

## Ep #42: Holiday Stressors



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With Your Host

Lisa Candra

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You are listening to episode 42 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, Holiday Stressors. The holiday season is in full effect and people are feeling it. In this week's episode I am going to talk about some of the holiday themed stressors I'm seeing in my clients and share some of the coaching that I've offered them. Keep listening to hear how you can apply these examples to your own life in order to bring more ease to your holiday season.

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.

Welcome to the podcast. A couple of more days until Christmas for those of us who celebrate it and new year's is just around the corner. So people are feeling some stress and I'm going to talk about that in just a moment. But first I want to thank all of you who have taken the time to rate and review the podcast. And I wanted to read a couple of the reviews that I have received because I so appreciate them.

The first review is from AhmanBonillo and she writes, "This podcast is so informative and is truly relatable. I can't begin to express how wonderful and amazing the advice that Lisa has put out there. I finally get support on all aspects of Autism, this includes our thoughts and our emotions as parents. I hear this podcast every week and I feel that it has truly helped me with my toughest times with my 15 year old son. This is a great support for all families who have a child with Autism regardless of age. I am grateful that I found this podcast, thank you, Lisa, for the wonderful advice and support."

Well, you are so welcome and like you I also have a 15 year old, so I feel you there on the tough times because Autism and puberty, it is something. I

## Ep #42: Holiday Stressors

also want to share a review that I received from Becky Oliver who writes, “I recently found this podcast and I am really enjoying it. It’s comforting to have someone to help me focus on myself and how to take care of me. I love that the episodes are not too long, they’re the perfect length for a busy mom.” Oh my gosh, I so agree.

When I look at podcast times I’m always very intimidated. If I see anything over 30 minutes unless of course it’s a true crime podcast and the longer the better. So thank you to Becky, and Ahman and I really hope that you enjoy the gifts that I sent you from Duross & Langel in Philadelphia. And like I said before, it is my favorite place, and it has been for at least 10 years where I find gifts every year for my son’s support staff, whether it’s Christmas, or teacher appreciation week, or end of the school year.

They always have fabulous soaps that are reasonably priced. And that they are just so unique. And they don’t just look cute, they smell delicious and they are really quite luxurious. So if you have not already you still have time to review the podcast. I am giving out gifts for every listener who reviews the podcast in December. So once you review it, just send me a snapshot of your review to [lisa@theautismmomcoach.com](mailto:lisa@theautismmomcoach.com) and I will send you your gift.

Okay, onto today’s topic. Let’s talk about holiday stressors. I am going to give you some examples from my coaching sessions. Now, first I am going to present you with the issue that my client came to me with and I’m going to offer you just a portion of the coaching that I provided so that you can get an idea of how this works. I want to give you a glimpse into the coaching relationship but just know this is a glimpse. For the examples I share here I have established relationships with each of these clients and we have been coaching for a couple of months.

So the coaching that I provided here is not just a one and done thing. There are lots of issues I have coached my clients on within the context of these examples. But for the purposes of this episode I’m just going to share a portion. That said, in future episodes I do hope to bring on a few brave

## Ep #42: Holiday Stressors

clients to be coached to give you a real time example of what it looks like. So for any of my clients listening, hit me up on the DMs because I will be reaching out to you to see if you are ready to do this. And of course it can be anonymous, so there's that too.

Alright, now, these examples may not fit you perfectly but listen carefully to see how and where you may be able to apply the principles from the examples to the challenges in your life.

Alright, example number one. My client's sister is hosting a Christmas Eve open house. So this party won't just be family, it will also be neighbors, and friends, and coworkers. So a lot of people, a lot of kids of varying ages. My client and her husband have discussed this and they agree that this event is not ideal for their seven year old with Autism. First, it doesn't start until 6.00pm so he will be getting tired. And it's going to be a pretty chaotic event.

