

Ep #29: When Other People Trigger You



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With Your Host

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You are listening to *The Autism Mom Coach*, When Other People Trigger you. When it comes to our children with Autism, other people trigger us in all sorts of ways. The questions they ask like, “What is her special skill?” Comments like, “Well, he doesn’t look Autistic.” And of course, the staring. We think other people trigger us because they don’t get it. They don’t understand our lives and they don’t understand Autism. But the real reason other people trigger us has actually nothing to do with them. To learn more, 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.

Welcome to another episode of the podcast. I am so happy you’re here and I hope you are doing well. My son and I are still living out of state while he attends an OCD program and we are both learning so much. This is really hard work, more so for him of course, but it’s hard work for me as well. And one of the challenges that we have both of us, one of the things that we’re really learning to develop is our capacity to make room for discomfort. And it’s really uncomfortable.

The ability to let discomfort in without resisting it and to just allow it is a practice. When I find myself struggling between what I intellectually know which is this is a process, and my knee jerk instinct to avoid discomfort or try to make it go away as fast as possible, I really lean into the right now, the present moment, my breath, my feet on the floor, my hands on the steering wheel. And this helps, it helps to slow down my racing thoughts like this isn’t working. It’s not working fast enough or my fears that it somehow won’t work.

Ep #29: When Other People Trigger You

All of these grounding techniques bring me back into my body and back into the present moment. And this is a big part of my coaching practice, the somatic piece. So many of the moms I coach are students of personal development. They read the books. They go to therapy, they are in tune with their thoughts. But there is this gap between what they intellectually understand and how they show up. And this is the part of the work we do together. How to bridge the gap between knowing something intellectually and knowing it in your body and living it. It's a practice.

Alright, update over, let's talk about comparison. By the time you hear this episode I will be the proud mother of a 15 year old boy, 15. I have been having a lot of thoughts and a lot of emotions about this birthday and they all got triggered the morning before my son turned 15 while we were out for breakfast. Here's what happened. The hostess came by to chat and ask my son about school, she told us that she was a retired teacher and she was just curious to know what grade he was going into.

My son told her that he was a freshman in high school but he wasn't going to school right now, he was attending a local program. And he gave her some details about that. All good. Well, while he was in the bathroom the hostess came over to me and started giving me advice. She just jumped in with telling me that she used to give vocational advice to special needs parents as part of her teaching gig, I guess.

And she just launched in with, "There are always dish washer jobs available at hotels. He could start as a dish washer and work his way up. Hotels are a good option because they have 401(k) plans. Oh, and by the way, the buffet guy, he has a bunch of issues and he's been with us for years." Oh my gosh, so I was a combination of stunned and sickened at the same time all the while just wanting her to stop talking and leave before my son returned to the table.

And I'll tell you, I'm usually not at a loss for words but I was, holy smokes, all of my words along with my heart and my stomach were just stuck in my throat and I wanted to throw up. So, let's talk about this, why? Why was I

Ep #29: When Other People Trigger You

so triggered? Now, I will tell you that before I found coaching and thought work I would have said something like this. “This woman had no right to assume that my son is not capable of going to college or pursuing a career. She had no right to judge us like that, she is ignorant. How dare she. She is the reason that I am upset.”

But here is the thing, she is not the reason that I got upset. As much as I would love to blame her tone deaf comments for all of my frustration, grief and sadness, she is not the reason I felt that way. She does not control my emotions. So, what was the reason? If it wasn't her comments and what she said, why was I feeling so upset? Well, let's remember the self-coaching model, in this self-coaching model this woman, her words are a circumstance.

And circumstances do not cause our emotions, our thoughts do. If you want a refresher on this go back to episodes, I think it's five and six, it's the thought, feel, act cycle and the self-coaching model where I walk through this process that I'm going to review today. The real reason I was upset, the real reason I wanted to throw up is because her comments triggered what was already there inside of me, just below the surface, all of my concerns, all of my fears about my son turning 15. All of my concerns about his future.

