

## Ep #19: What to Do After a Mommy Meltdown



### **Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

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You are listening to episode 19 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, What to do After a Mommy Meltdown. You yelled, you cried, you lit it up, now what? This week we are going to talk about what to do after the meltdown because remember, they will happen. And once we let go of the idea that we should not have human reactions, or that we are bad for having them at all, we can choose how we want to respond and how we want to treat ourselves in the aftermath. Stay tuned for a simple tool you can use after any 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. I hope you are doing well and enjoying the summer. So, a little update. Shortly after recording episode 18, What to do During a Mommy Meltdown, I had a big fat mommy meltdown of my own. I want to share that with you for two reasons. First, I want to normalize the experience that you're having because we all have them. We all have our own meltdowns. We all react or overreact. Maybe we don't share that with others, maybe we shame ourselves for doing it but it happens.

And so as much as I can in this podcast I will share my real life experiences and that of my clients so that you can know you're not alone. And two, the other reason for sharing it is I want to share with you how I use the S.O.S. process that I taught you last year to support myself in real time.

Okay, so here is what happened. I decided kind of last minute to take my son and his best friend to Boston for two nights. It was a great time. We hit all of the must see attractions which for these two boys was the Nike store, the movie theater and the hotel snack bar. So, we didn't do all the touristy

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things but we had a great time. And just really enjoyed being together and the boys enjoyed having some time where they could walk around, and sample new foods, and just enjoy being summertime.

Anyhow, on the way home we had about an hour left in our drive and lucky for us the 4<sup>th</sup> of July traffic was going in the opposite direction. So, we were just cruising, that is until I stopped for a bathroom break and I went into the back seat so I could retrieve my iPhone charger from my backpack. Well, this is when I discovered that my backpack was not in the back seat and my son who was in charge of the backpack, well, he had left it not in our hotel room but in the Wholefoods next door to our hotel where the boys had gone to have breakfast.

In that moment, panic set in. I was freaking out, someone could have taken that backpack so easily. Maybe I lost my laptop and all of the work that I had stored on it. And so, what did I do? I lost it. I yelled. I cried. I melted down. So, given what I do, I coach moms on things like this all the time, whenever things like this happen in my life my mind immediately goes to what would I tell my clients to do in this situation? And of course, I had just recorded the S.O.S. episode.

So immediately just stopping and observing, I am in a stress response. And oh my God, I was. My heart was beating so fast, my mind was racing and went blink at the same time somehow. So immediately hand on the heart, slow deep breaths. And it worked. It didn't bring back my laptop but it did return me to a calmer state where I had access to my rational thinking. This was important because in my fear response the only thing I could think of was I have to turn this car around immediately and race back to Boston.

Fortunately, once I was able to calm down what I did was I called the Wholefoods. I confirmed that the backpack was there, thank goodness, and I asked them to hold it. I then called the hotel and asked the staff to retrieve the laptop from the hotel which they agreed to do. So now I had a decision. I could turn around and return to Boston and get the laptop right now or I could have them mail it to me. So here is where I did the math.

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I looked at the traffic pattern and I thought, well, we have 90 minutes to get home versus turning around now, getting to Boston in bumper to bumper traffic only to turn around and drive back home again in 4<sup>th</sup> of July traffic with two teenage boys in the backseat. So, this was an easy decision. We were not turning around and going to Boston, we were going home. Now, this all happened in five minutes and most of it happened in my head.

Once I was able to calm myself down and decide what I wanted to do using my rational brain I was then able to talk myself and the boys through it. So, in a calm voice, “Hey, guys, I’m sorry I got so upset. I was really afraid that the laptop was gone.” But just notice when I was panicking I couldn’t really think straight and I thought we only had one choice. But once I was able to calm down by just slowing down, being quiet and breathing I was able to think through my options. So here it is.

We’re not going to turn around and go back to Boston, we are going home. Now, meanwhile, these are two teenage boys in the back seat with their accessories. And so, I think they heard me. They were on their devices and really they were more concerned about whether we were stopping for snacks and whether or not we were going to get home for them to participate in whatever 4<sup>th</sup> of July plans that they had. Anyhow the point is I felt better, I was calmer and I was able to drive us home safely.

So, there you have it, a real life example of working through a meltdown using the S.O.S. process. Now, let’s move on to what to do after the meltdown. Now, I know what we usually do after a meltdown. We usually shame and blame ourselves but as you might have guessed, that’s not what I’m going to suggest here.

