

## Ep #31: The Stories We Tell



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With Your Host

Lisa Candra

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You are listening to episode 31 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, The Stories We Tell. Human brains are story making machines. We create stories as a way of understanding our lives, relating to the world, and relating to one another. Some of the stories we tell are empowering and some of them are just the opposite.

In this week's episode I am going to tell you two very different diagnosis stories drawn from the same set of facts. Which is true? Well, both and neither. There is no ultimate truth. There are always multiple interpretations of the same facts available to us in any given moment. And our power lies in our ability to choose the version of the story we want to tell, believe, and live. To learn more stay tuned.

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 another episode of the podcast. I am so glad you're here and I hope you're doing well. I have some fun news to share, in a couple of weeks my son and I are going to be doing a presentation together called how to talk to your child about their Autism diagnosis. We're going to be doing this for a local Connecticut organization called The Lark. And I will put the information in the show notes.

Anyhow, my son has some very strong thoughts about this topic. And so I am so excited for him to have the ability to share his perspective with the parents because I just think that it'll be so informative for them to hear really straight from a person who has lived this experience.

One of the things I will have to share during this presentation is that I didn't actually tell my son about his Autism diagnosis. He figured it out while he

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and I were watching Atypical together when he noticed how similar he was to the main character, Sam. Anyhow, it should be a really interesting conversation.

And I will share more on my social media about this conversation and some of my thoughts about it. So if you don't already, follow me on Instagram and follow me on Facebook. You can find me in both places, The Autism Mom Coach. On Facebook I have a private group and on Instagram I just have The Autism Mom Coach page.

All right, so on for the topic of today, the stories we tell. So first, what are stories? Stories are a collection of sentences, thoughts in our brains. And what do we know about our thoughts? They are real, but not necessarily true. They are simply our interpretation of the circumstances in our lives, influenced by a countless number of factors from our gender, sex, age, upbringing, education, race, religious background, and on and on.

Whenever we tell a story about our lives, whether it is the story about how we got married, divorced, pregnant, or learned of a diagnosis, we think that that story we're telling is the story. We think that when we are telling a story, we are recalling it exactly as it happened and that the way we experienced the story was the only way it could be experienced. But this isn't true.

When we tell a story it is a combination of some facts as we recall them, and a lot of judgment and interpretation. And so often we default to telling these stories in a way that does not serve us. In a way that casts ourselves as the victim of our circumstance, of life happening to us, and from the version of ourselves who is not enough, not doing enough, or no matter what she does, never get it right.

Here's why this is important to know. It is not the facts, the real actual facts of the story that are causing us to feel anything. Rather, it is how we interpret these facts that create how we feel and determine our experience of the story we are telling.

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I want to demonstrate this by telling you two versions of the same story. First, I'm going to start off with just telling you the facts. And then I'm going to offer you two different versions of the story. And first we're going to start off with a silly one.

Here are the facts, I have two cats and a hamster. There is a teenager who is babysitting my animals while I am away. Last weekend the teenager cleaned out the hamster cage and did not return the lid to the top of the cage. The hamster did not escape and it is still alive.

So here's version number one. My sitter is so careless, my hamster could have been murdered. I could have walked into a gory mess. I can't trust her.

Version two, I am so glad I opted for an aquarium cage. There is no way a hamster is escaping it even with the lid off. And of course she is alive, there is no way my cats would have harmed her. They know that she's family and not desert.

So which version of the story is true? Well, both and neither. There's no ultimate truth here. There's just how I choose to look at it. And I am choosing the second version of the story because I don't want to think ill of the teenager who is watching my animals. And I am really entertained by the idea or the thought that my cat's would never hurt my hamster because she's family.

Now, I know that this was a silly example. And I did that on purpose because I just wanted to highlight how different of a story I could tell using the same facts. So onto a story that is not silly and is much more serious to me. And this is the story of my son's OCD diagnosis.

Here are the facts, my son began exhibiting high levels of anxiety at the age of six. We met with many professionals, developmental pediatricians, neurologists, psychiatrists, psychologists and various therapists. I bought a bunch of books about anxiety.

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I learned how I may be feeling the anxiety and I experimented with different strategies and metaphors to help my son understand his anxiety and cope with it. Over the years I asked various professionals about OCD. And I was told that OCD and Autism are very similar and it was difficult to tell which was which. At the age of 13 my son was diagnosed with OCD.

Version of the story number one, I should have known. I should have done more. I should have pushed harder. We have lost so much time. I can't trust myself or anyone else.

Version two, wow, I suspected for a while that Autism was not driving the bus and I was right. Even though I didn't have an official diagnosis, all of the things I did were on point. Also, I don't know that an official diagnosis would have changed much when my son was younger. I think he's at the right age and stage of development now to understand the concept of externalizing his OCD and bossing it back. We are doing exactly what we need to do.

So which version of this story is true? Again, both and neither. There is no single truth. And it does not matter which one of these stories is true. The facts are what they are and I can choose to tell myself the default story that this is my fault and we are behind and I should have done more. But why? It's not helpful at all.

This story does not serve me in any way. It would undermine my confidence and my competence as the sole decision maker in my son's life. There is absolutely no upside to me telling myself I should have done more and this is my fault.

I choose to tell and believe the version of the story that empowers me. The version of the story where my gut instincts were spot on. I can trust myself and I was doing so many of the things that were helping my son before I even knew what was wrong. That's the story I want to live into.

But this is a choice because, trust me, there are plenty of times where the default, you should have done something, you should have known, those

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thoughts pop up. The difference is, is I just notice them. I relate to them differently. They're not the truth of the universe, they're just a thought that I'm having. And I lean in to the story I want to believe, the story that I want to live.

Because the way we think about things, the way we talk about them, creates our experience. And this is so important because how we're feeling is going to drive our actions. It's going to drive how we show up, it's going to create our reality. We are in charge of that. And so one of the ways that we can take hold of it is by choosing on purpose how we want to think about the circumstances in our lives.

So if you want to give this a try, pick a topic and write down just the facts. And then write down the default story you are telling yourself about these facts. And then write down the version of the story you want to believe, that you want to live into.

What is the difference between those two stories? What are the thoughts that are standing in between you choosing the story that empowers you right now? This is where your work is, uncovering those limiting beliefs that are keeping you stuck. Because here's the thing I've learned from coaching, how we do one thing is how we do everything.

So if you were stuck in an I'm not good enough, I'm not doing the right things story about your parenting, it's probably showing up in other areas of your life. Maybe in your relationships, maybe at work. So uncovering those limiting beliefs and seeing the impact that they are having in your life and seeing the choice that you have to choose a different way of thinking about it, this is where it all begins.

If you want some help with this, this is exactly what we do in my one-on-one coaching program. You don't have to stay stuck and you don't have to do this alone. I would love to support you and your transformation. If you are interested, go on my website, [theAutismmomcoach.com](http://theAutismmomcoach.com) and schedule a consultation.

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All right, that's all I have for this week. 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](http://theAutismmomcoach.com). See you next week.