

Ep #8: Riding the Wave



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Episode eight, Riding the Wave. Emotions are a lot like waves. They peak and they break, they ebb and they flow. You can stand rigid against them and get knocked over or pulled under, or you can let go, let them flow and ride the wave. Keep listening to learn how.

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 the podcast. I hope you are doing well and finding these episodes useful. I have to admit that I've been holding my breath a bit lately because things are changing. For one, I just learned that my son's teacher has resigned. And my son will have a new teacher for the remainder of the school year. And on top of that we are researching high school placements. And the one thing that is for sure is that my son will not be in his current school environment next year.

And this is a bit nerve-wracking. This year has been going pretty well in the sense that the school is a great fit and he is really well supported emotionally and academically. But like it or not this has been a regular part of our experience for the last 12 years. We settle into a good routine, we establish a great rapport with a teacher, or a school and then something changes. And this does not just go for schools, it applies to everything really, doctors, therapist, medications. They work until they don't.

And this is so challenging because we get attached to our supports. And when something is working it is so natural to want to cling to it for dear life. And this lends nicely to the topic for today which is riding the wave. In this episode I am going to teach you a technique for processing your emotions. Now, if you're listening to this and you're thinking I should know how to do

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this, I've been having emotions for years. Hold the judgment. The truth is most of us never learned how to process emotions.

In fact, a lot of us were taught explicitly or implicitly that emotions are to be ignored, mind over matter, just plough through and get it done. And now we find ourselves in the position of parenting kids with let's say big emotions and very big responses to their emotions. So, if we want to stay calm and support our children in processing their big emotions it is important to understand how to process our own.

But first let's talk about what we usually do in response to emotions that we don't want to feel. First, we try to control the circumstances. Remember, circumstances, the only line of the self-coaching model that we can't control? Yeah, this is exactly what we try to control, the one thing we can't, our children, other people, the environment. And I did this for years and I still do it to some extent. I did not want to feel helpless or out of control so I tried to control everyone and everything around my son so that he would not have a meltdown.

I brought extra birthday presents for him to family parties because when he was younger he did not understand why the birthday child was the only person getting gifts and he was not. And let me tell you, this got a lot of stares from family members and friends who said things like, "You're spoiling him", and all that. And yeah, maybe so but really I was trying to control and avoid what I saw as the bigger threat which was him melting down in front of everyone and party being over.

What else did I do? I ordered his food as soon as we sat down at a table to ensure the least amount of waiting. And one time I went so far as to stuff his birthday party pinata with ziplocked bags of treats, with each party guest's name on it. So that my son would not be upset that he did not get as much candy or the same toys or trinkets as someone else. I mean seriously, I know how crazy that sounds and even at the time I did but again I was like I control the situation or he'll be out of control and I don't want to handle that. So that's what I did.

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And despite all of these clever little plans and hacks, most of them didn't even work. My son would get upset and he would do what humans do and he would have an emotional reaction. And then I would feel so defeated and exhausted because I was trying to control the things I can't control, which always when I say that, reminds me of the Serenity Prayer which is my favorite prayer and really probably the only one I can remember. But it was hanging in my grandparents' house, when I do think of it, it brings me so much peace because a line, the serenity to accept the things I cannot change.

Well, circumstances are something that in the moment you can't change and when you're trying to control them it feels exhausting and you feel defeated when it doesn't work. So first, we try to control it.

Second, we avoid our emotions. We avoid them by distracting ourselves with just about anything, food, work, booze, shopping, mindlessly scrolling, Netflix, even cleaning which is by the way, one of my favorites. Whatever we can do to occupy ourselves and avoid our emotions. So, after my son was diagnosed I purchased every sensory toy I could find and I created a little classroom in my dining room of learning materials, sensory boxes and educational toys.

What I never did, I never sat with my feelings of fear and sadness. I just ploughed right through them by busying myself with projects.

Third, we resist our emotions, we suppress them, we ignore them, maybe we think we don't have time. Maybe we view it as self-indulgent. Maybe we are afraid of opening up Pandora's box. But our emotions don't like to be ignored. So, they get louder, and louder, and more intense until we can't push them down anymore and boom, we react, we cry, we yell, we scream, we melt down. And sometimes this feels good but most of the time we don't like the way we show up when we react to our feelings.

Luckily there is a middle ground between stuffing our feelings away and overreacting to them. And this is called processing your emotions. I am going to teach you how to do this using the acronym NOW. N stands for

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notice and name, notice the emotion in your body and name it. I feel anxious. I feel disappointed. I feel angry. Noticing and then naming the emotion helps us to demystify the experience for ourselves.

O stands for observe, once you notice and name the emotion you can begin to observe it. And this means you describe the emotion in detail like you are describing it to someone who has never heard of it or experienced it before. Imagine that you're describing the emotion to your child or you're trying to give them the words to understand the emotions that they're having in their bodies. Do this for yourself. Is it hot or is it cold? What does it feel like, is it clenching, is it tight? Where is it in your body, is it in your head, or your throat, or your stomach?

The better you get at discerning this for yourself the more language you will have to help your child identify their own emotions, so win/win.

And then the W stands for wave as in ride the wave. Emotions are a lot like waves. They peak and they crash, they ebb and they flow. Now, you can stand up straight and brace yourself against the wave and guess what will happen? It will knock you over or pull you under. So instead of bracing yourself against the emotion, open up to it. Let it flow through you and imagine riding it like you would a wave.

Here's the important thing to remember, all of our feelings are simply vibrations of energy moving through our bodies. They can't hurt us. So instead of standing firmly against them, let them flow. And here's the other thing, our bodies want to return to a state of homeostasis or balance. So, when you find yourself stoked by an intense emotion like anger or fear your ability to open up to it and ride the wave will help it dissipate.

The best advice here is to stay focused on the somatic, that is the physical bodily experience of the emotion and to stay out of your head. Because the thoughts like oh my God, this is terrible, this is too much, these thoughts will keep the emotion going. So instead of dissipating and returning to a state of balance you are actually amplifying the experience with your own thoughts. So, when you find this happening just return to the somatic

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experience, to enter your body and tune out the chatter. And there it is, NOW, notice the name, observe and wave, ride it.

Alright, that is it for today. Give this a try and let me know how it goes. But one more thing, before I go I want to remind you, if you haven't already, please take the time to rate and review the podcast. This really makes it easier for other moms to find the podcast and it helps me understand what is going well, what you like and what you would like to see more of. So please go to theautismmomcoach.com/podcastlaunch, there you can learn how to enter to win a prize for rating and reviewing the podcast.

And I promise you, these prizes are pretty good. They are from Duross & Langel in Philadelphia. And I put together some self-care packages that I want to share with three listeners who rate and review the podcast.

Alright, thanks again 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.