking this path. I created this podcast to share these tools really because I wish I had learned them earlier in my Autism parenting journey because they

Ep #5: Think-Feel-Act Cycle

have changed everything for me, especially during the most challenging times. So, I am so glad you are finding ways to apply these tools to your neurodiverse child and to your neurotypical children.

Alright, let's get onto the business of today. In the next two episodes I am going to teach you the tools at the foundation of my coaching program. These tools changed everything for me in a good way and I'm hoping they do the same for you. In this episode we will talk about the think, feel, act cycle and how it is always at work and how it drives everything we do and we don't do. And in the next episode I'm going to teach you how to coach yourself using the self-coaching model that I was certified in through The Life Coach School.

We start with the think, feel, act cycle because it is the center of the self-coaching model. Once you understand this the self-coaching model snaps right into place. Okay, the think, feel, act cycle is a concept from neuroscience and cognitive behavioral therapy. The think, feel, act cycle posits that how we think creates our feelings and how we feel drives our actions. So, let's start with thoughts. I know we've talked a lot about thoughts in episodes three and four but this bears repeating because many of us or definitely me, this was all news when I first learned it.

So, thoughts are the sentences in our minds, the language we use to name, judge, understand and assess the world. Thoughts are not facts which is weird. A lot of us think, well, I wouldn't think it if it wasn't true. How many times have you caught yourself thinking this? I would not think I was a terrible mother if it wasn't true. I wouldn't think my child's struggles were my fault if it wasn't true. Spoiler alert, this is false, or fake news, or whatever you want to call it.

Your thoughts are not facts. Your thoughts are an opinion. They're an assessment. They're a judgment. Real but not necessarily true. Thoughts are important but not for the reasons we think, not because they are the truth of the universe. They are important because they form the lens through which we see and interpret the world and our experiences of it.

Ep #5: Think-Feel-Act Cycle

For example, if I have the thought that my son's IEP team has his best interest at heart I will feel confident in them. If I feel confident in them this will be reflected in how I act towards them and how I respond to their recommendations. By contrast, if I'm thinking they're hiding the ball that thought will create a feeling of distrust and my actions will look a lot different. Again, this is because our thoughts form the lens through which we see everything.

And the second reason they are so important is because our thoughts create our feelings which is the second element of the think, feel, act cycle. So, let's talk about feelings. The feeling or the emotion is created by what you are thinking. And I use the words feeling and emotion interchangeably. They are the one word descriptions of our emotional states like happy, sad, mad, lonely, bored, stressed, jealous or compassionate, just to name a few.

So, about feelings. First, feelings are the reasons for all we do and we don't do. This is what is referred to as the motivational triad. Humans are wired to seek pleasure, avoid pain and be efficient. Animals and humans were all designed with these three principle motivations. Seek pleasure, which basically means eat food, seek connection, all animals do this, all humans do this. We have to do this if we want to live and if we want to continue as a species. We must be nourished, we must procreate. So, it is built into our wiring.

The second leg of the motivational triad is to avoid pain. We are prewired to avoid things that might hurt us both physically and emotionally. Pain equals death. Fear equals death. Rejection equals banishment from the tribe. We innately know that we want to avoid pain and that avoiding it is helpful for our survival.

And the third leg of the motivational triad is be efficient. We want to expend as little energy as possible, not only with the way we move our bodies but also including with what we do inside of our brains. Think of a pint of ice-cream, bottle of wine or binging a season of Netflix, or all three, instead of filling out the heaps of paperwork for an intake with a new provider. Seek pleasure, the dopamine hits provided by the sugar and the entertainment.

Ep #5: Think-Feel-Act Cycle

Avoid pain, the paperwork and the difficulty of reflecting on milestones not met, and be efficient, hang out on the couch without taxing your brain with remembering your child's lengthy medical history. And there you have it, the motivational triad working in the background of your decision to sit on the couch and watch Netflix rather than fill out the paperwork.

