

Ep #69: Have I Done Everything?



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With Your Host

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You are listening to episode 69 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, Have I Done Everything?

In this week's episode I am answering the burning question every Autism mom has and that is, have I done everything for my child? Stay tuned to find out.

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.

I also know that constantly fueling yourself with fear and anxiety is not sustainable for you or of any benefit to your child. That is why in this podcast I will share practical strategies and tools you can use to shift from a chronic state of fight, flight to some calm and ease. You are your child's greatest resource, let's take care of you.

Hello everyone and welcome to the podcast. I hope you are doing well. A little bit of an update here. I'm okay, I am working through some very heavy feelings with my son being inpatient as I discussed in last week's episode. I have been practicing what I preach quite literally. For me this has included letting go of the idea that I should be super productive while he's not here and get tons of things done and just letting myself rest. It has also included being very purposeful about managing my mind. My mind, that would just love to second guess all of my decisions and catastrophize about the future.

Now, for those of you wondering what does it mean to manage your mind? Here's what it is. I see the thoughts. They're like uninvited guests knocking on my door, the second guessing, the catastrophizing, the what ifs. I see them, I acknowledge them but I don't invite them in. I'm not entertaining them, or at least I'm not entertaining them for very long because of course these thoughts come up. And sometimes, yes, I will think about them for a minute but I will redirect myself.

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This is what it means to think on purpose because there is really no upside to indulging in these thoughts, I know this, having done so a time or two in the last 15 years. I know full well that thoughts like this send me down a rabbit hole that puts a knot in my stomach and leaves me feeling sad, angry and defeated. None of this serves me or my kiddo. This is work but it is the most important work any of us can do because we don't have control of our kids, their future, their feelings or their outcomes.

But we do have control over how we respond to all of it and that is very powerful. Alright, that's enough for the update. Let's talk about today's topic. Have I done everything? I hear this one all of the time, in every consult, in so many of my coaching calls. And since this seems to be the burning question so many Autism moms have, I have decided to answer it for you. Ready?

The answer is no, it is not possible to do capital E Everything. All of the therapies, all of the programs, all of the clinical studies, all of the medications, the diets, the suggestions in your Facebook Autism mom group. Doing everything is not on the menu of options. In fact the idea that you can or should is setting you up for failure. It presupposes that there is a checklist of all of the things to do for your child with Autism. And you just need to move through them systematically one by one.

Well, there is no checklist. There are so many competing theories about what causes Autism and theories about how to handle it, which therapies are good, which are child abuse, which diets, which schools and on and on. And then add on comorbid diagnoses like seizures, OCD, ADHD and the list grows from there. It is not possible to do everything. In fact, the decision to do one thing is the decision not to do other things. If you decide to do playtime with your kids then you have decided not to do ABA or to do it any longer.

If you send your kid to school then you have decided not to homeschool and vice versa. Moreover, when you decide to do it all or as close as you can possibly get, this usually means doing a little bit of a bunch of stuff and likely none of them consistently. Imagine, you just get the diagnosis and

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you've spent a couple of days on Google and Facebook groups and you've collected all of the potential therapies. So you decide, you know what, I am going to cover all of the bases. We're going to start with floor time and in six months we'll try playtime.

And then in about a year we'll try ABA therapy and then we'll do RDI or some combination of that. You would not be getting the best of all worlds. You would be getting a little bit of a lot. And really how much of it would stick? Imagine the amount of confusion that you would add to your life and to your child's and the amount of inconsistency, which you know our kids love so much. This idea of doing everything is just really absurd. When we go to college, for example, we don't decide to major in every topic. No, we pick a lane.

And this is important. I believe in the Autism journey too because there are so many things to pick from. And we really need to be in charge of deciding what is best for our child, our family in these particular circumstances. This is all to say that I do not think it is possible or even goal worthy to try to do everything. And this is why I think asking yourself, have I done everything or even have I done enough, I think these questions are self-defeating. Have you done everything is a terrible question to ask yourself.

