

Ep #30: Autism-Colored Glasses



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Lisa Candra

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You are listening to episode 30 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, Autism-Colored Glasses. Do you ever find yourself interpreting all of your child's behavior through the lens of their Autism diagnosis? If so this episode is for you. 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 everyone and welcome to the podcast. I'm so glad you're here and I hope you are having a nice week. Before I turn to this week's topic I want to read a listener review from Harrison's Mom. She writes, "I found the Autism Mom podcast one day after a tough meltdown from my two and a half year old son with suspected Autism, which resulted in me having my own mommy meltdown. I was in the car desperate to find anyone who was going through what I was going through. I stumbled upon Lisa's podcast and I felt like she was describing my life to a tee.

I can't begin to tell you how much Lisa's advice has helped me. Even though her son is much older than mine, I'm still able to find tons of tips and tricks that I can apply to my life. Some days I feel like I hear Lisa's voice in my head guiding me through the think, feel, act cycle, more than I hear my own." She then says, "Lisa, thank you for all you have done for us and the advice I know I will get from you in future episodes." Well, Harrison's Mom, you are a 100% welcome. And I am so happy to hear that you found this podcast exactly when you needed it.

I have had many a meltdown in a car and I will say although my son is much older than your two and a half year old, the lessons that you are learning now, everything that you are going through now, it's like the

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initiation. And you are going to learn so much right now and you're going to be able to fall back on these skills as your child grows. And as they grow and you get more experienced with riding the wave of the ups and downs that come with raising any child but particularly a child with Autism, you will gain more and more confidence.

So even when you get to say 10 or 11, and you're dealing with some brand new to stuff, you'll have all that experience from when your child was two a half years old and you didn't know what was what, but you figured it out, but you got through it. You're going to keep on doing that. And part of the reason for me having this podcast is I know that the number one resource for any child with Autism is their mother. Or really I shouldn't just say the mother, their parents, but my focus is on the mom, you are the number one resource.

And so, your ability to ride the wave, to take care of yourself and to be resourceful and resilient is going to serve both you and your child. And that's why I do what I do. It's why I have the podcast. It's why I have my coaching program. And I really do believe that our ability to support ourselves and support each other is going to be the gamechanger for all of our children because in case you haven't noticed, no one is just making that happen for us. We're going to do it ourselves. But in order to do it we need to be replenished. We need to be resourced.

And that's not happening when we're spending all of our time and energy focused on our children. And when we're not focused on them we're actually focused on beating ourselves up in some way telling ourselves that we're not doing enough and shaming ourselves. Really there's just no place for that in this journey. And so, whatever I can do, whatever words I can provide to guide you into treating yourself better and to being kinder to yourself, well, that's what I'm here for.

Okay, so rant over, let's get to the topic for this week's episode, Autism-colored glasses. Now, when so much of your life revolves around supporting a child with an Autism diagnosis, it's really common to begin to

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see Autism everywhere. I know this happened for me shortly after my son was diagnosed. It was like every work meeting I was in the wondering, no eye contact, maybe an Autism diagnosis. Doesn't understand sarcasm, maybe Autistic.

I see this in my clients too. They are encountering people that they have known for years and now they are questioning whether some their quirks or behaviors are somehow attributable to Autism. Who knows? But you get the idea. You have new information, a new perspective and all of a sudden you start seeing it everywhere. So, when you start seeing Autism everywhere this is what I am calling Autism-colored glasses. This is when you are wondering whether a behavior is because of or attributable to an Autism diagnosis.

Now, I think, Autism-colored glasses can be amazing especially when they lead to increased empathy, curiosity, acceptance and understanding. So, for example let's say that you are at the store and you see a child losing it. And maybe before your child's Autism diagnosis you might have thought something like, that child's a spoiled brat because they're not getting their way. Or their mom isn't disciplining him the way she should. But now that you have on your Autism-colored glasses, your thoughts may be a lot kinder and a lot more generous and compassionate.

So maybe instead of judging this mother or giving the child a dirty look, maybe you smile at the mom, maybe you offer to let her in line in front of you. Or maybe you just think warm thoughts about her and her child because you are wearing those Autism-colored glasses. Now, of course you don't actually know whether or not the child has Autism. But the fact is when you're wearing the Autism-colored glasses you might be showing up differently.

And this is a great thing, if it's used to bring more, again, compassion, understanding empathy into the world, wonderful. But here is the thing, I see so many examples in my life and in the life of my clients where our Autism-colored glasses are leading to increased anxiety and anxiety fueled

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actions. This happens when we attribute all of our child's feelings and all of their actions to their Autism diagnosis. And I think this is because when we believe that the behavior is caused by the Autism we also believe consciously or subconsciously that this is a problem to be fixed.

