

Ep #24: Back to School Series: Making Decisions Ahead of Time



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Lisa Candra

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You are listening to episode 24 of *The Autism Mom Coach* podcast Back to School Series: Setting Yourself Up for Success Part 1, Making Decisions Ahead of Time. The countdown is on or the timer went off depending on where you live. The 2022 school year is here. And no matter how much we plan, things are going to go wrong. Your child will refuse to get on the bus. Their teacher will be out for a week because of COVID. Homework will be a disaster, then what?

In this episode I am going to teach you the power of making decisions ahead of time so that instead of spinning in worry and anticipatory stress about what might happen you can start deciding how you want to show up no matter what the school year brings. Keep listening.

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 and welcome to the second episode of the Back to School series of the podcast. I hope you enjoyed last week's episode and took some time to define success for your child in a way that is loving, supportive and sees your child for the uniquely amazing human that they are. In the next two episodes of the Back to School series I'm going to teach you how you can prepare yourself cognitively and somatically, so that's mind and body for whatever the school year brings.

We are going to start with learning how to make decisions ahead of time because like I said, no matter how much we prepare, no matter how much we stress ourselves out, some of the things that we're worried about, they're probably going to happen. The good news is you don't have to wait

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for the thing to happen to decide how you want to think, feel and respond. So, let's get to it, making decisions ahead of time.

When we make decisions ahead of time we have the opportunity to use our prefrontal cortex which is the part of the brain that is responsible for reasoning, problem solving, impulse control and perseverance to make decisions that are aligned with our long term goals. Otherwise, we default to our reflex reactions, whatever it is that our primitive brain tells us will keep us and our children safe. For example, if I decide ahead of time that when I hear my child yelling, "I don't want to go to school", that I'm going to think this is normal. He is scared. He is dysregulated.

When I'm thinking these thoughts I'm not going to go into a full blown panic attack where I start yelling back and catastrophizing in my head. When I am able to stay calmer and more grounded I am able to show up how I want to show up. I can be the solid object, the steady in the storm. Now, why is this helpful? Well, first it enables you to make decisions aligned with your goals.

So, if one of my goals is to model emotional regulation to my child then deciding ahead of time what I want to think when he becomes dysregulated, that's going to help me model the behavior I want to see and hopefully have a downregulating impact on him rather than matching his behavior and co-escalating with him.

Second, when you make decisions ahead of time you shift from this idea that life is happening to you or at you to life is happening and I am 100% capable of deciding how I want to show up. And this is so empowering. You get to decide, no matter what. So, decisions ahead of time means you don't have to wait for the school year to begin to decide how you want to think, feel and respond to the things that may or may not happen. I don't have to wait for my son's OCD and anxiety to kick up. I don't have to brace myself for the first week of school.

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I don't have to dread the complaints about the long bus ride. I can decide right now how I want to think about these circumstances in order to create the feelings that will fuel the actions that I want to take when life gets lifey. Please know that I know firsthand that this is all easier said than done. But we need to start somewhere. So, we're going to start with our thoughts, the thoughts we decide to think on purpose to create the feelings that will fuel the actions we want to take.

Now, I want to help you get started by sharing with you some of the thoughts that I am practicing right now to prepare me for the school year. First, changes and transitions are hard. This is a big one for me. I really do struggle with the fact that this is still true for us. My son is about to be 15 and changes and transitions are still a big challenge.

So, my work here in thinking this thought on purpose is also to humble myself to the fact that I will never truly understand his experience, and why what I perceive as simple and routine is anything but for him. Because changes and transitions are hard.

Number two. This is skill, not will. This phrase comes from Dr. Stuart Ablon who believes behavioral challenges are misunderstood. And the lack of skill in the cognitive domains of flexibility, frustration tolerance, and problem solving are the causes of challenging behaviors. This has been a gamechanger for me.

I will share that as the parent of a child with high functioning Autism. I often find myself falling into the thought trap of because he can he should, or that because he did it once, or that he does it in certain circumstances that he should do it all the time. Skill, not will takes me from frustrated and fed up to calm and compassionate.

Number three. Home is his safe place. We have all experienced the coke bottle effect. No? If you don't know what I'm talking about, I suggest that you check out the YouTube video by Autistic blogger, Orion Kelly. In this

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video he explains what happens to an Autistic child throughout the day. All of the vagaries and unexpected things that happen living in a neurotypical world. Each one of them is like shaking a bottle of coke and when they get home the lid comes off and boom, burst, flash.

So, I really found this video to be eye opening and very true to my own experience. So instead of taking my son's behavior personally, I have found it really helpful to remind myself that he's going through a lot during the course of the day that I couldn't possibly understand. And that home is his safe place. And for those of you who tend to find yourselves the target of whatever your child is dishing out, I would add to this, I am his person, or I am his safe place. This will help you regulate yourself so that you can be the solid object they seek instead of taking it personally and exploding.

Number four. We are all on the same team. This one helps me when I am dealing with my son's school team, doctors and therapist. Because we don't always agree. We are all on the same team to me means that we all have the same objective but not necessarily the same agenda. When you start from the premise that you all have the same objective, I think it makes it easier to be more open, and to listen, and to communicate more effectively.

I find this especially so with the school. It is so easy to get into an us versus them when we believe our children are not getting what they need. For me I have found it more helpful to approach these situations from we all have the same objective. For one, I'm not really a fan of confrontation which you might find surprising since I am an attorney. But I would much rather be collaborative whenever possible. Plus depending on your child's age, you may be with this team for a minute.

So, to the extent possible I like to keep my working relationships with the team as professional as possible. Or maybe it's not your school team, maybe it's your doctor. Maybe your doctor is encouraging you to try a certain type of therapy. They are telling you that it's the gold standard but

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you've done your research and you are the expert on your child and you decide, no, it's a no for you. And that's okay, you can still be on the same team and have different views of what to do.

And number five. My only job is to love my child unconditionally. There will be times when your child is struggling and you just want to do something, anything to help them and you will feel helpless. For these times I like to remind myself my only job is to love him right now just as he is 100%.

So, there you have it. You don't have to brace yourself for the school year. You can start making decisions right now about how you want to show up. To help you with this I highly recommend that you grab my free workbook, *Check What's Triggered*. This workbook will help you identify some of the triggers that you're anticipating for this school year and to create thoughts that will better serve you. You can get this workbook by going onto my website, theautismmomcoach.com. You'll find it right under the resources tab. And I will also put a link in the show notes for you as well.

And finally, while you're on my website, you can schedule a free consultation with me to learn more about my coaching program. You don't have to do this alone. I would love to work with you one-on-one to transform your relationship with Autism and Autism parenting and to help you step out on the right foot this school year. That's it for today. Thank you so much 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.