

Ep #62: How to Stop Second Guessing Yourself (Part Two)



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With Your Host

Lisa Candra

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You are listening to episode 62 of *The Autism Mom Coach*. How to Stop Second Guessing Yourself, Part Two.

In last week's episode of the podcast we talked about the subtle and pervasive habit so many of us have of second guessing ourselves and our decisions especially as they relate to our child with Autism. In this week's episode we are going to talk about how to interrupt this habit. Stay tuned.

Welcome to *The Autism Mom Coach* podcast, I am your host, Lisa Candra. I am a lawyer, a life coach, and most importantly, I am the full-time single mother of a teenager with Autism and other comorbid diagnoses. I know what it is like to wonder if you are doing enough or the right things for your child and to live in fear of their future.

Hello everyone and welcome to the podcast. Thank you so much for being here. If you are here and you are getting value from this podcast I want to invite you to rate and review the podcast. Your reviews help other moms like you find the podcast and benefit from these resources. And bonus, I am giving away handcrafted soaps from Trev's Trades - Where Autism Meets Potential for 10 listeners who rate and review the podcast.

So in writing a review you won't only be supporting the podcast and helping other moms like you find the podcast. You will also be supporting a disability owned business and a mother and son team that are such an inspiring example of what we all want to do and provide for our children as they grow, which is dignified employment, meaningful experiences and a life that they really deserve. To enter the giveaway you need to rate and review the podcast and email me the title of your review at lisa@theautismcoach.com and your mailing address and that's it.

Alright, I also have another resource for you, it is called The Seven Truths Every Autism Mom Needs to Know. I created this resource because I get a lot of questions about what advice would I give a mom who just got the diagnosis or their child is approaching puberty or they're about to be an adult. And really the seven truths cover it all. It's the not what to do, the mechanics of it because that will vary so wildly from child to child.

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These seven truths are more like a flashlight to help you see ahead and to navigate some of the challenges that you may be experiencing no matter how old your kiddo is. You can get this resource by going to the show notes or to my website where I have a popup that will pop up as they do. And you can enter your name and your email address and you will get The Seven Truths right in your inbox.

Alright, so let's now shift to the topic of this week which is how to stop second guessing yourself. Last week we talked about what second guessing is and all the subtle and not so subtle ways that it permeates our lives. Before we get to how to stop, I first want to identify the type of second guessing that you are doing and how it is showing up. I generally put second guessing into two big categories. There is the second guessing of yourself, your values, your worthiness and then the second guessing of your decisions.

So when you are second guessing yourself it sounds like telling yourself that you're not doing enough or the right things, doubting your own instincts and deferring to others, doubting your ability to support your child. Or wondering what other people think of you as a parent and whether they think you are doing a good job. On the other hand, second guessing your decisions looks like with respect to past decisions, you imagine that things would be better now if you had done something differently in the past.

Blaming yourself for not making the right decision and imagining that this decision that you made set into motion a cascade of events that has resulted in whatever results that you have now that you do not like. In your mind, if only you had done A then Z would not be your current reality. So you will notice that there are a lot of liberties with logic and some magical thinking that allows us to draw this conclusion. This really isn't rational, but this is what happens in our minds when we're second guessing our past decisions.

We're really imagining that if we had just done things differently that things would be different now without accounting for all the many, many other

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variables and obstacles and issues that who knows? We just don't know. But in our mind we're just imagining that it would be better or not as bad. When you're second guessing your current decisions, decisions that you want to make, you're thinking about making this looks like gathering as much information from as many resources. And we're not even talking about resources that you even think are reliable.

You will really take it from anywhere, your mom's group, Reddit, random person on the street, it doesn't matter. You are just gathering information. You have a lot of back and forth in your mind about what to do. You're never making a decision, you're just sort of ping-ponging back and forth. A lot of analysis paralysis, just to-do list and weighing but never making a decision. You are opinion shopping, so asking other people about their experiences, what they think, what they have done, how it's worked out for them.

And you're gathering all of this information but not really discerning it. It's just information that's coming in. Crowdsourcing, poll taking, just other forms of trying to get as many other people to weigh in on your decision. And then you never actually make a decision. In both forms of second guessing, whether you are second guessing yourself or second guessing your decisions there is a lot of seeking external validation. So this is again, where the opinion shopping, the crowdsourcing, the poll taking comes in.

