

Ep #18: S.O.S. What to Do During a Mommy Meltdown



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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You are listening to episode 18 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, S.O.S. What to Do During a Mommy Meltdown.

We have all been there. Our child is on our last nerve, we are tired, we are depleted and we are losing it. Sometimes the meltdown is internal as we white knuckle it through the day. But sometimes we let it all out. We yell. We cry. We scream to the point our child is looking at us like, are you okay? In this episode I will give you some tips on the things you can do in these moments to support yourself and manage your own meltdown.

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 another episode of the podcast. Thank you for being here and I hope you are doing well. Our summer is off to a nice start. We spent the first few days visiting family and now we are settling in for a week of mostly unstructured time until ESY start. So, fingers crossed. Today's topic is an S.O.S. topic. You can use the techniques I'm going to teach you in real time when you are losing it or when you have just plain lost it. That said, what I'm going to teach you in this episode isn't just for when you are melting down.

You can begin to incorporate these techniques long before you're at the point of a meltdown and I highly suggest that you do. This is because the more you begin to incorporate these techniques and make them part of your daily self-care the easier they will be to grab for when you really need them.

Alright, let's get to it. Maybe it is in line at the grocery store while your child is flailing on the floor. Maybe it's during the car ride to school while your

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child is screaming at the top of her lungs. Or maybe it's after your child has just landed a slap on your face. Stress hormones and adrenalin are coursing through your body. Your mind is spinning, your breath is shallow, your heart is racing and the best options in this moment seems to be scream, cry, run or all three.

You are in a primal survival response. Your nervous system is in fight, flight mode and is functioning for one purpose, to keep you alive. Now, if you or your child are in actual danger you can use all of this energy to get out of harm's way. But for the times when your fight, flight response is activated and you are not in a life or death situation, which is probably most of the time you can use these techniques to deescalate your fight, flight response and return to a calmer state.

The name of the tool I'm going to teach you today is S.O.S. stop, observe, self-sooth. The first rule of deescalating a fight, flight response is to stop and notice that you are in it in the first place. For those of you who live in a state of chronic stress activation you probably don't even know you're in it. You are so used to it. You may even think it's normal because for you it is. But in reality what's happening is your nervous system is in a fight, flight response. You're having a biological and physiological response to a real or perceived danger. So, let's just start by stopping and observing.

I am in a stress response. My body is trying to protect me from danger. As simple as this sounds here's why it's important. Stopping and observing is interrupting a deeply grooved pattern in your brain and your nervous system. It is bringing consciousness to an unconscious and automatic response. So, by stopping and observing, and bringing awareness to what is happening we can take the next step which is self-soothing. Self-soothing is anything you can do to bring some comfort and support to yourself as you manage a challenging situation.

Now, of course we are all familiar with this term, self-soothing. It's the thing that we're working so hard to help our children with. Well, what about us? We're activated. We are in a stress response. We can use the same techniques that we use on our children to support ourselves in these

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moments. First, breathing. Now, if your thought is, oh my gosh, seriously, breathing, that's all you have for me. Yeah, I breathe every day, I do it all the time, got it. Hear me out.

I am not talking about automatic breathing. I am talking about conscious breathing. Not just a few quick deep breaths in the middle of a meltdown, that is not how it works. And it doesn't work. By conscious breathing I mean deep controlled breathing, slowly inhaling and exhaling the breath from your body. Deep breathing is not just for yoga and meditation, it is for the most stressful of situations. This is why it is used by the Navy SEALs, professional athletes, police officers and nurses.

Speaking of the Navy SEALs, I am going to teach you the breathing technique that they use, it is called box breathing. It uses the image of a square box so that you can anchor your mind and your breath and shift from that shallow and panicked breathing to deep rhythmic breathing. So, in box breathing each side of the box represents one motion, inhale, hold, exhale, and hold. And each of these motions last for four seconds. The secret to box breathing is its repetitive and rhythmic nature. The brain loves patterns.

