

## Ep #36: Why We People Please



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With Your Host

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You are listening to episode 36 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, Why We People Please.

People pleasing is like fight club. We don't talk about it and that's because when we do we talk about it as if it's some sort of virtuous or morally superior trait that some people have. But that's not what it is at all. People pleasing is a lie. When we are doing it we are lying to others and to ourselves. We are trying to manipulate how people view us by acting in ways that are not in alignment with how we really want to show up.

And with the holidays fast approaching the people pleasing season is upon us which makes now the perfect time to talk about how people pleasing shows up in special needs parenting and what you can begin to do right now to break this exhausting habit. In part one of this three part series I will talk about what people pleasing is and how it shows up in special needs parenting. In part two I will tell you how to stop people pleasing. And in part three I will talk about what to do when you stop people pleasing and people aren't pleased. 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 everyone and welcome to the podcast. This episode will air on my birthday and I will be in an IEP meeting again on my birthday two years in a row. And fingers crossed that this meeting goes more smoothly than some of the rest of them have. So anyhow you know how it is with IEP meetings, they're not a party no matter how wonderful your team is. And as I was thinking about this upcoming IEP meeting and IEP meetings of the past I realized something.

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Now, for years and I mean years I approached the IEP table with an agenda that did not just include advocating for my son. Now, of course that was the primary goal, but my secondary goal, and this one was hidden to me for quite some time and really until I found coaching and started to do more of this internal work. The secondary goal was for other people at that table to like me. I wanted them to like me. I wanted them to think I was doing a good job. And I say this now and I kind of feel embarrassed by that, but also really compassionate and understanding to myself.

I mean of course I wanted people to think I was doing a good job. Now, that in and of itself is not a problem and it is quite natural. We are a social species. We are wired to be aware and to some extent really care about what other people think of us, and who more than a mom advocating for her child in a sea of no's and unknowns would benefit more from a high five and a pat on the back. But I also know that this natural inclination we all have to be accepted and approved of can have a darker side.

And that darker side is when it shows up as a never ending need to people please other people to the point where you are doing all kinds of things because you think you just have to. And you don't even know what you want because what you want has never really been a consideration beyond if everyone else is happy with me then I can relax and be okay until the next time someone needs something. Exhausting.

Now, of course there are things that we do every day that may be pleasing to others but that does not make them people pleasing as I'm going to define it in just a moment. I make my son, breakfast. I attend doctors meetings and IEP meetings on my birthday. I clean the house. I feed my friend's cat when she is away. I call my mom a few times a week to check in and see how she's doing. While all of these actions may please other people in my life my motivation for doing them is love, care, friendship and kindness,

They feel good to me. They feel expansive. Even if I don't love cleaning the house, which I actually do, or feeding the cat, I am not doing it out of a

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feeling of dread or obligation that if I don't do this then other people will think poorly of me. That is the difference between the things we do because we want to do them and the things we do to people please. People pleasing often does not feel good and it feels like dread and obligation. So let's define it.

What I am talking about people pleasing I am talking about the actions you take, or do not take in order to be perceived in a favorable light by other people, in order to control what other people think of you. People pleasing takes many forms, saying yes when you want to say no and vice versa. Not telling people the truth because you are afraid it will hurt their feelings. Doing things for other people so they will think that you are good or nice, focusing on how other people see you, and doing things so they will think that you are competent, or kind, or nice, or just a good mom.

Not setting or holding boundaries because you are afraid that you won't be able to stick to them or because other people will be unhappy by them. People pleasing is you doing things or not in hopes that other people will be pleased by you often at the expense of pleasing yourself. And it is a lie, people pleasing is lying, lying to others and to yourself. Lying to others so you can avoid the discomfort you are afraid you might feel if they don't approve of you, or if you believe that they will not approve of you.

So you trade in the discomfort of displeasing others for the discomfort of letting yourself down. Let me give you some examples of how I see this showing up in special needs parenting. Maybe you don't set or enforce boundaries with your child because you don't want your child to see you as the bad guy. You want to be the good parent. Maybe you overcorrect your child for a behavior in the playground because you do not want the other parents to think you are letting your child get away with a bad behavior.

Maybe you don't ask your partner to do bath time, or fill out paperwork, or make dinner because you want him or her to believe that you have it all under control and you don't need any help. Maybe you don't ask family members or friends for help or for breaks because you don't want them to

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believe that you can't handle your child. Maybe you say yes to invitations from friends when you really want to say no because you believe whatever the invitation is for, say a birthday party.