And if he goes then one of his parents is going to need to tail him the whole time, which will likely for them involve hanging out in a cousin's bedroom alone while he plays with their toys. So my client and her husband decide that they will go to the party but they will leave after an hour or sooner depending on how their child is doing. So when my client came to me for coaching she was pretty upset and saying things like, "Autism makes everything so much harder. And I can't do normal things like other people. And because we need to leave early I'm missing out on my family time."

Here is the coaching that I offered. First, I pointed out to her that she was making a decision about how long to stay at the party based on her expertise on her son and his capacity. But she was not having her own back about her own decision. Rather, she was thinking thoughts that essentially made her the victim of the decision, and by extension, her child and his diagnosis. The reality here was that she had the control. She was making the decision to stay an hour and she was also deciding to think that this decision means that she is missing out.

## Ep #42: Holiday Stressors

Of all thoughts in the world she could have thought about this circumstance she was choosing the one that made her feel terrible. So just notice, the decision to stay at a party for one hour is not what was making her sad. It was the thought that she was missing out. Now, does this mean just change your thoughts, and be happy, and move on? Well, sure, if that worked that would be great, but it usually doesn't. So what I offered was first just notice what this thought is creating for you. You can sit with the emotion of sadness and process it.

You can be sad that you're going to not stay for the entire party and that you will not see your family for all of the time that you would like, okay, be sad about that. Processing an emotion, feeling it and letting it pass through you is very different than getting stuck in the emotion. Getting stuck in it looks like making a decision then spinning about how terrible it is, how terrible your life is and how terrible you feel and it just keeps you stuck. When you process the emotion it will feel heavy at first but when you sit with it, when you support yourself through it you can get to the other side.

And then you can decide what now, how do I want to think about this decision that I have made about this party based on my knowledge of my son and my expectations of this party? Here is what my client came up with. She said, "This is a great solution. It's not all or nothing and I can be flexible too." Now, this client is working a lot on her own rigidity so she really liked the thought, I can be flexible too. She said that she felt more empowered when she thought that she was being flexible too.

And as she sat with this more, the wheels in her brain started offering her more possibilities and more solutions which makes total sense. She was feeling calmer, she was feeling more regulated so she had access to her highest level of thinking and creativity because she was no longer stuck in the emotion and caught in her fear brain and what I like to call the land of no solutions. So here is what she came up with.

First she decided that she could reach out to her sister to see if one of the neighbor kids who was also a babysitter would be willing to hang out with

## Ep #42: Holiday Stressors

her son if he gravitated towards a bedroom. This way her son could be looked after, the neighborhood kid could make a few extra bucks and she and her husband could get at least 30 to 60 minutes of adult time. She also came up with the idea of driving separately. Her husband wasn't exactly thrilled to spend Christmas Eve at a big party with tons of random people there.

So if it wasn't going well, if her child was getting tired, her husband could always leave early and if she wanted to, she could stay longer if she liked. So, again the circumstance here is still the same. There's still the party, there is still the possibility of leaving early. But once my client was able to process the sadness she was feeling caused by her thoughts that she was missing out she was really able to come up with some more empowering solutions that felt better to her, that felt more empowering to her.

And she was able to show up for herself by not engaging in all of the negative self-talk, which for so many of us is such a big part of this. It's like the party's only going to be a couple of hours but the dread, and the spinning, and the negative self-talk, well. We can make days and days out of that.

Alright, situation two. My client comes from a big family and holiday celebrations are a big deal, but she doesn't think it's the same anymore and this makes her feel sad. We dug into this a little bit deeper and she shared that her child with Autism doesn't like to do the traditional holiday things like sitting on Santa's lap, that was the one that really upset her because she wants the picture of the kids on Santa's lap and she wants to share that with the family members just like everyone else does. So she was bummed that her daughter was a no for that one.

So we talked about two things. First, the client has an idea of how holidays are supposed to go, what children are supposed to do and what they are supposed to enjoy. And so just noticing that right there, this is her manual on how it's supposed to be and it isn't. And she is feeling some sadness about this which of course, it's totally okay to have an expectation of how

## Ep #42: Holiday Stressors

you would like something to be and feel sad that it's not working out that way. So she sat with that feeling of sadness for a bit and processed some of the heaviness that she was feeling in her chest.

