

## Ep #43: When Things Suck



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With Your Host

Lisa Candra

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You are listening to episode 43 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, When Things Suck.

Sometimes things just suck. Maybe you are planning a winter vacation this break and then everyone in your house gets sick. Or maybe your child's favorite teacher just resigned. Or maybe your child was asked to leave their school. Or maybe your child's new medicine helps with her impulsivity but now she never sleeps and neither do you.

We all hit these points at some time or another and between the six strains of flu that are going around, scheduled changes and lack of structure during winter break, you might be in one of these moments right now. So if this is you now or in the future I have seven tips to help you weather the storm. 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 you had a nice holiday. I can't believe it. This will be the last episode of 2022. We are just days away from 2023 and if you are counting the days or the minutes until your child returns to school then you are not alone. Given how many of my moms are bracing themselves for the winter break I thought it would be helpful to do a podcast episode on the times when things just suck. Here are my seven tips.

One, breathe. I think I shared this before but a few years ago when my son was really struggling and his therapist told him he needed to take deep breaths, my son was so annoyed and frankly so was I. Both of our reaction was something like, "Is that all you have?" The answer is no because

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breathing is the best and most effective thing you can do to regulate your nervous system when it is activated. Not just breathing though, breathing on purpose. Breathing in a way where you need to stop and bring attention to the breath coming in and to the breath going out.

There are several different techniques you can use but the main thing here is to take a deep breath in through your nose and to blow it out through your mouth. Think of smelling the flowers and blowing out birthday candles. I like the box breathing technique that I shared in an earlier episode of the podcast. I'll also link it to the episode notes here. This is the breathing technique that is used by the Navy Seals and I just think that sounds badass so I like it.

Plus it's really easy to do because wherever I am I can always see a box somewhere, whether it's the shape of a window, or a picture on the wall or just even visualizing the box. And visualizing breathing in up the side of the box and down and out, out the other side of the box. If box breathing isn't your thing there's also a method called the 4-7-8 where you breathe in for four seconds, hold it for seven seconds and then blow out for eight. It really doesn't matter which technique you use. The point is, is that you're paying purposeful attention to a slow breath in and a long breath out.

You don't need to get stuck on the technique, it really is beside the point. Again, bringing purposeful attention to the way that you are breathing. And another benefit of this in addition to calming your nervous system is that it forces us to pause whatever other action we want to take. So instead of immediately reacting to a trigger, we pause, we breathe, we reset and then we can respond,

Tip number two, sip water. Stress and dehydration go hand in hand and they are a vicious cycle. Stress can cause dehydration and dehydration can cause stress. Why is this? Well, our brains are about 85% water. So when the brain does not get enough water it gets just a bit grumpy and you feel it in the form of a headache. The more and more water your brain loses, the less energy you will have and the more tired you will become. In addition, the lack of water in the brain also changes how you respond to stress.

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Even a little bit of dehydration can cause cortisol levels in the body to increase and lead to stress. And what's more, when we are stressed, what do we usually grab for? Well, for me, it's certainly coffee and like many other moms we run on coffee. We grab the big cup of coffee. We have a lot to do, our children aren't sleeping and we have to keep on going. And then when we can't go any more and we are desperate to unwind at the end of the night, what comes out? For some of us maybe it's the wine, or a cocktail, or salty snacks all of which are very dehydrating.

So we're not getting enough water, stress is causing more dehydration. And on top of that we are consuming dehydrating beverages and snacks. Luckily this one has a pretty simple fix, drink more water. You don't have to down your body weight in ounces in one sitting. Sipping water throughout the day is a great way of staying on top of your hydration especially during stressful times. The easiest way to do this is to keep a water bottle with you at all times and maybe even in multiple rooms so it is always present.

You can set an alarm. You can add fresh fruits or veggies to flavor it. I'm a fan of limes and cucumbers but not really at this time of the year. I prefer my water to be a bit warmer. You can even get one of those huge water bottles that is divided by the time of the day so you can actually track your hydration throughout the day. Whatever method you choose the important thing here is to stay hydrated. So keep on sipping your water throughout the day.

Number three, move your body. Moving your body is a great way of releasing stress from your body. So walk around the block, stretch, do some jumping jacks, or pushups, or quite literally, shake your arms and hands and tell yourself I am shaking this off. When you are doing this you are literally shaking the stress out of your body. And this will help you release some of that stress and reset yourself just a bit.

