

Ep #41: Holiday Survival Strategy



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With Your Host

Lisa Candra

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You are listening to episode 41 of *The Autism Mom Coach* podcast, Holiday Survival Strategy. The holiday season of joy and gratitude is here and along with it, increased stress and mental breakdowns. That is why I am going to devote this episode to teaching you a powerful strategy that includes my favorite family hack to help you prepare for family time, skip the drama and actually enjoy your holidays. 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 hope your December is going well. Thank you for all of you who have taken the time to rate and review the podcast. I so appreciate it and I hope you love your gifts. And for those of you who have not, please do. I have gifts for about 10 more listeners who rate and review the podcast in December. So if you have not already, now is the perfect time, rate and review, email me a snapshot of your review along with your address at lisa@theautismmomcoach.com.

Alright, onto today's episode. It is mid-December and the holidays are upon us and with that comes a lot of extra stress between family plans and obligations, changes to schedules and of course the winter break. So instead of bracing yourself for the next few weeks I want to share with you a strategy you can use to bring more ease to the holiday season.

First, prepare. Now, I know as parents, with children with Autism, you are all about preparation, schedules, social stories and previews, just to name a couple of things. This is all great especially in times of change. But when I'm talking about preparation in this episode I am talking about you and how

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you can prepare yourself for some of the stress and frustration you may feel or already be feeling this holiday season.

This preparation starts with accepting that you may feel a little bit emotional and you may experience a lot of triggers that bring up intense emotions for you like grandma baking cookies with the cousins except for your child because they have a hard time being safe in the kitchen. Or seeing other kids doing 'normal things' like playing with one another, taking family photos or sitting on Santa's lap. Maybe seeing your child retreat to an empty room to play by herself while all the cousins play together.

Or hearing your mother-in-law compare your eight year old with Autism to your sister-in-law's neurotypical five year old. If you brace yourself hoping none of these things will happen, you will be exhausted by the time the day comes and have less capacity to manage your mind and your emotions when they do. So you will either be imploding or exploding, or maybe even both.

The alternative, if you just expect that you may have some thoughts and some feelings about other people's behavior and you remember that this is not fatal, you will be much better positioned to ride the wave when these thoughts and feelings do arise, and when people do their people things. And when you expect that it might be challenging, you can mentally and emotionally prepare yourself by deciding ahead of time how you want to think and feel when the stressful thing happens.

Tip number two, expect other people to do other people things. Okay, what this means is that people in the context of the coaching model that I teach, that's episode five or six, what they do and what they don't do are all circumstances. That means they are neutral. They don't make you feel any way until you have a thought about it. In addition, circumstances in the moment are things that we cannot change.

Now, I'm not saying that other people can't and don't change but in this context expect other people to be who they are and to do the things that they do without resisting it. Now, caveat here, I am not talking about things

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that go over your boundaries. Boundaries are the standards or expectations that you have and if another person crosses them, you will take an action like if you yell at me, I will ask you to stop, or I will walk away. Or if you mock my child for flapping I will ask you to leave my house. Or if you smoke in front of me I will leave your presence.

I am never telling you to just hang out while someone crosses a boundary that you have set. What I am saying is there are a lot of things people do that are just them being who they are. Like your sister-in-law who emails you every article she can find about what causes Autism. Your child, who would rather play in his cousin's bedroom by himself rather than downstairs with the cousins. Your mother who asks you, "Why do you need to bring special food for your child", when she has cooked an elaborate meal?

Your father who asks you why you let your child get away with tantruming when he does not get his way. Or your friend who wonders why you have your child in so many therapies. When you stop resisting people doing their people things, even if you do not agree with them, even if you think that they are ignorant and tone deaf, you get to decide how you want to think, and feel, and respond.

And my favorite hack for this one is of course they did, of course my grandfather asked me why am I paying for private school when I already pay taxes to support the local school system. Of course my grandmother was offended that my child first sniffed and then rejected her signature dish. Of course my friend who has ignored all of the red flags of Autism and her child thinks it is odd that I have my child in OT, PT and speech. Of course my mother is concerned when she sees my son smack me when he is dysregulated.

Of course my child is more interested in her sister's toys than her own. Of course my child prefers the box the toy came in over the toy itself, of course they did. This is what they do. Other people are allowed to have their thoughts, feelings and actions just like you, it is okay. You do not have to brace yourself for it and this of course they did, it is just a nice way of

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bringing levity to what is happening, which is people are being people just like you and it is okay.

Finally, if you are feeling so moved by the spirit of the holidays and you have the capacity to offer generosity to others then assume the best intent. Assume the people you love, love you too. Assume that they want the best for you. Assume that they are not trying to hurt you or your child. Their behaviors are not personal. What they say and what they do is about them, not you, not your child, not your parenting.

So for example, let's say your mom gets offended when you bring chicken nuggets for your child's dinner. When you are assuming the best intent on her part you might think well, it makes her happy to see other people eating her food and she is making the chicken nuggets mean something about her, or her cooking, or her ability to feel the love and joy of knowing that she has provided for the family.

Now, am not telling you to twist yourself into and knot to get into other people's heads but in the spirit of the holiday maybe you can open yourself up to the fact that other people's actions aren't about you. They are about them and whatever they are thinking and feeling. So if some of their questions or comments come out sideways, instead of making them personal, consider that like you, they're doing the best that they can with what they have access to at the moment. Alright, good luck with this and I will talk to you next week. Thanks so much for listening.

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.