We want other people to tell us that our decision is a good one because we're not trusting ourselves because we are second guessing ourselves. Now, I want to be clear again, second guessing is different from self-reflection and due diligence. Self-reflection and due diligence are open and non-judgmental. Self-reflection is a positive process that involves examining our own thoughts and our actions in order to gain insight and to make positive change. It is done with the goal of personal growth and development.

Due diligence is the process of conducting a review or an investigation into a decision. It involves gathering a finite amount of information, analyzing it

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and making an informed decision, now listen to this, based on the current facts as they are currently known to you. Second guessing on the other hand is a negative process where we doubt and judge ourselves and our decisions based on what is happening and what we know now. So not what we knew then, what not was always available to us back when, when we made the decision, but what we know now based on hindsight.

So I want to give you an example of how this is showing up in my life right now. When my son was diagnosed with Autism, this was 13 years ago. There were no levels. I had the label of Autism but there wasn't the category of level one, two or three. And from the time that my son was five years old he was generically referred to as high functioning. He spoke, he was able to attend to many of the age appropriate activities of daily living. And so when people would ask me what level he was years later when levels came out, I just assumed he was level one.

And I got a lot of support for this assumption based on really the way other people reacted to him and interacted with him. He's a really pro social kid. He's hyperverbal at this point and very just engaged with other people, at least on a surface level and so I figured level one. Fast forward, he is now 15 years old and he is struggling quite a bit as so many of our kids do during puberty. And he is so clearly not level one. He's definitely level two and really sometimes hangs out in level three.

Now, enter the opportunity to second guess myself and I have, I have questioned myself. How did I not know that he was more impacted than he actually is? Was I in denial? Was I secretly avoiding this? Did I think that I could fix it? Did I fool myself? Was I overshooting? Was I pushing him too hard? I questioned my decisions. If I had known that he was level two, would I have put him in a general education classroom? Would I have moved him to a private school? Would I have moved to Connecticut?

Would I have accepted the jobs that I have accepted over the years? Now, of course, I can't know the answers to any of this, but because right now the struggle is real, I'm imagining a life where it's not as hard as it is now.

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And in doing that I'm thinking back to what could I have done to make this moment right now different? And honestly we will never know and I really do think that the answer is probably nothing which is really the scarier answer.

I wish that there is a point in time where I could say, if I had done x, y and z, we wouldn't be here, but the reality is, I don't actually think that that's the truth. And that's a harder pill to swallow. The idea that we could do all of these things and our children are still going to suffer. They are still going to have growing pains and this is what we are experiencing now. But in an effort to avoid some of that pain, second guessing, although it's not pleasant, it offers a little bit of an out in some way.

I am also looking for some external validation of my decisions. Now, the team that is dealing with him now, they don't know him from Adam. And so they're only seeing him at his current presentation. And I wonder if how they're looking at me, like lady, are you kidding me, you didn't see this? But it wasn't always like this. And so I find myself in the situation where I'm trying to give them all of the evidence so that they understand my decisions, so that they validate my decisions but really there is no way to know.

And when I am second guessing myself it is always with the flavor of what I did was wrong because things are difficult now. If I had done things differently they wouldn't be this way. And this is not logical thinking. It's not rational thinking. It's anxiety and fear at the wheel. And it leaves me feeling sad and guilty and with nowhere to go other than to create this belief that I don't really know what I'm doing and that I can't trust myself or my own instincts. And I know I'm not alone in this.

I see this with so many of my clients every day, second guessing decisions that they have made, second guessing their own abilities as parents. And while I understand why we are doing it and that is what I talked about in part one of this podcast series, it is not useful. What is useful is self-reflection because self-reflection by contrast is a way for us to look forward.

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And so when I do this in terms of my son and his current presentation, I can ask myself, what is it that even when he was two years old, I was always looking forward?

Why was it that I never viewed his diagnosis as a deal breaker to participating in life? Why is it that I availed him of all of the opportunities that I did? Why is it that I always assumed and I still do, that we will figure this out? This self-reflection lets me tap into what I do know and into my own resilience and my own resourcefulness. And what I can see is that no matter what label somebody put on my child, I would have probably have done the exact same things.