The second thing about feelings. Feelings are signals. Remember, most of our thoughts are subconscious or so automatic that we don't even notice them. So, the feelings we are having are clues back to the thought. Think of a fire alarm ringing, we hear it but we are unsure of the cause so we investigate, burning toast or couch on fire.

For example, I sometimes find myself feeling agitated on Friday afternoons, work meetings are wrapping up and everyone is wishing their colleagues a nice weekend. It was not until I tuned into that feeling at the pit of my stomach and got more present with it that I was able to discover the thoughts. Other people have nice weekends. Weekends are not relaxing for me. I hope this weekend isn't too hard. I was not consciously thinking these thoughts but it was below the surface. And it took listening into the feeling in the pit of my stomach to uncover what was going on inside of my mind.

Finally, feelings are the fuel for our actions. They are the why and the how behind what we do. If you are feeling panicked your actions will be to rush, to act first and to think later. If you are feeling calm your actions will be deliberate and thoughtful, not reactive. This brings us to actions, inactions and overreactions, this is what you do and what you don't do. And they don't just mysteriously happen. They're always motivated by how you're feeling.

Feelings fuel your actions. They drive both what you do and how you do it. In fact, the action can be the exact same with totally different outcomes depending on the thoughts and feelings driving them. For example, maybe you are reminding your child for the hundredth time to dry off in the shower because you are sick of the slip and slide that follows their evening routine. Imagine saying, "Please remember to dry off in the shower", using a calm

Ep #5: Think-Feel-Act Cycle

voice and a relaxed body. Then imagine saying the same words through clenched teeth with your arms folded. Big difference, right?

And we'll get more into this in future episodes. Our kids are a tuning fork for our emotions. Maybe they haven't met all of the milestones of their age but damn can they tell how we're feeling? And they react to it. Again, we will get to this more in future episodes. But the how behind what you do in my opinion, is more important than what you actually do. The action part of the think, feel, act cycle also includes inaction, the things you don't do.

For example, if you are thinking that your friends do not understand your child and feeling sad or frustrated, maybe you don't make an effort to talk to your friends. Maybe you avoid them. Maybe you avoid opportunities to connect with them. The thought, feel, act cycle is always at work. It is always running in the background and it is a great tool for getting more insight into the thoughts and feelings that are driving your actions.

What I like about the think, feel, act cycle is the flexibility. Maybe you are struggling to catch your thoughts, a lot of us do. And not surprisingly if we are conscious of every one of our 60,000 thoughts a day, we wouldn't be able to do much else. So, take notice of your feelings, the clenching in your throat, the pit in your stomach, your racing heart. What is it trying to tell you? Ask yourself, in these moments what is happening for me right now to see if you can uncover the thoughts.

Or maybe like so many of us, you're not very connected with your feelings. You live from the neck up. If so, start paying attention to your actions, they're usually the easiest to catch. For example, you find yourself scrolling on Facebook, ask yourself, how am I feeling? What am I seeking? What am I avoiding?

Challenge yourself to do this work with the curiosity of an investigator. The more you do this the more you can see your own think, feel, action cycle working in real time. The more it will become a meta skill that you are practicing in the moment. And the more you do this the more opportunities

Ep #5: Think-Feel-Act Cycle

you will have and the better you will become at interrupting your default reactions and choosing your responses.

Okay, that's it for this episode. Next week I will put this all together for you by teaching you the self-coaching model. But before I go I want to remind you of the giveaway. To celebrate the launch of the show I'm going to be giving away self-care packages that include handmade soaps, soothing lotions, and other goodies from one of my favorite places in Philadelphia, Duross & Langel soap shop.

I'm going to be giving away three care packages to three lucky listeners who follow, rate, and review the show. And please do this because the more reviews, the more ratings the show receives the easier it will be for parents like you to find the show and to have it as a resource. So, it doesn't have to be a five-star review, although I sure hope you love it. 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 an upcoming show. Thanks so much.

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.