

Ep #6: The Self-Coaching Model



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Lisa Candra

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You are listening to episode six of *The Autism Mom Coach*, The Self-Coaching Model. Remember the book, *The Little Engine That Could*, I Think I Can. I Think I Can? Well, before the little engine had the courage to go up that hill another character in the book told her, “If you think you can, you will. If you think you can’t, you won’t. Either way you are right.” This is the power our thoughts have to create the results in our lives. To learn a simple tool for creating the results you want in your life, 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.

Welcome to episode six and thank you for being here. I hope you are doing well and enjoying the beginning of April. As we all know it is Autism Awareness Month. And I’m seeing so many educational posts in my feed from other parents who are taking the time to educate their families, friends and acquaintances about autism. Bravo to all of you. We are the first and the best examples of what autism awareness and acceptance looks like. We model it every day and we do it in the face of all we have been socialized to believe about what parenting should look like.

And we do it in the face of all of the people who don’t get it, or who tell us how they would do it, or who tell us that we’re doing it wrong. We are the living proof of what it looks like to parent a child who does not fit the mold. And I like to think about this when I’m out in public with my son. Instead of looking at other people as judging us, I look at us as educating them. This is what it looks like. Take notes. And this is what each and every one of you are doing too. You don’t need to post about it on social media, or sign up for the local walk, or fundraise to be an example. You already are.

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Before we get to the topic for today's episode I want to read a review from a listener named L. Chenard. They write, "This podcast came along at the perfect time in our family's journey. There were messages and tactical strategies that I absolutely needed to hear and it was so helpful to better understand the science of what's happening during one of my son's meltdowns. It's also helpful to have someone else put my feelings into words and to know that we are not alone. I look forward to future episodes."

Well, thank you so much for this review and you certainly are not alone. I'm happy to hear that this information is making a difference for you. And I agree, knowing the science behind a meltdown, even at the most basic level which is what you're getting from me because I am not a scientist. It has really helped me separate behaviors from all of my judgments about them. And this has been a gamechanger.

So, I just want to say, if you are enjoying the podcast please take the time to write a review. For one, I want to know what is resonating, what you want more of and how I can provide it. And two, your reviews make the podcast more visible and that makes it easier for other moms like you to find it. And last but not least, who doesn't love a prize? When you leave a review you can also enter to win one of the three self-care packages I will be giving away in an upcoming episode.

Okay, as promised, in this episode I am going to teach you the self-coaching model I was certified in through The Life Coach School. At the center of the self-coaching model is the think, feel, act cycle which we talked about in last week's episode. And by the way, this is what drew me to Brooke Castillo and The Life Coach School. I didn't really know anything about life coaching but I did know about cognitive behavioral therapy from years of personal and family therapy.

I understood at least intellectually the think, feel, act cycle. But I never knew how to apply it in real time or to use it to get the results I wanted in my life. The self-coaching model changed all of this. Brooke added two elements, the circumstance which comes before the think, feel, act cycle and the result which comes after. So, the self-coaching model, all together

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there's five elements, circumstances, thoughts, feelings, actions and results, or CTFAR as you'll sometimes hear me refer to it in shorthand.

Here is how it works. First there is a circumstance. Circumstances trigger our think, feel, act cycle. A circumstance happens, we have a thought about it, that thought creates a feeling in our body. And that feeling drives our actions and creates our results, the final line of the model. So, let's break this down further by taking a deeper look at circumstances and results.

Circumstances are everything out in the world. Everything that is happening now. That could be the weather, current events, marital status, a diagnosis, whether your child has an IEP, the medications your child takes. Circumstances are not only everything that's happening right now, but they also include things that have happened in the past. So, circumstances could be what happened yesterday, what happened in your childhood and what happened the day before you were born. All circumstances are outside of your immediate control.

In this exact moment you cannot change them. So, you can't change the weather, your marital status or a diagnosis. Circumstances also include other people and what they say, do and what they don't say and what they don't do. Now, here's the thing about circumstances. All circumstances are neutral until you have a thought about them. Now, the first time I heard this my lawyer brain went to the extremes as lawyer brains tend to do and so my first reaction was, wait, so you're saying that murder, or rape, or my child hitting me, those are neutral? Are you kidding me?

Two things. First. Things that happen in the world have no moral value until we have a thought about them. This includes the things that most people in the world would label as terrible. They are also neutral until you have a thought about them. And this actually makes a lot of sense. It's the reason why no two people react the same way to the same set of events. It's because we are all having different thoughts about them. Second. A circumstance being neutral does not mean it is neutral to you. You get to decide how you want to think about the circumstances in your life.

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However, the value in viewing circumstances as neutral is to enable you to begin to separate the facts from your judgments and interpretations of it to see what these are creating for you. And this is because the circumstances don't create your feelings, your thoughts do. Think of separating circumstances from thoughts like being the objective narrator of your experience.

I think about this when every once in a while one of my cats will sit on our remote just right and turn on the voice narrator. This is kind of amusing but it's mostly annoying because you're watching a show and you have this voice saying things like, "Man walks into the room. Lady picks up the phone", and on and on. But anyhow it's just a great example of seeing the separation of circumstances, what's happening from all of the judgments we're having about it.