I’m going to teach you a tool called the Seven R’s and you’ll see why in a second. But let me first acknowledge, seven’s a lot of steps. You don’t have to use all of them. They are all really helpful but in a pinch, step one and step seven are a must. I suggest that you do these every time and as I walk through these you will see why, so let’s get to it.

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Number one. Regulate your nervous system. The first step always is to return yourself to a regulated state. And by regulated I mean a state of calm, or at least neutrality where you are no longer operating in a stress response. You are no longer operating from your fear brain and you have access to your rational thinking. This is so important because as long as you remain in the stress response the more likely you are to continue to melt down. Every little thing will trigger you because you are already in a fear response.

So, the first thing to do after the meltdown, return yourself to a regulated state. You can do this by using the self-soothing techniques we talked about in episode 18 like deep rhythmic breathing to signal to your brain and your nervous system that you are safe and you are in control. When it comes to regulating your nervous system you really want to do anything that's going to return you to a sense of safety and work also to release the stress from your body.

And so, one of the great ways of doing this again is the deep rhythmic breathing, but there are also other things that you can do like movement. Movement of any kind will help you release the stress from your body. Remember, you are in a stress response, the adrenalin and cortisol was pumping through your body. And maybe you've released a bit of it with the meltdown that you had but to the extent that there is some still hanging out in there, you want to do whatever you can to move it through your body.

So, movement of any kind, you can literally shake your hands, shake it off. You can take a walk, you can do jumping jacks, you can dance, movement of any kind. Other ways that you can regulate your nervous system is you can co-regulate with someone else. Is there someone near you that you can give a hug to? Can you give a friend a call? Anything that you can do to regulate with another nervous system will help you return to a regulated state of your own.

Other things you can do, you can laugh, you can cry, you can give yourself a hug, these are all ways of soothing your nervous system, returning yourself to a sense of safety while releasing the stress from your body.

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Number two. Recognize your role. Now, the next suggestion I have for you is to acknowledge the role you played in the meltdown and take ownership of your actions. This means you are not blaming your child or even autism for your actions. That sounds like if only he listened, she knows how upset I get when she hits me, or autism won today. These are all examples of giving your power over to your kids or their diagnosis. So, when you recognize your role you are not blaming your child, or autism, or yourself.

You are just recognizing that in this circumstance I had thoughts that created feelings that led me to take certain actions. As uncomfortable as this might be, it's the path forward because we can't control our kids and we can't control autism. But we do have a lot of say about how we think, feel and respond.

Number three. Review your thought, feel, act cycle. Now, you'll remember from previous episodes on the think, feel, act cycle and check what's triggered that in order to shift from reacting to responding, you first need to understand your current thought, feeling, action cycle. So, you can do this by taking a look at whatever triggered you and ask yourself, what was I thinking? What was I feeling? And what actions did this produce? Once you see your current think, feel, act cycle, you can work on noticing your default thoughts and reframing those to ones that are more supportive.

So, for example, if you are triggered when your kid does not listen because you are thinking that they are being disrespectful, maybe you start by just noticing this default thought, I'm having the thought, my kid does not listen to me. Then maybe you move to reframing the thought to something more neutral like, sometimes kids don't listen. Let me give you an example of this from the car meltdown that I have.

So, one of my thoughts that came up was, I have to do everything. And now this is because in my mind my son was only responsible for getting that backpack into the car. In my mind I was responsible for everything else, making sure we got everything out of the hotel room, getting the luggage into the car, dealing with the valet so we could get our car, etc.,

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etc. So, in my mind his only job was to get this backpack into the car and he didn't do it. And my thought was, I have to do everything.

So, by the way that's a thought I have in other situations too and I think you'll find this, the more you start to look at the thoughts you're having when you're triggered, you'll see that they show up in other situations. So anyway, one of the thoughts I was having was I have to do everything. And then another thought I had was, I can't have nice things. Now, this laptop is brand new, I bought it for myself for this business and I was excited to have it but it was a bit of a splurge.

So, the idea that I had lost it, this thought I have had before which is I can't have nice things, that came up. And so just being able to notice that in the moment. And I actually did, was like, that soundtrack is running again, is helpful. You're noticing yourself in real time and even that small step helps me to put some distance between what's happening and my thoughts about it. And maybe that's why now looking at the situation I was able to shift rather quickly into the self-soothing that I was able to do in order to redirect myself.