I don't think I ever would have backed down to having him have all of the opportunities I could possibly avail himself of, that I would not have pushed him a little bit further, that I would not have seen his potential and tried to maximize it as much as possible. I can also see that when I am always pushing forward, that in some ways it has also led me to not be fully present in the moment and that is happening now too. And so that is the takeaway that I can have.

While it is great to always be looking forward and always be looking for the best outcomes, it is also important to be in the present and to see as clearly as possible what is happening right now. Good to know I can use this going forward. That is the difference between self-reflection and second guessing. Self-reflection allows you to move forward with what you know and what serves you and what you can do better. And second guessing just leaves you doubting yourself and your own judgment.

Alright, so let's get to how to stop second guessing yourself. Like I said before, first we need to identify the type of second guessing we are doing. So with that as background, let's get to how do we stop second guessing ourselves? Here are my tips. First, identify the type of second guessing you are doing. And so I put this into three categories. First, identify the type of second guessing that you're engaging in.

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So the first type I label as just the background noise. This is the automatic soundtrack of always wondering if you are doing enough or the right things, if you said the right thing, if other people think you're doing a good job, if the school thinks you are being too pushy. Just that constant hum of questioning yourself. When this pops up, I want you to notice it, name it and enough it, as in enough already. You need to interrupt this.

Instead of letting this play in the background you need to change the channel, which is by the way exactly what I say to my kiddo when he is stuck in a perseveration loop. I say to him, "Hey, let's change the channel on this." You need to do this too, acknowledge it, yeah, I'm second guessing myself. This is an old habit. Of course my brain is offering me these thoughts. This does not mean you need to engage with them.

I want you to think about a toddler in Target. A toddler can find the junk aisle in Target, no matter which Target you send them to, they will find the junk aisle. And when they do, do you say to your kiddo, "Oh, look, you've found it, now go for it?" No, you redirect them. You need to do the same thing with your brain. Your brain will always find the junk aisle, which those are the negative thoughts. We are hardwired to overfocus on the negative. Your brain will always find those thoughts.

It is your job to redirect your brain from the junk aisle just like you would a toddler. This is tedious but the more you do it, the more you're able to repattern the deep old habit of hanging out in the junk aisle of your thoughts.

The second category is external validation. So when you find yourself opinion shopping, looking for other people to tell you something you want to hear about yourself or about your decisions then here is what you do. Figure out what it is that you want the other person to say, what do you want them to tell you, you did a great at that IEP meeting, you are such a good mom, I can tell how much your child loves you by the way that they look at you. Whatever it is that you are looking for other people to validate for you, you need to validate it for yourself.

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You need to grow the muscle of internal self-validation. This is the kind of validation that you do not have to wait on. You can create it for yourself. And the more you do it the more supported and resourced you will be. And here's the thing, we love external validation. It's a nice little dopamine hit. It's the feeling that other people think that we're doing a good job, but it's fleeting and for a good reason.

It really doesn't matter what other people think of us and what they think about what kind of a job we're doing. Because as we all like to remind ourselves, other people don't get it. And that is true. No one really understands your experience but you do. That's why internal validation from the person who gets it as much as you do is the most important type. The more you grow this muscle the less you will look for it from other people.

And when they say it instead of saying to them, "Do you think so, do you think I'm a good mom? Do you really think my daughter loves me?" You'll be like, "Of course. Of course they do." That is the muscle that you want to grow because like I said in a previous episode, external validation is nice, it feels great but it's like motivation. You can't depend on it but you can depend on internal validation because you can create it for yourself.

Third, decision drama, so whenever you are picking between options, you're trying to make a decision. The first thing that you need to do is to remind yourself that there are no right decisions unless you are dismantling a bomb. Decisions aren't right or wrong, it's the decision that you make, you see how it goes and then maybe you make another decision after that. There are no right or wrong decisions, it's just the decision that you're making now based on the information that you have now.

So instead of a pros and cons list, because those can just get you stuck in analysis paralysis and looking for more external validation, more people's opinions, more information that keeps you stuck. Get out a values list. When you are making decisions based on your values you have some clear guidepost for how to make the decisions. Instead of gathering

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information from tons of places, you're gathering it from within. You get to decide ahead of time right now the values that you hold dearly in your life and the values that you want to guide the decisions that you make for your child.

