

Ep #17: Check What's Triggered



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Lisa Candra

Ep #17: Check What's Triggered

You are listening to episode 17 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, Check What's Triggered. In episode two I told you that your child's behaviors are not personal. They may involve you but they are not about you. Their behaviors are not personal but your reaction is 100% personal. Your actions including your reactions and overreactions are about the thoughts and feelings that get triggered in your brain, in your body and in your nervous system.

And this is good news because you can't control your child's behaviors but you can uncover what is getting triggered inside of you and decide how you want to think, and feel, and respond to it. Stay tuned 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.

Welcome to the podcast. I hope you are doing well and enjoying your summer break whatever that looks like for you. So last week my son graduated from eighth grade and it is not at all what I had imagined or really what I had assumed it would look like. I assumed he would attend and graduate from the local middle school where he began seventh grade. But life happened, things changed, his needs changed and we changed with them. It was not what I had imagined but it is what he needed.

And I am very grateful for the school that he attended and all of the people who supported us along the way. And in true form, Ben was awarded the school citizenship award and the Brightside award for his class. Both are testament to who Ben is and how he shows up when he is receiving the support he needs. And now we are on to summer break which started with a trip home to visit family and a four hour delay in our train schedule which was so much fun and really a great segue to the topic of today which is triggers. Lots of triggers on this train ride for sure.

Ep #17: Check What's Triggered

So, let's get to the topic for today. I want to talk about triggers in a way that is a little different from how we are used to thinking about them and what I find a bit more empowering. So first, what is a trigger? In everyday parlance we use the word trigger to refer to something that happens outside of us that results in us having an emotion. The child who does not listen. The partner who does not help with household chores. The mother-in-law who says words or exist.

Now in terms of the self-coaching model each of these examples I just gave you would fall into the category of circumstances, life happening, what other people do and do not do. We can't control circumstances, at least in the moment. Now, I talked a lot about circumstances in episodes five and six of the podcast. So, if you have not already listened, I encourage you to take a listen so that you can familiarize yourself more with this term and how it works in relationship to the thought, feel, act cycle and the self-coaching model.

So, circumstances happen and they don't cause us to feel or act in a particular way, not until we have a thought about them. It is the thoughts that get triggered in us that create our feelings and drive our actions. Let me give you some examples. In fact, actually an example is happening right now and I am trying to ignore it. So, if you hear my voice getting a little bit louder it's literally me trying to drown out the sounds that I'm hearing in the background which is my son in an OCD loop. And very much a trigger for me.

But since I am recording a podcast and I am trying my best to get this to be a one and done, I'm going to carry on. So, example, my teen walks into the room and says, "Hi, mom. How are you?" And I tense up. What on Earth? I mean how sweet of him to come in and greet me and ask me how I'm doing. So how do I go from his greeting to feeling anxious?

Let's track what's triggered. When my son walks in and greets me like this my thoughts go like this. Oh, no, this may be part of the ritual. He may be breaking the ice before he launches into a reassurance loop. This may be a ritual or a compulsion. He doesn't care how I'm doing. He just wants to feed

Ep #17: Check What's Triggered

the OCD monster. I can't give into him. I can't give him the reassurance he seeks. If I do then I'm making it worse and it will be my fault if he doesn't get better. This is so hard.

These thoughts, this is what gets triggered in my head when my sweet teenager walks in and says, "Hey, mom, how are you doing?" Those thoughts that get triggered are causing me to feel tense and to brace myself. Not his words, his words are just a greeting. They don't make you feel good, bad, happy, sad until you have a thought about it. And my thoughts are all causing me to feel tense.

Another example. My client's child was having a meltdown in the bathtub. Her husband stayed downstairs in the living room while she was upstairs doing battle in the bathroom. And my client was furious. Now, her husband being on one floor while she was on another did not cause her anger, that was just the trigger. It was all the thoughts that got triggered like he's not helping me. He thinks I should do everything. This is not fair. All of these thoughts caused her to feel angry.

