

Ep #32: When You Think Nothing is Working



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Lisa Candra

Ep #32: When You Think Nothing is Working

You are listening to episode 32 of *The Autism Mom Coach*. When you think nothing is working. One of the most challenging aspects of raising a child with Autism, is all of the time and energy we spend trying things we have no idea will work, from therapy and medication to assistive devices and non-traditional school environments. And since there is no roadmap, no one size fits all, we end up throwing it all against the wall with varying degrees of success. And there are times we try, and we try, and we try and we do not get the results we expected or hoped for.

And we tell ourselves I have tried everything, I have done it all, and nothing is working. If you've been there and done that you are not alone. Keep listening to learn how you can show for yourself when you believe nothing is working.

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 hope you are doing well and you are enjoying the October weather wherever you are. The topic for today's episode is one I think so many of us can relate to. And as it happens shortly after I wrote this episode, I'm talking the day after, I had an experience that triggered the nothing is working story. What I want to share with you is the difference in how I related to the story and how much time I spent hanging out with it.

Because nothing is working, it's a thought, it's a story we are telling ourselves. It is not the truth. And so that's what we're going to talk about today. This is that's not to undermine your experience, believe me, I get it, I am having it right now. We are in month two of an intensive program and things are getting better in some ways and not in others. And so, it's so

Ep #32: When You Think Nothing is Working

tempting to go down the nothing is working road. But it's an active choice not to do it. And so, I want to share that with you today.

So, a lot of you, if you're listening to the podcast, you know that we are in an intensive program right now. And as part of that program there are a lot of doctors' appointments, there is a lot of conversations reviewing my son's history, particularly in the past two and a half years. And as I review all of the details with them I am remembering so many times during the last couple of years where I believed nothing was working. And I really believed it.

After countless doctors' appointments, therapy appointments, medications, hospitalizations, I believed that this was true. I believed that we were working as hard as we could, we were doing everything that anyone suggested and still my son was struggling a lot. Now, of course, this was not the truth but it was my interpretation of the facts. In my mind all of the steps I was taking was supposed to result in things getting better or easier and they weren't, or at least not with the speed or the permanency that I was seeking.

So, I told myself over and over, nothing is working. Now, I want to point out that this is such an easy go to story for our brains, because remember our brains are equipped with a negativity bias. I talked about the negativity bias way back when in episode four. The short version is that we are wired to over-remember and over-rely on negative information. Our brains are like Velcro for the negative and Teflon for the positive.

So, when we are feeding ourselves all of these negative thoughts like nothing is working, our brains are all in. Their job is to protect us. And they protect us by being hypervigilant of anything that could kill us or that we view as negative. And so not only are we feeding ourselves negative thoughts, we are actually seeking out confirmation for this negative thinking and filtering out evidence to the contrary. This is what is known as confirmation bias.

Ep #32: When You Think Nothing is Working

This is all of what is happening when we are telling ourselves nothing is working. And in my view and experience it is not helpful for a couple of reasons. First, when we are doing this we are putting ourselves in a position of helplessness. We are victims, life is happening to us, we are powerless. So, remember from the last episode when I talked about the stories we tell. When we are telling ourselves nothing is working, we are telling ourselves a story that is disempowering.

Second, we are creating our own suffering. Pain is inevitable, it is part of the human experience. We are going to experience feelings of pain when we see our child struggling, when we are disappointed or at our wit's end when the therapy, or the medication, or the school does not work the way we wanted or expected. Experiencing pain in these circumstances is normal. And while it does not feel good, because it certainly doesn't, we have a choice about whether we pile on and make it worse. That is what suffering is.

We suffer when we tell ourselves nothing is working because this belief is demoralizing and soul sucking. It does not motivate us or inspire us. It is like a punch in the gut, or really it's like being kicked when you are down. And finally, when we are telling ourselves nothing is working, we are missing out or purposefully ignoring everything that is working. Now, let me be clear, I am not telling you to put a positive spin on your pain because that's bullshit. I mean, we really do just ignore or miss what is working.

So let me give you some examples from my experience of the things that were working. Well, the school district, they were so supportive of my son's needs. I found fantastic advocates, that was working. My health insurance, well, that was working, thank god, that was a life saver. All of these things were working. They were making this painful situation easier on me and easier on my son.

My friends who did not take no for an answer when I said I would just stay at home, and came to my house. My coworkers who picked up the slack when I took time off for various emergencies. Ben's friends who stood by his side with love and encouragement and learned strategies for redirecting

Ep #32: When You Think Nothing is Working

him. All of this was working. And for the things that were not working the way I wanted, or expected, or hoped, this all became information and data to add to the suitcase I have been accumulating over the years.

So now that I told you my thoughts on why saying nothing is working, is not working for us, I want to give you some strategies about what to do. First, pause, deep breaths, do whatever you can to self-soothe and offer yourself support because very likely this thought, nothing is working is likely to set off a survival response in your nervous system. You're either in fight, flight or in a shutdown. So, by breathing you can start to return yourself to a more regulated state of safety and connection.

Then notice the thought, when you do this you want to create some distance between you the thinker and the thought. You can do this with the phrase, I am having the thought that nothing is working. Remind yourself that this is a thought and like so many of the negative thoughts we think, it is pretty automatic. But this automaticity does not mean that this thought is the truth of the universe. It just means it's one you have had before, your brain has practiced it before so it feels true. It's still just a sentence in your brain, real, not necessarily true.

Next, decide how you want to relate to this thought. Here's what I mean by this. We can let our thoughts come and go or we can spend a lot of time with them. We can be like, tell me more thought, what else do you have to say? Nothing is working, you're right, let's think of all of the evidence of all of the reasons that's true. So, it's like do you want to let the thought go or do you want to hang out with that it? This is what I mean by relating to the thought.

We're not going to stop this thought from coming up, it's going to happen. We can choose though how we decide to relate to it. For me, when it comes up I just like to remind myself, of course I'm having this thought right now. I always have this thought when this happens, of course I am, it's okay. And redirect myself that way. So that way I'm not resisting the thought, it's here, come on in, I see you but I'm not hanging out with you today. I have got other things to do.

Ep #32: When You Think Nothing is Working

Then be mindful. This thought will keep popping up and each time it does you repeat this process of examining and redirecting your brain in the direction you want it to go, so you can choose how you want to think, feel and respond when this happens. And then finally, when you are feeling a little bit better, a little less triggered, take a look around and notice what is working. When you start to look for what is working, you will find it. This is you using your brain's confirmation bias in your favor. Put your brain to work by asking it the question, what is working, what is going well?

The more you do this the more you build the muscle of deciding on purpose how you want to think and relate to your automatic negative thoughts. Alright, that's all I have for this week. 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.