First, like I just said, I don't even think it's possible or goal worthy. Second, this question is a dead end question. Actually this isn't really even a question, have I done everything. These are actually limiting beliefs with a question mark at the end. That is because whether you realize it or not, when you ask yourself a question like have I done everything or have I done enough. What's really happening is you're having one of two thoughts. I have not done enough or I have done it all and nothing works. Two very, very painful thoughts.

Remember, your thoughts are so important because they create your feelings and your feelings drive your actions. When you think, I have not done enough and you feel guilt or fear, how do you show up? When you think, I have done so much and nothing works and you feel defeated, how

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do you show up then? I'll share some answers from two recent coaching sessions with different clients.

One client was having the thought that she was not doing enough and this created the feeling of anxiety. When she was feeling anxious, she told me she Googled a bunch of stuff about Autism, she bookmarked various research articles. She made appointments with doctors that she then canceled. She second guessed her previous decisions and she was overall dismissive or absent minded during the current therapies because she already viewed them as not being enough. So the result of her thinking that she wasn't doing enough was that she did a bunch of nothing and she was still stressed.

By contrast, my other client had the thought, I've done it all and nothing works and she felt defeated. And from the feeling of defeat she was dismissive of any possibilities. Any time someone suggested anything to her, she just dismissed it out of hand. She was annoyed by people that would even talk to her about different things because in her mind, no, we've tried it all and nothing works. So she did not trust her team. She did not trust her current doctors. She was dismissive of the idea of getting second opinions because she thought it would be a waste of time.

In addition, the small things that she could do that had been helpful, she really stopped doing them. For instance, she had done quite a good job with setting certain boundaries with her child about TV time. And when she was feeling this defeat of nothing was working, she was not enforcing those boundaries because again nothing's working, why bother. And the result of her thinking that nothing was working is she was giving up and she was giving up on the things that were working. None of this is a mystery.

These actions flow directly from the thoughts, I am not doing enough or I'm not doing everything. Or I have done everything and nothing works. That is why this question is poisonous to you. There are two answers to this question, if you want to answer it. It's a closed end question, yes or no. Either yes, I've done everything and it didn't work if you're asking yourself.

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Or no, and I need to do more. The answer to these questions, these thoughts create feelings in you that fuel actions that do not serve you.

Here is what I suggest instead. First, scrap the idea that everything is on the menu. This is not the Cheesecake Factory. You can't have tacos and Lo Mein. You need to make a decision to do some things and not others and that is okay.

Two, stop asking yourself dead end questions like have I done everything or have I done enough or have I done the right things. The answer is yes or no. And the underlying beliefs is that you have not done enough or that there is no hope. This leads to feeling terrible and you working against yourself and your goals.

Third, start asking yourself powerful questions. I talked about powerful questions in a previous episode. I will link it in the episode notes. If you have not already you should go and take a listen to that episode because it's very instructive. Open ended questions are questions that invite curiosity and inquiry and send your brain, your most powerful tool searching for answers. Now, when you ask a powerful question and you invite in that curiosity, you are not in a fight flight state of your nervous system.

When you are regulated and you are able to have perspective, when you are able to tap into your rational thinking the answers that you find will serve you better than the answers you find from these yes or no questions. I'm going to give you some examples to get you started.

First, what has worked or what is working? That's right. There are things that have worked or that are working now. Maybe you put a boundary in place and have honored it. Maybe you have redirected a behavior. Maybe you knew enough to get your kid diagnosed despite people telling you that she was fine or that he would outgrow it.

Second, what have I learned? Be specific here. For example, what have I learned from our medication journey? For me, I have learned that SSRIs

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are bad for my kid and are something we will never try again. Good to know. So ask yourself, what have you learned? What have you learned about your kid? What have you learned about how to manage transitions? What have you learned how to move from preferred activities to non-preferred activities? You've learned a lot, even if it wasn't pretty, you've learned a lot.