She was the trigger, it was what got triggered inside of me that created my feelings. So, I want to walk you through this. I want to show you how I self-coached myself so that you can use this tool on your own. Now, first before I self-coached I cried. I just let it out. I am afraid, I am scared and it is okay to feel these emotions and process them. Once I got it out and I was feeling more clearer headed, and I was no longer in that fight, flight response I was able to take a look at what was going on in my brain.

So again, the circumstance, hostess recommends hotel jobs for child. My thought here was, he is being robbed of his future. And I'll just give you a little bit of background about this thought. One of the thoughts that I do have about generally speaking, society and Autism is that there seems to

Ep #29: When Other People Trigger You

be two categories, folks who are smart and can go on to be the next Elon Musk, and then basically everybody else.

And so, the idea that she saw my son, gathered a few pieces of information about him and then came over to tell me about dish washing jobs. That triggered this thought, he is being robbed of his future as if don't even bother, there's only one of two destinies for him. And she had picked destiny number two. So that was the thought, he is being robbed of his future and that created a feeling of grief for me. And when I was feeling grief my actions were to become hypervigilant of my son and how he was acting and presenting that was different or not 'normal'.

And then I began catastrophizing about his program, about the fact that he was missing school, about the fact that he is 15 and so close to falling off the services cliff. And what was the result of all this? The result was that I robbed myself of the present moment, the lovely breakfast with my son where we could just enjoy one another. The circumstance, the hostess' words, they did not cause my sadness. I could have just as easily been like, "Okay, boomer", or, "Great tip", and moved on.

And in fact, now that I think about it this advice that this woman gave to me about hotels and 401(k) plans, it's probably not much different than the advice that I got from my grandfather when he learned that I wanted to go to college. He was like, "Get a job, preferably with a 401(k) plan, preferably with a pension and get to work." Anyhow, her words did not cause my emotions. It was my thought that he was being robbed of his future that caused my feelings.

Here is why this is so important. There is very little in life that we can control especially when it comes to our children and especially when it comes to other people. But we can decide how we want to think about the circumstances in our lives including other people, what they say, what they understand, and how they present. So, in this situation I had to decide how I wanted to think about this woman's words. Did I want to hold on to them and my knee jerk interpretation of them for the rest of the day or the week?

Ep #29: When Other People Trigger You

Or did I want to think differently? And so, what I decided to think was that this woman was just trying to be helpful. And really that was her intention. She came over trying to give advice, I'm sure she had no intention of being disrespectful or hurting anyone's feelings. That wasn't her MO, even though it resulted in me feeling some of those ways. That wasn't her MO. And in a way she kind of was helpful, not really in the advice that she gave but the fact that she triggered me to finally let it go and cry.

I had been holding onto this tension pretty tightly for the week leading up to my son's birthday and after I had that big old cry, it really helped me let go and feel a bit lighter. Now, look, I am not telling you to go around thinking the people who make tone deaf comments to you and give you unsolicited advice. What I am saying though is that you can't control what other people will say but you do have the opportunity to decide what you want to do, how you want to think and how you want to feel in response to whatever they do.

And I guess what I would offer here is that when you are triggered by something that someone else does or says, it's an opportunity for you to go inward, to find the part of you that is in pain and needs your attention so that you can tend to it. If you want some help working through triggers to onto my website theautismmomcoach.com under resources, and grab the free workbook, it's called Check What's Triggered.

And of course, if you want some help working through these issues one-on-one with me as your coach, take the time to schedule a consultation so that we can chat about working together. Working with a one-on-one coach is an opportunity for you to take some of the things that you've been learning in this podcast, apply them to your real life and to maximize the results that you can get. And I would love nothing more than to help you with that. So again, on my website [The Autism Mom Coach](http://TheAutismMomCoach.com), schedule a free consultation.

Alright, that's it for this week. Thank you so much for listening and I will talk to you next week.

Ep #29: When Other People Trigger You

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.