Again, not the husband being on one floor and her being on another but all of her thoughts about her husband not coming up to participate caused her to feel angry. That's what got triggered by him staying downstairs.

A third example. My client was preparing breakfast for her five year old child. She placed a sippy cup in front of him but he didn't want it. He wanted a different cup. So, she offered him a second option, no big deal. But he didn't want that cup either. He wanted a third option. And this made my client very anxious, but why? A toddler wanting a certain cup, or really any child wanting a certain cup, no big deal. How do we go from a child wanting a different cup to my client feeling anxious?

Well, let's look at what got triggered by this. Her son's therapist told her to only offer two choices. She had offered two choices and he rejected both of them. So, if she let him have a third option then she would be giving in. If she gave in then she was doing it wrong. And if she did it wrong then her son would suffer. And of course, it would all be her fault. This was not

Ep #17: Check What's Triggered

about the sippy cup. This was about the fate of her son and her competence as a parent. And here's the thing, it's never about the sippy cup or whatever the trigger is. It's about what's getting triggered in you.

This is important to understand because we are never just dealing with the triggering event, the thing our child, or our partner, or the world does or does not do. We are dealing with all of our thoughts and feelings about our child, their diagnosis, our parenting and ultimately ourselves. And not just in this moment, no, no, we project far into the future. My client went from sippy cup to her child's ability to lead a productive life in seconds. It's not about the sippy cup. It's about what gets triggered. And this is actually great news because try as we might we can't control the circumstances.

We can't control our children, we cannot control other people, and what they do, and what they don't do. But we can decide how we respond. But to do this we first need to understand what is getting triggered in us, all of the thoughts, all of the feelings before we can shift to choosing how we want to think, feel, and act in response to the triggers in our lives. This is where our work is. So how to do this.

First identify your top triggers. Second, do a thought download of everything you think when the trigger occurs. I like to do this on paper and just like I said before in a previous episode, rage on the page, get it all down, uncensored, everything that comes to mind, everything you think, all of the thoughts, even the ones that make you cringe. Third, for each trigger, pick the loudest thought, the one that comes up the most or causes you the most pain.

For example, when it comes to aggressions maybe your thought is my child wants to hurt me and that thought is the one that causes the biggest emotional reaction in you. From there, brainstorm. What else might also be true about this trigger? Try to find some neutral thoughts. For me when I could think of neutral thoughts I just tried to go with the most factual black and white clinical observations.

Ep #17: Check What's Triggered

So, for the example of a child being aggressive toward a parent, maybe a neutral thought that works for you is she is dysregulated. Or, she wants to stop but does not know how. Or, she is in a fight, flight response and her fear brain has taken over. The point here is to find a thought you believe now and that feels better in your body than the thought that gets triggered when your child is aggressive, or wants another sippy cup, or won't do their homework, or whatever the situation is.

Finally, you have to practice the new thought. This is how we work with our brain's neuroplasticity, by interrupting the deeply grooved neuropathways and creating new ones. And the good news for you is you don't have to do this alone. In fact, I created a workbook specifically designed as a companion piece to this episode to walk you through the process of checking what's triggered and choosing how you want to think about the things that trigger you the most.

You can get this by going onto my website, theautismmomcoach.com, I will leave the link in the episode notes but also if you just Google The Autism Mom Coach, that's me. There's only one of us. It's me. So, you can just get that by going to my website, by the time this episode airs, when you go to my website you will see a popup to enter your email address. And once you do you will get a copy of the workbook in your inbox.

And of course, now if you are ready or even curious about doing the work to create a new life and a new relationship with Autism, I invite you to schedule a one-on-one consultation with me about my coaching program. During the consultation we will talk about where you are, what your biggest pain points are, and what your goals are, and how we can work together. You can do this by visiting my website, The Autism Mom Coach and scheduling a consultation right from the site. Again, the link will be in the show notes. Thank you for listening and talk 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.