Maybe you think that this will be too intense for your child but rather than offending them, you go to the party. Maybe you agree to bake the cookies, or decorate the classroom, or volunteer at that dance because you want the neurotypical kids' parents to know that you are just as involved as they are. Maybe you do not tell your family members how they can accommodate your special needs child in their homes because you don't want to offend them or you don't want them to judge you or your child.

Maybe you don't tell your sister-in-law to stop sending you emails about Autism cures because you don't want her to think that you are ungrateful or a bitch. Maybe you tell your child's doctor that you will pursue a therapy she has suggested just because you want her to believe you are doing everything you can even though you don't agree at all that this therapy is appropriate for your child.

And finally, maybe you decide to discontinue a social skills therapy because you don't think the program is meeting your child's needs but you decide to tell the administrator it is because your schedule is too full. Because you don't want to have a difficult conversation with her about the program. These are all forms of people pleasing and really people deceiving. And here's the thing, it doesn't work because the truth is we can't please other people because we don't cause their feelings. Other people's thoughts cause their feelings.

So when we engage in people pleasing we are really just trying to influence how other people think about us and how they feel about us. And on top of that, people pleasing really isn't about the other person at all, it is about us. It is about the discomfort we want to avoid when we fear that we are not doing what other people expect of us. So let's talk about this. Why do we do this, why do we people please?

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First, like I said at the beginning of the show, as human beings we have a desire to fit in and be accepted, this is driven by our evolutionary biology. We are wired to care about what other people think about us as a matter of survival. But in addition to our biology there's also our strong, strong socialization as women. As women we are socialized to put other people's needs above our own. We are socialized to believe that this is what makes us good people worthy of love and acceptance.

How much we do, how much we show up for others, how much we sacrifice for other people, these beliefs are taught to us and modeled to us by caregivers, educators, and society at large. For some of us, people pleasing as much as we resent it, it feels a lot safer than not people pleasing and this is for good reason. Historically, people pleasing might have been a matter of survival. I mean at its core, people pleasing is a survival technique. If other people are happy with me then I will be okay.

So the idea of not going with the program, of rocking the boat, that is scary. It means risking the safety of being the good girl, being liked by everyone and never ever disappointing anyone but yourself. And this makes sense, we are rewarded for people pleasing because it enables us to fit in with the archetype that has been carved out for us, of the good mom while avoiding the discomfort that comes with owning what we really want. Because, well, other people might not like it.

We people please because it is the road we have been travelling most of our lives. It is what we think we are supposed to do, what we have been socialized to value of the mom who does it all, the supermom over the mom who values her own needs and sets boundaries. I mean that woman is selfish which is basically the worst thing you could call a mother, selfish. So we do it all even though we don't want to and then we wonder why we are feeling resentful or burnt out.

Here's the good news, people pleasing is a choice. We can choose our discomfort. We can choose the discomfort of standing for ourselves over the discomfort we feel when we do things just because we think we should

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or have to. But first we need to notice it. We need to get really honest with ourselves because people pleasing is so insidious. It's so wrapped up in everything that we do and a lot of what we think of ourselves that we don't even notice it so much of the time.

So the first thing always is we need to notice all of the areas in our lives big and small where we are doing or not doing things for really no other reason than we fear that another person will be upset or perceive us in a way that we don't want. And I'm not even talking about people you know. A lot of times we people please for people we don't know, for people we imagine in our minds. And sometimes we people please for the person right next to us. The point here is to really get familiar with the areas in your life where this shows up.

You can do this by asking yourself the following questions. When are you saying yes when you want to say no? When are you staying quiet to keep the peace? When are you doing things to control or influence how others perceive you? If you are unsure whether you are taking actions because of people pleasing ask yourself, am I doing this out of love? Is this in alignment with my values? Or am I doing this because I think I should do it? And usually whenever a should pops up it is very tightly linked to people pleasing and what other people think, or what we believe other people think or expect of us.

Once you gather up your list ask yourself, what am I afraid will happen if I don't do whatever it is I'm doing to people please? And then finally ask yourself, can I handle this? And that question is really ultimately, can I handle the discomfort I will feel by not doing the thing that I think other people expect of me? Can I handle it if a stranger thinks I'm a bad mom? Can I handle it if my mother-in-law is disappointed or even angry that I didn't invite her to dinner?

Can I handle it if my sister-in-law takes offence when I tell her to stop sending me articles about Autism? And I think what you'll find the answer to these questions is probably yes. Yeah, of course you can, you've handled a

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lot. You handle a lot of discomfort on a daily basis. And so it's the question of whether or not you're willing to make room for this kind of discomfort in order to show up in your life in a way that feels good to you.

Alright, that's it for this week. Give some thought to these questions and next week I will tell you what you can do to stop people pleasing Thanks and I'll 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.