

Ep #12: Stepping into Your Role as the Expert



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With Your Host

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You are listening to episode 12 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, Stepping into Your Role as Expert. You are the expert on your child, now what? In this week's episode, I'm going to show you how to use the think, feel, act cycle to step into your role as the expert on your child. Stay tuned.

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 having a nice week. I spent some time this weekend emailing the winners of the selfcare package giveaway for rating the podcast. Thank you again, Sherry P, Gina C and Christina F for your reviews and I hope you love the Duross & Langel gift boxes as much as I do. And thank you to everyone who has reviewed the podcast, it really does help other moms like you find the podcast.

So, if you haven't done so already please take a few minutes and let me know, how do you like it? What would you like more of? I'm listening. I've actually heard from a few of you so far and I have some great suggestions for episodes that I plan to cover this summer.

Okay, on to today's topic which is part two in a two part series about experts, In episode 10 I talked about what an expert is and how you are the expert on your child. This week I will show you how to use the think, feel, act cycle to step into your role as the expert. But before I do that I want to address the elephant in the room and that is maybe you don't want to be the expert. I certainly don't. I would much rather the doctors, the therapist, or the educators to have all of the answers and just give me a list, tell me what to do and I'll do it.

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Unfortunately, there are no list, there are no one size fits all and there are no tidy solutions and this is really frustrating. So, if you hear you are the expert and this does not feel empowering to you, I get that. I feel this frustration a lot as well. However, the reality is there is no one person, one answer or one way. Autism and all of its comorbid cousins are complex neurological diagnoses that differ dramatically in their presentation from person to person. As a result, what works for one person won't work for another.

And what works for you today might not work tomorrow. Experts have ideas, they have experiences and they have a broad base of knowledge from which they make suggestions and recommendations. We are the ones who have to weigh these recommendations and make decisions based on our knowledge of our child. And so, this is why stepping into our role as the expert is important.

Let's get to it. I want to frame this discussion using the think, feel, act cycle. Remember the think, feel, act cycle from episode five? In case you didn't listen to episode five or you need a refresh here it is. The think, feel, act cycle posits that how we think, the thoughts in our mind create our feelings, the emotions in our body and that these feelings fuel all of our actions. As you may have noticed, actions come last in the think, feel, act cycle. So, before I start to talk to you about the actions I recommend let's start at the top of the cycle with the thoughts.

How you are thinking about yourself and your role is important. If you are thinking, I don't know what to do or I don't know what I'm doing, what kind of feelings will this create? Anxiety, uncertainty, maybe some fear and shame. And when you are feeling these emotions what kind of actions are you taking or not taking? Are you organizing your thoughts? Are you creating a plan? Or are you spinning in overwhelm and anxiety

By contrast if you are thinking, I'm the expert on my child or I know my child best, what kind of feeling does that create for you? Maybe confidence, or certainty, something better than fear and overwhelm hopefully. And when you are feeling confident or certain what kind of actions are you taking? Are

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you taking the actions that you want to take like emailing the team, or setting up a meeting? Or are you spinning in overwhelm and hiding?

So, the first thing you want to do is to identify your current think, feel, act cycle when it comes to being the expert on your child. How are you thinking about yourself? What feelings is that creating? And what actions is that fueling? Now, there are two points I want to make here about the 'negative' emotions like anxiety, fear or self-doubt. Now, emotions aren't good or bad, so when I say negative, I mean it in the sense that they don't feel good and you would probably prefer not to have them.

So first, negative emotions like anxiety and fear usually do not produce productive actions. They usually result in a lot of spinning, and self-doubt, and hiding. And second, I'm not telling you that you can't fuel your actions with negative emotion. Let's face it, most of us do this a lot. We fuel quite a bit of our actions with anxiety and fear. It can be done but there are some big drawbacks. One, it feels terrible. Two, it's not sustainable. And three, it leads to burnout.

This is why before we even start talking action we want to decide how we want to fuel the actions we want to take. Remember from the self-coaching model in episode six, we get to decide how we want to think and feel about the circumstances in our lives. And how we are thinking and feeling, they are the how behind the what we do. So, this step is important and it's not one to be overlooked.

