

Ep #7: When You Are Rigid



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With Your Host

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You are listening to *The Autism Mom Coach*, episode seven, When you are Rigid.

While cognitive rigidity, like all or nothing thinking, is a characteristic of autism it is also alive and well in each one of us. In fact, the more stressful our lives are the more we tend to rely on the safety of all or nothing thinking and the more rigid we become. To learn how all or nothing thinking is impacting your parenting and what you can do to manage it, 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 everyone and welcome to podcast. I'm so glad you're here and I hope you are doing well. We are doing really well here. We have been having such a great time in our new place. We just moved in last week and it's been pretty busy but all in all it's gone super well.

And the last thing that I moved from our apartment to the townhouse was the LEGO Death Star. I have a job figuring out how to transport this giant LEGO set. Now, for those of you who are not familiar, the Death Star is from the Star Wars movies. It is the empire's moon sized space station and it can blow up planets and fun things like that. The LEGO version of the Death Star is 4,000 pieces.

My son had been asking for this LEGO set since he was seven years old. And I always told him, "No, we're going to wait until you get older, when you have more experience and more patience, that'll be the appropriate time to do it." And so sure enough the perfect time came when COVID hit and he was 13 years old. He had put together tons of LEGO sets so we knew he had the skills to do it. And it just seemed to be the perfect thing to

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do during quarantine. And it was, he was beyond thrilled to receive it and he had so much fun putting it together.

And he was just so proud of himself because he put it together in just a few weeks and that was with me urging him to take breaks. And he was just having so much fun with it so it was overall just a really nice experience. But now two years later this Death Star is actually my Death Star because my son can't even stand the sight of it. A few pieces fell off, a few went missing and boom the Death Star was dead to him. It was either perfect or it was worthless. And I found this so frustrating and I have a lot of thoughts about it.

And some of these thoughts are, LEGOs never work out. There is always a problem. He can never just enjoy himself. I wasted \$500. And this was a fail. Notice anything here? Thought work has been really eye opening and humbling for me, noticing all of my all or nothing thinking, and all of my rigidity. And it's not just me. I see this in my clients all the time. And it seems ironic at first. We are raising kids with autism, they are the ones with all or nothing thinking. They are the rigid ones, but guess what? So are we. And sometimes maybe even more so.

I want to talk to you about all or thinking, how it shows up and how it makes perfect sense but also what we can do to manage our minds when we find ourselves in these either or situations.

So, first, all or nothing thinking is usually defined by pairs of opposites such as something or someone is good or bad. And this is all over the place in the autism community. Take for instance, ABA therapy, love it or hate it, no in between. Puzzle pieces, that's a big one for some people, it's either the greatest thing or the worst thing. Something is either working or it is not, think vaccines, medications, speech therapy. But it can also show up as believing there are only two choices to something.

For example, do you remember the character, Walter from the Muppets movie? This was the 2011 version. In the song, A Man or a Muppet, the character, Walter is having an identity crisis caused by the fact that he sees

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both sides of him-selves and the belief that he is either one or the other. That is what all or nothing thinking tells us. And when you start looking for it you will find it everywhere. And it's everywhere because it comes so naturally to the human brain. It provides our brains with certainty. And brains love certainty.

Certainty means safety, it means your brain gets to preserve energy because it does not have to think or ponder. You're either a man or you're a Muppet, no identity crisis, simple. So, take a look at your thoughts and see where this shows up. And I'm going to ask you a few questions here just to see if you see yourself in any of these. Are you telling yourself you have to implement a therapy exactly as prescribed or you're doing it wrong? Do you tell yourself that your child is either progressing or regressing?

Are you telling yourself that you can only feel loved by your child if they say the words, "I love you?" Do you tell yourself that you need to cut someone out of your life because they did something you dislike? Are you telling yourself that you have to give up on living your life because your child has autism? Do you find yourself thinking your child will either be 100% independent or 100% dependent on you? These are all signs that you're currently in all or nothing thinking. You are being rigid.

And while there is a lot of comfort for our brains in all or nothing thinking, there is a huge downside to it as well. When we view life at the extremes we miss all of the nuance and possibility in between. We cut ourselves off from our own creativity, resourcefulness and resilience when we opt for the comfort of mental shortcuts over the discomfort of shades of grey. And when it comes to our children, when we view their happiness and success as either or, we set ourselves up for heartache and we miss all of the magic in the middle.

Back to the Death Star, if I were to view this with all or nothing thinking here is what I would be letting go of. The excitement I felt when I ordered this for my son. The anticipation I felt when he opened the box. The utter joy of watching him jump up and down and scream with excitement. The pride of

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watching him diligently building a complex set. And all of the feels of seeing him taking pride in his own accomplishment. All of that gone because why? A few pieces are no longer together. No, thanks, I'll keep the good and the amazing if it means it comes with some disappointment.

The space between all or nothing is vast. So, the next time you feel yourself in black and white thinking ask yourself these questions. How could the opposite be true? Where could I be wrong about this? What could a third option be? How could both of these things be true? Get curious with yourself, take a look, see where all or nothing thinking is coming up for you and challenge yourself to find a third, or fourth, or tenth option.

Speaking of all or nothing thinking I just realized that I did not read the review that I meant to read at the beginning of this episode. So, I'm going to be flexible and I'm going to read it now. And as a reminder to all of you, if you haven't done so already, please go and rate and review the show. This makes it easier for other moms like us to find the show and it also gives you an opportunity to share what you like and to make suggestions for things that you would like to see in the future.

Right now I'm going to read a review from CT Mom JS2. And she writes, "Practical encouraging advice from someone who's clearly been in the trenches. It's so easy to feel alone as a parent, Lisa talks with the confidence of a mom who's not pretending to understand." Well, thank you so much for that review. And for sure you are right, I am not pretending to understand at all. I am there with you in the trenches on our own journey. And although all of our circumstances look a little bit different, I'm a single mom of one child who is verbal and high functioning.

And I know that's not the circumstance for all of us but there are more things that we have in common than we don't. And so, I am so glad to offer any support I can to you wherever you are in your journey and to whatever your circumstances are. So again, please go rate and review the show and enter to win the contest. I am giving away self-care packages to three listeners who rate and review the show. To find out more go to

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theautismmomcoach.com/podcastlaunch and you can get all the details on how to enter the contest.

The contest runs through the beginning of May. So, if you haven't already, please get your review in. I would love for you to be one of the people who wins one of these self-care packages from Duross & Langel in Philadelphia. This has been my go to place for gifts for teachers, carers, one-on-one aids, speech therapist, OTs, you name it, since my son was three years old. It's a fantastic place. They have wonderful products. And all you have to do is enter the contest and you may win one of them.

So, with that, thank you for listening and I will talk to you next week.

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.