And for this I'm going to give a very recent example of the Oscars last Sunday with Chris Rock and Will Smith, or the slap heard around the world. So, the objective facts. Chris Rock said, "Jada, I love you, GI Jane too", or something like that. Will Smith walked onto stage, slapped Chris Rock and yelled some words. That's basically what happened, the facts, if you were just observing it and without any judgment or interpretation. Chris Rock said words, Will Smith walks onto stage, smacks him and says other words. That's what happened.

Now, there's the interpretation. Chris Rock mocked Jada's health condition. Chris Rock's joke was not funny. Will Smith assaulted Chris Rock. Will Smith has anger management issues. Do you see the difference? Facts versus the interpretation. And this is what we want to do when we are trying to pull out from our own experiences what's actually happening versus all of our thoughts about it because again, it's not the circumstance that's creating our feelings, and our actions, and our overreactions. It's our thoughts about it.

Circumstances trigger the think, feel, act cycle and this produces our results. The result is the outcome from our actions or lack thereof. So let me give you an example from my personal life. The circumstance here is

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my son's homework. My thought is this is always stressful. My feeling is I'm stressed. My actions, I avoid it, I'm short tempered with my son, I get easily annoyed with him. And what's the result? I stress myself out.

So, a pointer about results and this is really important. You can only create results for yourself. Your result applies to you. You don't create results for other people and they can't create them for you. For example, I didn't create the result of stressing my son out. I can only create results for me. Second. Nine times out of ten the result you are creating is proving your original thought, true. So, my thought, this is always stressful. Well, I made damn sure that that was the case by my actions and inactions.

This seems crazy but it makes so much sense when you remember how the brain works. It wants to be right. Being right means being safe, it means being efficient. So, we go to work finding evidence to prove our thoughts true. Think of the little engine that could. Before the little engine has the courage to start up the hill another character tells her, "If you think you can, you will. If you think you can't, you won't. Either way you are right." And I love this so much because it so concisely captures what's happening when we commit to a thought, we make it come true and then we are right.

And we like to be right even if it keeps us stuck and feeling miserable. It is better than uncertainty. It is better than exerting effort. And that's what our brains prefer. So, this is the self-coaching model I use. You have a circumstance that triggers the think, feel, act cycle followed by the result created from the cycle. If you want to start using this as a tool you need to do two things. First you have to identify your current cycle, what you are automatically and habitually thinking in response to the circumstances. You need to pull this out.

And then two, once you understand how the cycle is working you have to identify a shift you can make. How can you change your thoughts to feel differently when the circumstance stays the same? So, again, I want to be clear, this is not about slapping on some positive thinking. It doesn't work that way, your brain will reject it. You cannot go from feeling helpless to feeling empowered overnight.

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But imagine how much better it would be to go from feeling helpless to feeling hopeful, or maybe even a little curious. Imagine how much better that would feel and imagine how you would show up differently just with that small shift. So, what I'm going to do right now is to walk you through an example so that you can see how this works in practice.

So, the example here is going to be a family birthday party. Birthday parties are neutral. They don't make us feel anything until we have a thought about them. And you might have a lot of thoughts about a family party. There will be too many people. They will not serve the food my child likes. It might be too loud. My child won't be included with their cousins. What you want to do is to identify the thought that is the loudest, pull that out and plug it into the model and see what it is creating for you.

So, one of those thoughts could be, my child may melt down. And when you think this thought you're probably going to feel anxious. And when you feel anxious your actions might look like, helicoptering around your child while you're at the party to make sure that they are okay. You are hypervigilant. You are seeing every interaction as a potential threat. You are not enjoying yourself and you are not connecting with others. And what's the result here? You are melting down, maybe not externally but for sure, internally.

Now, the party is not making you feel anxious or causing you to helicopter. It is your thoughts, my child might melt down. You have to pay attention to this. And once you see how the thinking is creating how you were feeling, how you were acting and the results you were creating it is only then that you could begin to explore ways to show up differently. Now, you don't have to change your child or other people to do this. You just have to start with shifting your own thinking. And shifting that thinking, it's like climbing a ladder. You have to take it one rung at a time.

You're not going to go from anxious to confident overnight. But you can start to slowly move up the ladder and feel better. And what that will take is brainstorming new thoughts to think about the same circumstance. So, in this case the circumstance is the party. And there are a million things that

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you can think about going to a party. Your current thought is, my child might melt down. So how might you shift this thought to feel better than anxious or stressed?

So, I'll offer to you one thought that I use is I know what to do. Just that thought, I know what to do, when you think that, maybe you feel confident or competent. You have a feeling that's different from anxiety and then the action is different. Maybe you have a plan, you preview the party with your child, you preview the party with other family members. You bring your own food. You make decisions ahead of time about who does what if your child gets dysregulated. And the result here is you know what to do.

The first step in shifting your current model and your current results is to brainstorm the new thoughts you can think about the circumstance. Go slow, you're not going to go from meltdowns are awful to meltdowns are no big deal, overnight, or maybe even ever. And that's okay. We aren't aiming for bliss. We are aiming for a more helpful, more supportive thought and feeling to fuel your actions and create the results that you want. Good luck and let me know how it goes.

Before I end this episode I want to remind you that to celebrate the launch of the show I'm giving away self-care packages to three listeners who follow, rate and review the show. Like I said earlier, these reviews help other moms like you to find the podcast. So please take the time and let me know if you're enjoying the show, what you're thinking and what you want more of. And to learn how to enter the podcast go to www.theautismmomcoach.com/podcastlaunch. I'll be announcing the winners in an upcoming episode. Thanks so much for listening.

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.