Before you start making the list of all the actions you want to take, do the work to see what your current model is, whether it's supportive of you. And if it's not, now is the time to work on the thoughts that you can think now that will create the emotions to fuel the actions that you want to take. This work right here is really the foundation to everything else that I'm going to talk about in this episode. So, with that let's get to brass tacks, stepping into the role as expert.

To do this I want to use the analogy of a company. I do this because wherever possible I like to make what is very personal, less personal

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because it really helps me clear my head a bit and to focus. So, for this, think of your child as a company and you are the CEO. The members of your child's team from teachers, and therapists, and [9:23], to psychiatrists and psychologists, they are all members of your advisory board. They serve at your pleasure. They all have different backgrounds and responsibilities and they are all there to assist you in supporting your child.

The point here in stepping into your role as the expert is to see yourself at the head of the table taking in information from various sources, communicating information and ultimately making decisions.

Step number one, overcommunicate. Quality communication between you and your child's team is helpful for so many reasons. It helps identify potential issues and strategies, coordinate responses and keep the team informed about what is and isn't working across different settings. The more you and members of your child's care team share relevant information the better equipped everyone will be to support your child in meeting their goals or navigating challenges.

To give you an example. My son started speaking when he was about four and a half but he was barely understandable. So, I would say until the age of eight there was a lot of interpretation of his words still going on. And add to this that his father and I lived in different homes because we were divorced.

So, in addition to going to school he was going in between two households. For this reason, I always insisted on a communication book from home to school that enabled his team to report on his day and for his family to update them about what was going on at home. Having this in place was helpful for me to understand what his day looked like and what I might expect at home and to be better able to understand and communicate with him when he did make attempts to communicate.

And it was a really simple book, just a few notes or checkboxes describing the day and this went a long way towards bridging the gap between home and school and keeping the team on the same page. And this is key. It was

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simple. It was brief. Because overcommunicating does not mean communicating every single thing. It means communicating the right things effectively, by effectively I mean friendly, or at the very least professional, getting to the point quickly and clearly stating what your ask is or what your recommendation is.

So, I want to give you a couple of examples of this from emails that I have pulled up. Okay, so this was an email to Ben's school team. Good morning. Ben had a nice time skiing on Saturday. Anxiety picked up on Sunday afternoon and continued for the remainder of the weekend. He got on the van this morning with minimal resistance but he was crying and hitting himself. PRN administered at 7:00am, he may be tired. Please let me know how the transition into school goes today.

So just a couple of things to notice in this email. I let them know that he skied so they can have something to talk to him about and hopefully that will help him just feel a little bit more relaxed. I made them aware that his anxiety had been building since Sunday and to be on alert for possible SIB. And finally, I ended with the ask to let me know how today goes. Just a few short sentences quick and to the point.

Here is another example. Hi team. Ben had a nice time visiting family and friends this weekend. The transition home was difficult because he wanted to stay and was upset about returning to school. Specifically, he mentioned anxiety about his speech therapy schedule and being pulled out of class during reading. He does not like this because he is afraid of missing the lesson and having to make up work. Let me know when you are available to discuss ways to address this. So again, I gave them a little bit of an update about his weekend. They can be on alert to the uptick in his anxiety.

And I have also made them aware of a specific issue and I've let them know that I want to discuss it.

Second, encourage collaboration. Now, this one goes hand in hand with communication. Your child has several members of their care team and more likely than not they don't know one another or communicate with one

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another. This is where you come in. As the CEO you have the ability to facilitate and encourage collaboration among the team members so that they can have a more fulsome understanding of the issues impacting your child, the strategies being used and how they are translating across provider and in different environments.

Now, in the age of email the simplest and most effective way of doing this is by using the CC option and copy members of the team, not in the [gotcha 14:58] way, the times you may email the teacher, and copy the principal, or maybe your special needs advocate. I mean more in the team building way where you're clearly letting everyone know what's going on and you're doing it in a way that facilitates cooperation. So of course, paperwork, paperwork, you have to sign consents to allow professionals to talk to one another.