So I'm going to give you some examples. For me, my values include acceptance, dignity, courage, growth, independence, advocacy and transparency. Those are all personal values and also values that I use when making decisions for my kiddo. So let me give you an example of how this works. Let's say you are deciding whether or not to hire a special education advocate. You're a bit skeptical about it because of the impact you fear it will have on your relationship with the team but you also want to support your child.

Specifically you want your child to have more life skills incorporated into their IEP and it has been a struggle with the school. They're not in the IEP yet. You've talked about it with the teacher and with the staff and they say they're incorporating it but you're not really sure. And you want these in the IEP because you know if they're in the document then you have a bit more leverage in getting the data etc.

So if one of your values for your child, like it is for mine, is independence, and you believe that hiring an advocate will aid you in getting life skills that foster independence written into the IEP, then the drama kind of melts away. The value is independence. I believe that this will get me closer to the goal of independence that I have. Then all of the rest is drama, the school might not like it, that people might get upset, that it might feel uncomfortable to you, yeah, it might.

But when you're being guided by your values instead of second guessing the decision because it might be uncomfortable, you can let that be your guidepost. And for me I have found this so helpful, because like I said, the drama tends to melt away.

Let me give you another example, a personal one. So as you all know I have a podcast where I talk to you all about some of the struggles that we

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encounter as moms raising kids with Autism. And as part of this podcast I share some personal stories and examples in my real life. Now, I respect my son and his dignity and that is a value that I have. But another value that I have is transparency and advocacy.

And I do believe that you knowing that you are not alone, that you know that I am also experiencing some of the challenges that you are, is important to helping you because personally if I'm listening to someone who is like, "Yeah, I'm the Autism Mom Coach, I've got it all figured out and now I'm going to tell you what to do." I'm out. That does not resonate with me. And so it's important for me that you know and understand that I'm in the trenches with you.

And so I in that respect, I'm balancing two values or actually three, transparency and advocacy and also the dignity of my child. So I am cautious in what I do share. And so there are details that I don't share for sure and then maybe in some respects I share a little bit too much. But when I'm being guided by my values I'm not second guessing myself in the idea that I'm going to go back and beat myself up for sharing something that I later think, maybe not.

Instead I can use those values to guide me in my next right decisions. And so, again, it's just another lens for looking for your decisions. I'm not looking at right or wrong. I'm looking at values and how can I live in alignment with these values in a way that feels good to me and also do the work that I want to do in the world which is to give a voice to the struggles that we experience. And also to let you know that there are ways that we can support ourselves and we can make it easier on ourselves.

And for me, that means that I am sharing a bit of my story but I am also tempering that with just the knowledge that my kiddo has the right to tell his story in his own way, that's not my story to tell. And so will I get it right, will it be perfect? No. But when I'm being guided by my values I'm not stuck in this right or wrong. And I'm not stuck in indecision and then never ever sharing anything or helping anyone.

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And so again, it's another lens to look at your decisions that allows for self-reflection and it doesn't come from a place where you're just messing everything up and you suck and you can't trust yourself. Which is so much better because guess what? As you know, we are called on to make decisions every single day with respect to our children and their care. And because of their Autism diagnosis it is like the definition of uncertainty. We are always dealing with imperfect information. And we're having to make these decisions.

And if we're making these decisions from the space of we don't know what we're doing and we can't trust ourselves, it's going to make it so much harder for us. And let's face it, this is hard enough. we don't need to pile on.

Alright, so let's recap, what to do when you are second guessing yourself. First, redirect your brain from the junk aisle. If this is just your sort of natural day-to-day hum of questioning yourselves, you need to interrupt this and create a new pattern.

Second, create self-validation so you are not constantly depending on other people to validate you or your decisions.

And third, be guided by your values. Decide which values you want to use as your north star when making decisions about your child's care.

Alright, so that is it for second guessing yourself. I hope that these two episodes were helpful for you. If second guessing yourself is something that you struggle with, schedule a consultation with me. In my one-on-one coaching program I help my clients with this every day and I can help you too. You don't have to live in anxiety and fear. You don't always need to be second guessing yourself. There is a better way and I can teach you the cognitive and somatic tools that you can use to support yourself no matter what is going on.

To schedule a consultation with me go right to my website or the show notes and you can get started there. Alright, thank you so much for listening and I will talk to you next week.

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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.