And when you give your brain a pattern to follow it signals that you are taking control and this is very calming to our central nervous system. Here's how it works. First, inhale slowly through your nostrils to the count of four. As you count to four, put your hand on your belly and feel it gently expand. Second, hold for four counts. While you are holding you can tense every muscle in your body as you hold the inhale for four counts, resisting the urge to exhale. Then after four seconds you exhale for four counts letting the air completely leave your lungs.

And then you hold again so in this point you're not going to inhale or you're not going to exhale for the next four seconds. And while you hold just try to keep a calm and relaxed body. Once you've completed the four part exercise do this for about six rounds, so we're talking a couple of minutes. And this will help get your body into a more relaxed state, more rhythmic

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controlled and deeper breathing. So, once you are able to do that and to calm yourself down then you have access to your rational thinking again.

You're not operating from your fear brain. You're operating from your prefrontal cortex and you're better able to make decisions. So, if I haven't sold you on this yet let me just tell you what Mark Divine who is a former US Navy SEAL commander says about box breathing. He says, "It was instrumental in saving my life several times in crises. I was able to remain calm and focus clearly to avoid reactionary thinking or worse, panic." It's pretty good.

And I'm going to include a link to the show notes to a video to demonstrate box breathing. Also, if you go to the Giphy app, and search for box breathing you can download the Giphy to your photos and access it at any time.

Next, movement. If possible move your body and release the stress that is building up, even if it is as simple as walking out of the room or shaking your hands and your arms to release some of the stress from your body. If you can do more then by all means, but if you can't, just do any little thing just to move it out.

Next, touch. Touch is a way of showing yourself comfort and bringing a feeling of safety into your body. Maybe this is a hand on your heart, maybe it is rubbing your hands together, maybe it is giving yourself a hug. This is a technique that I have used so many times when my son has been struggling and we are in a confined area like a car, or a train. And there's really nothing I can do to help him in that moment. And the only thing I can do is to keep myself calm, but I don't have tons of options. And so just putting a hand on my heart is a way of signaling to myself, safety and comfort.

Next, words of support. With our words we have the ability to step outside of ourselves and offer ourselves support. This might look like saying to yourself, this is hard but you are doing a great job. This is really difficult and it is okay to feel the way you do. Of course, you feel frustrated, or scared,

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or sad, anyone would feel this way. An important piece to this is your tone. Tone communicates safety. If you are speaking to yourself in a high pitch or commanding voice, like, 'suck it up buttercup', you are telling your nervous system that you are not safe.

But if you speak to yourself using a warm and prosodic voice, like the one you'd use when you see a baby, or a cute little animal, this tone will communicate to your nervous system that you are safe, you are seen and you are held. And bonus, you can use this way of talking to yourself to verbalize the experience your child may be having in order to coregulate with them.

For example, your flight is delayed for a few hours, you have played all of the iPad games, eaten all of the snacks and taken all the walks your child will tolerate. You are frustrated, they are frustrated and they are acting out. You can use this self-soothing talk for the both of you. I've actually done this, I'm talking to myself/talking to my son and it has a double effect. Yes, I know you are frustrated. This stinks. We should have been home by now. Of course, you're upset. It's okay. I'm upset too. It's going to be okay. We're going to be okay.

When you do this you're acknowledging your disappointment and your discomfort along with your child's. You are seeing yourself and your child and you are offering your own care and support. And you're also modeling for your child how you deal with difficult emotions. And double bonus, the better you become at taking the temperature down for yourself and regulating yourself, the more coregulating of an impact you can have on your child.

So, to sum up the self-soothing tips for what to do during a meltdown, breath, movement, supportive touch, words of support, using a supportive tone. I highly recommend that you begin to practice these techniques ahead of time and incorporate them into your daily self-care. This way it will be easier for you to access them when things are really hard. And of course, you don't have to do this alone.

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If you are interested in taking this work to the next level with one-on-one coaching, schedule a call and let's chat. You can do this by going to my website and booking an appointment. Thanks so much for listening and I'll 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.