So, assuming you're comfortable with that and you've done it, what I like to do is send a group email to introduce folks to one another and to let them know what I would like in terms of cooperation. So, for example, at the beginning of the school year I sent this email to my son's school psychologist who I was just meeting and I was copying my son's therapist.

And in the email, I'm not going to use real names, I say, Jill, I am copying Jack, Ben's therapist on this email so that you have his direct contact information. He has been working with Ben for the last two years and sees him weekly in group and/or one-on-one sessions. Please touch base with Jack so that you can coordinate strategies between home and school. Thanks. Lisa.

Now, I do this for a couple of reasons. First, I want as many of my team members as possible to be on the same page and talking to one another. And I don't want everything going through me because I think that that can hold things up a bit depending on schedules. And I have found a bit of upside from having the professionals on my son's team speaking directly to one another. I also like it especially when things get, we'll say, complicated. It's nice to have other people vouching for you.

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I will tell you that I have seen quicker reaction times when it's my son's therapist or school psychologist, or school nurse reaching out to my son's psychiatrist than when I do it. Now, I'm not saying the psychiatrist doesn't believe me, although I do wonder whether he thinks I'm being overdramatic at times and maybe I am. So, it is nice when other people, other professionals can pop in and say, "Here's what we're seeing and it's concerning."

So let me give you an example of an email where I tried to facilitate this communication. Hi team. I hope you had a nice weekend. Ben had a difficult weekend and we were unable to leave the house. His psychiatrist copied here is aware. School therapist, please let me know how today goes and feel free to reach out to Ben's psychiatrist directly. Just to be clear, these are my suggestions and my recommendations based on what has worked for me.

As the expert on your child and that includes being knowledgeable of the folks and their team, you may choose to go in a different direction. But for me in the last few years we've brought on so many additional people to Ben's team that I start the relationship off like this just so I'm setting the tone from the beginning of what my expectation is. And as the expert, as the CEO, you are also in a position to do this.

Finally, number three, own it. The book stops with you as the CEO of your child's team of advisors. You do not have to agree with all of the experts all of the time and chances are, you won't. There may even be times when you decide to fire a doctor, change a treatment, or forego a recommendation. When this happens, it is more important than ever to own the role you play in acting for the best interest of your child.

For example, about a year ago we were recommended ABA therapy. We tried it for six months and if I'm being honest, I did it more of a feeling like I had to do it, or if I didn't do it the doctors would judge me. And this is a topic, people pleasing that we will talk about in another episode. So, ABA therapy, controversy aside I didn't want to do it because I didn't believe it's

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what we needed. My son was suffering from severe OCD. So how is ABA therapy going to help him? And guess what? I was right.

The ABA providers were utterly stumped as to how to handle severe OCD and it was a shit show. All of that to learn what I already knew but I was afraid to own. For me owning it means the ability to take courageous action based on what you know in the moment and to have your own back.

Owning it looks like, here is what we have decided based on whatever your reasons are and not beating yourself up with self-doubt. For example, when I reported that we were no longer doing ABA therapy to my son's doctors, it was, it wasn't working for us so we are no longer doing it.

It wasn't, well, we stopped but I'm not sure, maybe we should. I don't know, maybe you're right, maybe I'll regret this. Owning a decision today does not mean you never reverse course. It means you don't beat yourself up now and in the future about the decision because there's no upside to this. It erodes your confidence and it undermines your role as an expert. So, when I say own it, I mean have your own back about whatever decisions that you make. And whatever decision you make today that's a decision that you'll make today.

You can change your mind tomorrow, that's your option and it's also your option to decide that whatever you do that you're going to have your own back.

Alright, so let's sum up. You can use the think, feel, act cycle to step into your role as the expert on your child. Start at the top of the think, feel, act cycle by deciding how you want to think and feel so that you can fuel the actions you want to take. From there, overcommunicate, encourage collaboration and own it.

That's all for this episode. Thank you so much for listening and I will talk to you next week.

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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.