

## Ep #53: Perfectionism



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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You are listening to episode 53 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, Perfectionism.

So many of us have this idea especially as it relates to our children with Autism that if we do as much as we can as fast as we can and as perfectly as we can then we are doing enough or the right things. One of the problems with this line of thinking is that we often end up creating these lofty or unrealistic plans about all the things that we will do. We inevitably lose steam and then we resort to beating ourselves up. This is the handy work of perfectionism. And while it sounds goal worthy and noble, it is just the opposite.

Perfectionism often keeps us in a cycle of doing more and more and yet never feeling like we have done enough. If this sounds like you, the next two episodes of the podcast are for you. In this episode you will learn what perfectionism is, how it is showing up in your parenting and how B minus work can help you relax the unrealistic standards that you are holding yourself to. And then in next week's episode we will continue this discussion and I will teach you the ultimate antidote to perfectionist thinking which is minimum baseline. 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 Cander. 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 another episode of the podcast. I am so glad you're here and I hope you are doing well. Today we are going to talk about a topic that has plagued me and so many of my clients and that is perfectionism. I'm going to give you some examples of how I see perfectionism coming up in my coaching.

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One of my clients was recently worried because her five year old does not know his sight words like his other classmates in his general ed class. So she decided that every night after school she was going to practice these sight words with him until he knew them just like everybody else. Well, this went on for about three days and her son after those three days was not tolerating long sessions of sight words after school and therapies. And then my client got frustrated and she told herself that it was all for nothing, that she had failed.

Another client who I am working with is trying her best to keep it together when her 10 year old walks in the door after school and has a meltdown and for most days she does a pretty good job. For the first 10 or 15 minutes she's really able to use her strategies. But for some days she's not able to or she's not able to do them as well and in her mind she's a failure. She's not doing her strategies every day and that means she's not doing it right.

Do you see a theme here? Either do it perfectly or bust. This is the hallmark of perfectionist thinking. It tells us that there is a right way to do things and anything less is a failure or not even worth the effort. To be clear, perfectionism or being a perfectionist, that doesn't mean that you actually think that you are perfect or that you actually are perfect of course. What it means is that you think you should be perfect. It means you think that you're never good enough, you, your work, your effort always falls short. There's always something more you could have done.

That's what being a perfectionist is. I see it in moms who blame themselves for their child's Autism who are constantly questioning themselves about their pregnancies, the things they ate, the activities they participated in. And in their minds they believe if they had done enough or more or a better job or they had had the perfect pregnancy then their child would not have Autism.

I see it following a diagnosis, whether the child was diagnosed at two, 12 or 20, I hear the same thing, "I should have known sooner." "I should have pushed the doctors harder." "I should not have listened to them when they told me that it was not a big deal that my child wasn't talking." "I should

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have gotten more opinions.” “If I had done all of the right things at the right time I would have had this information earlier.”

I also see it with respect to day-to-day activities whether it is using PECS, practicing ABA skills or encouraging interactions with other children, I am not doing enough. I could be doing more. What I’m doing is not enough because if it were my child would be using their PECS. They would be speaking. They would be reciprocating with other children and on and on and on.

And because the way you do one thing is the way you do everything perfectionism is rarely found in just one single solitary area of our lives. Because it’s a framework for how we think about ourselves in the world it seeps into everywhere. So, if you have a perfectionist mindset when it comes to parenting your child, you’re likely employing the same way of thinking in other areas of your life. In fact you were probably a perfectionist long before you became a parent and long before your child was diagnosed.

And to be sure, perfectionism is sneaky because we think it means that we are striving to do better and to achieve our goals and this is good. But this is not what is actually happening. When we are setting ourselves up against these unrealistic goals we end up not liking ourselves. We end up comparing ourselves to other people and living in fear of never being good enough. This does not lead to us achieving our goals. It leads to action fueled by fear which is not sustainable. Hello burnout. Or it leads to straight up paralysis, avoidance and procrastination because taking action feels too risky.

I have to say, for so many of us, myself included Autism is the ultimate monkey wrench. Speaking for myself and so many of my clients we are so used to pushing ourselves towards our goals, sucking it up, trying harder, working harder and getting it done. We are used to getting results in this way. And so we believe that our success is because of our perfectionist tendencies, not in spite of them. So then Autism comes along and we are

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totally stumped because Autism is like Teflon to rules, timelines and the best executed to-do list. It sends us reeling.

Our perfectionist superpowers can't help us here. We are like the wicked witch in munchkin land. Our powers don't work here. But since we know that things don't turn out great for the wicked witch, at least in the Wizard of Oz, let's talk about an alternative path that we can take. Let's get off the yellow brick road of seeking the perfection of Oz which we all know was fake and let's talk about how to live in our really, really real lives.

Instead of grasping for the A plus, the ideal, let's focus on what my coach calls B minus work, good enough. Good enough for a week is better than perfect for a day. Good enough gets it done. Perfectionism stalls us out in analysis paralysis, compare and despair, fear and self-loathing. B minus work is work that does not drain your soul, it gets done. While striving, grasping for that constant A plus and perseverating over it, that keeps us stuck in a vicious cycle where less gets done and there is more heartache. Done is better than perfect.

This podcast is the perfect example of B minus work. A little over a year ago I decided that I wanted to start a weekly podcast. And I was really nervous about whether or not I could come through with an episode every single week, especially with life being how it is, unpredictable. The answer to that dilemma has been B minus work. I listen to this podcast sometimes and just cringe. I said the wrong word or I could have given a better example, or oh my goodness you can really hear my New Jersey twang coming out.

And that's just the beginning of it. When it comes to writing, when it comes to putting together an argument and examples and having them flow I can get really stuck on this. My lawyer brain wants to make everything absolutely perfect, completely tied up and tightened up. And that's not really possible for a weekly podcast, at least not in my life. And so the answer has been B minus work. B minus work means I show up in your feed every single week whether I'm having a good week, a bad week or a terrible week.

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B minus work most importantly means that I am building that trust with myself that I do what I say that I'm going to do and that I can come through. This is the magic of B minus work because when you're setting yourself up to be perfect it's really a lose/lose. Perfection is impossible. You have no idea what perfection looks like because you're not the kind of personality that would ever let yourself believe that something was good enough and so analysis paralysis, fear, stalling out, procrastination, all of that.

I much prefer B minus work. Done is better than perfect. Done moves us forward, perfectionism keeps us stuck. So here are some tips to get you started in shifting from perfectionism to B minus work. First, always is to notice. Notice where in your parenting or anywhere else in your life where this perfectionism mindset is getting in your way of getting things done or it's just making what you are doing so much harder because you're telling yourself it's not enough.

Second, accept without judgment. Remember, judgment just like perfectionism will keep you stuck and perseverating in the could have, should have, would have.

And then finally, ask yourself what would B minus work look like in this situation and then let it be B minus.

Alright, that's it for this week. Next week we will dive a little bit deeper into this topic when we talk about the minimum baseline. But before we go, just a reminder. I am accepting one-on-one clients. So if you are ready to do this work and you want me as your one-on-one coach now is the time. You can sign up for a consultation on my website under Work With Me or go to the link in the show notes. Thanks again, 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.