And then I asked her, "What is the problem?" And what my client told me is that it really was her problem because it wasn't a problem for her daughter at all. Her daughter did not want to sit on Santa's lap, so she wasn't missing out. And then my client kind of laughed about it and there was a shift. The heaviness she was feeling of her daughter missing out and all the spin this was creating in her mind because of course it wasn't just about Santa's lap. It was about everything that she could think of that her daughter has or would miss out on.

And this was really heavy to her. So then the thought of her daughter just not missing out at all because she did not want to sit on Santa's lap was kind of hilarious to my client, because my client, and we have talked about this before, really does admire how her daughter just 10 years old really knows what her boundaries are and enforces them. So she doesn't do things just because she's supposed to or because everybody else does. And really that can be pretty refreshing at times.

Again, I am not telling you or any of my clients never to be sad, no, of course be sad, that's totally normal. I'm always saying though, check in, are the thoughts creating the sadness ones that are serving you? Are they even true? And are they ones that you want to keep? Because at the end of the day you get to choose how you think about any of the circumstances in your life. This is where your power lies. It is okay to feel sad, that will totally happen. Parents will feel sad about their kids but you do get to choose whether you stay stuck in the sadness or whether you process the emotion and move forward.

Situation number three, other people's social media post. This one always gets a bit heightened during the holidays. All of the perfect families out there living their best lives while you are white knuckling it through yours. Okay, so one of my clients told me that she could not stand social media

## Ep #42: Holiday Stressors

posts this time of year and all the family cards of the perfect families. And she told me, “We don't have holiday pictures unless we count the one of the tree before my son's knocked it over.”

So let me walk you through this. I asked my client to pull out a specific example of a post or a card so that I could understand the circumstance. And so she picked the Facebook post from her sister-in-law of her three kids wearing matching outfits and all looking at the camera and smiling. This is a circumstance, it does not make you feel anything until you have a thought about it. And her thoughts were this, I don't have Christmas cards, I'm a bad mom. I can't get my kids to sit still. My sister-in-law thinks she is so perfect. She has no idea how hard our life is and we are always being compared to her.

No surprise here that my client was feeling angry, any of these thoughts would make someone feel angry. So I pointed out to her how much control she was giving these pictures, these are just pictures of kids looking at a camera wearing outfits. These are pixels on a screen, that's all they are. But she was giving them so much power by making these pixels mean that she is a bad parent, or her life is awful, or that other people don't understand her. Why? Why was she beating herself up over these pixels?

So what she shared was that these pictures just reminded her of how different her life is from other people and this makes her sad. So, okay, sadness. We sat with that for a minute. Again always process that emotion because when you don't, when it stays stuck inside of you, it doesn't feel good and the more we resist it, the more it persists. Because for my client, when she was feeling sad, instead of processing the emotion she was trying to avoid it by hating on her sister-in-law and judging herself which makes total sense.

Feeling angry feels so much better than feeling sad. Anger in its own way can feel empowering while sadness does not. But here is the thing, there is power in working through your emotions. It actually puts you in the driver seat of your actions because you're not being run by your emotions. So

## Ep #42: Holiday Stressors

when you find yourself in a spin cycle of anger or resentment take a look under the hood. Is there some grief or sadness you might be avoiding? If there is, how can you support yourself in processing these emotions?

This is where your power lies. Other people's pixels have no power over you unless you make them mean something about you. You can see the pixels, you can feel sad and you can remind yourself of course I feel a little sad when I feel like my life is hard and other people don't understand. And then you can choose to redirect your brain from its greatest hits to thoughts that you want to think on purpose, to thoughts that support you, not the thoughts that make you feel like crap. They get to post whatever they like and you get to decide whether you weaponize their pixels against yourself.

Alright, that is it for today. I hope you found this helpful 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](http://theautismmomcoach.com). See you next week.