Ep #52: External Validation

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With Your Host

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You are listening to episode 52 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, External Validation. External validation is like motivation. It is nice to have because it feels good but it is not reliable. Relying on external validation, i.e. what others think and feel about us to determine our own self-worth is like waiting around on motivation to get out of bed, eat broccoli or attend the IEP meeting. You might be waiting around for a long time.

Moreover, when you are relying on external validation you are outsourcing all of your power to other people. They get to decide whether or not you can think well of yourself. When you are doing this you create a vicious cycle of always trying to prove yourself and manipulating other people in your life to provide you with the feedback you seek so that you can feel good, rinse and repeat. If this is you, you are not alone and the good news is you can re-pattern this behavior. Stay tuned to learn how.

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 Candera. 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 that you are doing well. This week's lesson is all about external validation which is an ever present issue in my coaching program. It comes up in statements like this, "My partner does not appreciate all that I do for our child." "My boss never says, 'Good job.'" Or, "My mom does not realize how hard it is to raise a child with special needs." These statements are all attempts to source validation from someone else other than themselves.

So let's just start by defining what I mean by external validation. External validation as a noun is the approval of others. And let's face it, it's awesome. It feels good. It's a dopamine hit and it's a nice to have because if we are relying on it we are setting ourselves up for a lot of

disappointment, disconnection and disharmony in our relationships when we are relying on other people so that we can feel a certain way.

External validation as a verb is the act of looking outside of yourself to determine how to think and feel about yourself. Put another way it is the act of outsourcing control over how you think and feel about yourself to other people. When I think of external validation I imagine that we are deputizing people in our life with control over how we think and feel about ourselves and they don't even know it.

So imagine you are at the altar and you look at your partner and think, I hereby deputize you with the power to determine whether I am a good wife and mother. My interpretation of how you think and feel about me will forever be my measuring stick of who I am.

Or the delivery room, you see your baby for the first time and say, “You little one are now in charge of whether I feel like I am good enough. If you are doing well, whatever that means to me in the given moment then I get to think I am a good mom.” Or a colleague, “Nice to meet you. You are now in charge over whether or not I feel successful or smart.” Of course I'm trying to be silly on purpose in these examples but this is kind of what it's like.

We have picked a select number of people in our lives and we have decided that if they do and say certain things to us then we get to feel good about ourselves. So why do we do this? Well, first it is human nature. We are a social species and being liked and approved of by others means safety. Second, as women and mothers we get an extra layer of socialization about our worth being tied to what others think of us, especially our parents, our husbands, our partners, our children.

And third, we seek external validation because we all want to feel loved. We want to feel accepted. We want to feel appreciated because it feels great. And we think that in order to feel these emotions we need to seek this validation outside of ourselves. So when we do this we put these other

people who we have deputized in charge of how we feel about ourselves when ultimately our feelings are created by our thoughts, not theirs, ours.

Once we're able to see what we are doing when we're saying things like, "I don't feel appreciated by my husband." Or, "My boss never compliments my work." Or, "My mom just doesn't get how hard this is." In all of those instances we are looking outside of ourselves to hear something, to get some sort of validation from other people that we're doing a good job, that we're working really hard and that we are overcoming really difficult challenges.

So here is the exercise that I do with my clients once we see what's happening, is that we take all of the things that we wish the other person would say. We write all of those thoughts down and then we say them to ourselves out loud. For example I had a client who was struggling with the fact that she made all of the decisions about her son's care and that her husband was never telling her how great of a job she was doing. She believed that he needed to say, "You are doing such a great job", in order for her to feel validated in all of the actions that she was taking.

So instead of looking to her husband and waiting for her husband and being secretly and not so secretly mad at her husband when he wasn't chiming in to say, "You're doing such a great job." She started saying this to herself after every appointment, after every time she filled out another application, after every time she sat in line at the pharmacy to pick up another prescription. Whatever it was she would tell herself, "You are doing a great job."

The other thing I have my clients do is to look for evidence for the thoughts that they want to think. So when my clients want to think that I am doing a great job I have them list out, okay, what's all of the evidence so that they can see it for themselves. And the funny part, when my client did this about all of the things that she was doing for her son, all the appointments, all the therapies, all of the programs, all of the communications with teachers, the IEP meetings. One of the thoughts that she came up with was, my husband trusts me so much to do all of this.

And so instead of seeing that her husband not saying all the time, “You’re doing a great job. You’re doing a great job.” He was actually saying it by the fact that he entrusted all of it to her. Of course she never would have seen this if she hadn't gone through this exercise. Because up until this point in her mind the only evidence that he thought she was doing a good job would have been him saying it to her. Again, external validation, amazing, it feels great, it's a nice to have.

But when we are relying on it to feel good about ourselves it’s the long way around and we are putting so much pressure on our relationships and other people to show up according to our rulebook in order for us to feel emotions that we can feel on our own.

So there you have it, external validation, nice to have but you don't have to wait around for it. You can validate yourself right now. Thanks 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.