So, in any event review your thought, feel, act cycle. If you want some help with this, I suggest you listen to episodes five and 17 and go to my website to grab a copy of the free workbook, check what's triggered to help you work through your own think, feel, act cycle when it comes to the things that trigger you.

Number four. Release the guilt. Now, this is probably the most challenging step. You may feel terrible after a meltdown and that is okay. It is not comfortable but it won't harm you. In fact, guilt can be a useful emotion when it is signaling to us that we are acting out of alignment with our own wishes or values. It is alerting us to an opportunity to course correct. Indulging in guilt however is not useful. It keeps us stuck. It undermines our confidence and self-concept and it does not lead to better results.

Contrary to what you may think, beating yourself up does not make you a better parent. Beating yourself up does not stop you from melting down. In

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fact, the opposite, if you are constantly beating yourself up for having an emotional overreaction, if you are telling yourself you are bad, or not good enough, or screwing up your kid, well, this is not exactly confidence inspiring, is it? Because now you have all of this pressure on yourself. I need to be extra patient and extra perfect to make up for whatever it was.

And this is impossible, life happens, your kid will do the thing that gets on your last nerve again. And boom, you are like a pressure cooker going off. So instead of indulging in guilt, let the feeling in, process it and release it. If you want some help with this, take a listen to episode eight, Riding the Wave where I talk about processing emotions.

Number five. Reconcile and reconnect. Part of taking responsibility is making amends with those who may have been impacted by your actions. This may include your child and it always includes you. So, first if you have a screaming fit, apologize to the extent it is age and developmentally appropriate, put language to the experience for your child where you are owning your responsibility for your actions and modeling to them what it looks like to experience and recover from big emotions.

I did this with the boys in the car a bit when I talked them through my overreaction to what I thought was losing the laptop. I waited until after I calmed down and then I did apologize for my overreaction. I apologized for yelling and I also let them know I was feeling really afraid. I thought we had lost the laptop and guess what? When I was overreacting, I wasn't able to really think straight. So, I had to take a few steps to soothe myself before I really can make a decision about how to go forward.

Then after you do this, forgive yourself. Be nice to yourself. Treat yourself the way you would a friend or a stranger on Facebook because I see you all in these Facebook mommy groups where you are so loving and wonderful to other parents who are struggling and try this for yourself. Try this with yourself. Try telling yourself, this is hard and you are doing a good job. Today was not your best day and that is okay.

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Number six. Recharge. One of the biggest reasons we melt down is because we don't make time for ourselves. We tell ourselves we don't have the time. We tell ourselves the drama is never ending. I understand that some days, week and months it can feel like we never get a break. But this is exactly why it is important to create breaks, even the smallest of breaks. If you have to hang out in your bathroom for five minutes just to get some peace, do it.

If you need to take a quick trip to the store and end up sleeping in your car for a few minutes, do that. Make a point of finding time to take a break and celebrate it. I made a joke of this during COVID. I would say I had three offices, my actual bedroom office, my bathroom office where I would sometimes work when my son was having a meltdown. And then there was my car office where I would flee to when things got a little bit too tense.

The point here is to create some time, to create some space for just you. No, it probably won't be enough but something is better than nothing. And just a little bit over time can add up.

And number seven. Remember I told you that points one and seven would be the most important? So just to review, point one was to regulate your nervous system. Point number seven, remember what matters. You are not melting down because you are a bad person who does not love their child. You are not out of control. You are not crazy. You are carrying a heavy load. You love your child, you want the best for them. You are doing the best you can and that is enough, more than enough.

Some days will be more challenging than others and you will have human emotions because you are human. It is okay, you will stumble, you will fall down and you will get back up. And that is what matters. I tell this to myself all the time. I may not be doing it perfectly but I am in the arena every day and that is what matters.

Okay, to recap the seven R's, number one, regulate your nervous system. Two, recognize your responsibility. Three, review your think, feel, act cycle.

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Four, release the guilt. Five, reconcile and reconnect. Six, recharge. And seven, remember what matters.

If you want more support with this or you would like to learn what it would be like to have me as your one-on-one coach now is the time to go to my website and sign up for a consult. I would love to work with you and I would love to find out how I can support you wherever you are in your journey as a parent raising a child with autism. Thanks 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](http://theautismmomcoach.com). See you next week.