Tip number four, coregulate with other people or pets. When we are in periods of high stress, when we are in it, it is really easy to believe the story that no one gets it, and no one understands, and that we are all alone. I totally get that, I have been there. So if it is available, reach out to another

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person for some coregulation and connection. This might be a partner. It might be friend. It might be a coworker.

If you can do this coregulation and connection in person, that's the best because it's literally two nervous systems responding to one another in real time, offering that connection and coregulation. And if you can't, the phone is great too because you can hear someone's voice and the connection that you get from how they respond to you, and the sound of them comforting you. And if worst comes to worse, grab your phone because you already have it in your hand already. So maybe it's a text. Maybe it's an email but do whatever you can to just create connection and coregulate with another person.

And if people aren't available or aren't your preference, coregulate with an animal. Animals are great for just sitting beside them, petting them and letting yourself sink into that feeling of comfort, relaxation and complete acceptance. This is something I love to do with my two cats because we are here all day together and sometimes I'll just find them resting in a sunny spot and I'll sit beside them. And it's totally relaxing. And I have noticed too that when my son comes home from school the first thing he does is he runs upstairs to the usual spot where the cat is by that point hiding from him.

And he sits with them and just pets them, and he talks to them and I've noticed it. Initially I wanted to tell him, "Stop going upstairs into my bedroom because I just generally do not prefer him to be there. But when I realized that he was going upstairs to coregulate with the cat, well, I couldn't say no to that.

Alright, tip number five, get outside. Being outside in nature is another way of regulating ourselves and releasing stress from our bodies. When you are outside make it an intentional sensory experience for yourself. What can you see? What can you smell? What can you hear? Take it all in one sensory experience at a time while you breathe deep breaths in and out.

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Number six, take breaks. Whenever you can, walk away. Now, I know that this is not always an available option but when it is do it, even if it is an extended stay in the bathroom, or a long shower, or tagging in a partner, or a friend, or even a sitter. Little breaks are an opportunity for brief recess so that you can sip the water, move your body and pet the dog, whatever it is that you can do to reset yourself and downregulate your own stress response,

Number seven, stay present with right now and you won't always be statements. Alright, let me explain this one. First, it is natural whenever we are in a stressful situation to start to catastrophize. Our thoughts go to a lot of always and never. It is never easy. It will always be like this. I never get a break. And once we are on the always never train, it gets worse and worse. Our thoughts continue to spin, our stress response escalates and we are just getting more and more amped up.

So what I like to do in these moments to reduce stress is staying in the present moment. Even though the present moment is stressful, it's just the present moment. It's not the rest of your life. So this is how I do that. Whenever I'm in one of these situations I say to myself, "Right now it is like this. Right now we are struggling. Right now we are in it, right now." By doing this I'm reminding myself that this is just happening in the present moment. This is right now, not always, not never.

And recently I have added the phrase that really stuck out to me when my son and I were watching the new OB1 Series on Disney. Okay, so we are huge Star Wars fans. And we just loved watching the series. And so in it, it is after the prequels where Anakin Skywalker becomes Darth Vader and before the New Hope. And so in this, Princess Leia is a 10 year old little girl. And OB1 is rescuing her. So at some point in the series he gives her a holster from one of the fallen heroes that they were fighting alongside.

And she looks at the holster and she says, "It's empty." And he responds to her, "Well, I wasn't going to give you a blaster, Leia, you are 10 years old." And then he says, "But you won't always be." And I don't know, for some reason that line really stuck with me and my son. And we started to use it

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as part of our own mantras, for when things are a little bit tough. It's tough right now but it won't always be. And he's starting to say things like, "I'm 15 right now but I won't always be."

And that's a statement that we have been using in support of acquiring life skills and moving forward into sort of upleveling skills and things like that. And so instead of a threat like, you're going to be 18 years old one day. You need to learn how to do stuff. It's like, no, I'm 15 right now but I won't always be. It just feels different and plus it came from OB1 Kenobi, so whatever works for you.

Okay, that is it for today. I will talk to you next year. And just one more thing, if you have not already, please take the time to rate and review the podcast. It really does mean so much to see the reviews really because I want to know what you are thinking about this podcast and what else you're needing. What else do you want to see me talk about, please, please feel free to share that with me either by emailing me or in the reviews. And the more reviews my podcast has, the easier it is for moms like you to find it. Alright, that is it for 2022. I will talk to you next year.

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.