Make a list of everything that you know about this kid, about how to parent them, about their sensory issues, whatever it is, you I know so much.

Third, ask yourself, what haven't I tried? Now, this does not mean that you make a list of all of the things that you haven't tried and then you do them. Instead, you make a list of things to consider and evaluate. For example, when it came to my son's OCD I had read a bunch of books. I had done some online courses myself. I had learned as much as I possibly could. He had attended an anxiety group by a specialist. And he was doing talk therapy with his one-on-one therapist.

What I had not tried was OCD specific therapy, specifically ERP. And I had not tried getting him tested for PANS or PANDAS as so many people suggested. So what I did is I evaluated these options and I opted to forego the testing. First, my son's OCD was not sudden. He never had strep throat. And I really didn't see in the treatment of PANS or PANDAS that anything different would be happening from what was already occurring. So I just didn't see it as worth my time. Instead I looked into getting him OCD specific therapy.

And I spent my time on applications to Rogers Behavioral and Bradley Hospital where he eventually went.

Fourth, ask yourself what might be helpful. Now, this comes from taking a look at the things that have worked, the things that have worked in the past or the things that you might even want to try. For instance, if you have been doing a lot of different things, maybe less is more. Maybe that's where you concentrate your efforts.

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Fifth, ask yourself what could I do less of. That's right, less. I remember telling my son's therapist all of the things that I was doing to help him with his OCD. And I said, "I don't feel like I'm doing enough." And he said, "You're doing way too much. You need to let go of most of that." Probably the same for you. You are likely going way above and beyond. So take a look, what could you do less of. And this doesn't even have to be stuff that you do for your child. What are you doing in your own brain? Are you resisting reality?

Are you wishing that your non-verbal child would talk and this is causing you pain? Maybe you could do less of that. Are you second guessing yourself? Are you going back through all of your decisions and wondering if you should have acted differently? Maybe you could do less of that. Are you telling yourself that you don't have time for yourself? And as a result, not making time for yourself which results in you being more on edge, more trigger happy and more apt to lose it with your kid.

All of this, if you did less of it, if you feel less stressed, less guilty, less angry, you will have more capacity for your child and whatever challenges they present.

Then finally, ask yourself, what could I do more of for myself? Not more of for your child because again, I am sure you're going overboard as we speak. You want to help your kid and you want to do everything you can to help your kid, but by solely focusing on your kid and ignoring yourself you're doing it wrong. This is a mistake. It is incongruent with the objective of helping your kid. The more you do for yourself the more you manage your mind, regulate your emotions, take time for yourself and protect your own energy.

All of this helps your child. Unlike anything else this is guaranteed. For one, you have more capacity. So when you're taking time for yourself, when you're taking time to manage your mind, when you're taking time to exercise, to get some space, whatever it is, you have more capacity for whatever they bring. Moreover, when you're able to model to your child the kinds of behaviors you are wanting from them, by keeping yourself

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regulated, you are ensuring that you are not contributing to their anxiety, their fear, their dysregulation.

So instead of being a co-escalating factor, you get to be a co-regulating anchor. Alright, that is it for this week's episode. Scrap the idea of doing everything, stop using dead end questions and start asking yourself powerful questions to move you forward. As always, you don't have to do this alone. You can do it with me in my one-on-one program. To get started, schedule a consultation, the link is in the show notes and on my website theautismmomcoach.com under Work With Me. I'll talk to you next week.

Thanks for listening to *The Autism Mom Coach*. If you are ready to apply the principles you are learning in these episodes to your life, it is time to schedule a consultation call with me. Podcasts are great but the ahas are fleeting. Real change comes from application and implementation and this is exactly what we do in my one-on-one coaching program. To schedule your consultation, go to my website, theautismmomcoach.com, Work With Me and take the first step to taking better care of yourself so that you can show up as the parent you want to be for your child with Autism.