So let me give you an example. My client was upset when her three year old son refused to get on the back of a truck for a hay ride. They were at a pumpkin patch and my client thought it would be so cool for her son to be on a hay ride. Well, he didn't, he was not having it. He wanted nothing to do with that big noisy truck filled with itchy hay. She interpreted his refusal to get on the truck as being because of his Autism. And in her mind he was missing out on a fun experience because of his Autism.

Well, these thoughts created by her Autism-colored glasses caused her to feel anxious. And when she was feeling anxious, here's how she showed up. First she tried to persuade her child to get on the truck even though he clearly didn't want to. And then when that didn't work she spent the rest of the night spinning about how they missed out on the fun and wondering how many other fun experiences or milestones they would miss because of the Autism.

I remember when my son was around three years old, so this was shortly after the Autism diagnosis. I would take him to the children's museum in Philadelphia and they had so many amazing exhibits. But where did my son want to spend most of his time? The Thomas exhibit. And my thought was, we are missing out on the rest of this museum because he is Autistic. Of course, he wants to play with the Thomas train, all the Autistic kids did. These were my thoughts.

And so, when I see my son fixated on playing with Thomas, my thought was, oh my goodness, this is because of the Autism. This is the Autism rigidity. I need to make him do something else. Well, look at whose being rigid then, me. I was laser focused on the fact that he was having fun with this one activity that I associated with being the proof of his Autism.

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And my actions were to try to persuade him to do things he didn't want to do. And what was the end result? He didn't have as much fun as he wanted to and we were just in this unnecessary struggle. So, if this is you, if you find yourself attributing all of your child's behaviors to Autism and this has resulted in you being anxious and trying to fix or control your child, here is what I suggest.

First, notice when you are looking at your child's behaviors through your Autism-colored glasses. Notice the feelings that come up when you're doing this and what kind of actions you are taking and how you are showing up when you believe that your child is doing or not doing something because of the Autism. Then ask yourself, if I did not believe that this behavior was because of the Autism, what would I think, how would I feel and what would I do?

For my client with the hay ride, she told me that she would not have given it a second thought if she didn't believe it was Autism related. She would have just figured he wasn't interested or maybe the hay ride looked a little bit scary for him because of course it was on the back of a pickup truck. And she would have went on with her night. She would not have been fixating about the hay ride and everything that she believed that they messed and that they would miss in the future.

And the same thing for me, if I wasn't fixated on my son playing with the Thomas train as being the harbinger of our life to come because of his Autism then I would have just let him play with the train and not made it a big deal at all. I mean maybe I would have tried to persuade him to check out other areas of the museum. But I would not have been attaching the kind of importance to it as I was because I believed that he was missing out and this this just because of the Autism.

And that if I didn't do something that he would be missing out on things for the rest of his life. I was catastrophizing because he wanted to play with trains as opposed to just being like, whatever, he's three, let him play. Here's what I've learned from practicing this technique of asking myself,

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what if it isn't because of the Autism? I have noticed that invariably I am a lot calmer when I'm not attributing a behavior to the Autism.

Now, this won't always be the case. Sometimes you will be looking at your child's behaviors through the lens of Autism and it will create a lot of compassion and a lot of understanding, and that's good too. The point of this exercise is really to decide where do you show up in a way that you like better? And so, if thinking of a behavior through Autism-colored glasses creates more compassion, more empathy, more understanding, more curiosity, then go right ahead.

But if you find that it's not creating those emotions, if it's creating anxiety and judgment, maybe asking yourself, well, if I didn't believe it was because of the Autism, let's say I think well, he's four years old, that's why it's happening. And when you believe that it's just because he's four you're like, "Whatever, it's no big deal." Then I feel like that's a better way to show up. You're not as stoked with anxiety. You can show up a lot calmer and you can model behavior that you want your child to exhibit.

The point here is there is never just one way of looking at our child's behaviors. And when we are always looking at them through the lens of our Autism-colored glasses, we may be missing out on the bigger picture or we may be causing ourselves unnecessary stress and anxiety. So, when we try to look at alternative views for the behavior we give ourselves an opportunity to decide how we want to show up because that's the point. We always get to decide how we want to show up.

And so, if this shift helps you in showing up in a way that is calmer, more collected, more grounded, I hope that you use it. Alright, that's all I have for you this week. I hope you enjoyed this podcast episode 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.