

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Lisa Candra

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

You are listening to episode 73 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers.

I am so excited to bring you a conversation that I recently had with my friend and fellow Autism mom and life coach for parents of children with Autism. Michelle helps parents potty train and improve the communication skills of their children with a straightforward results driven approach. Her mission is to help every child with Autism to reach their greatest potential by empowering their parents.

Michelle provides Autism parents with mental, emotional and tactical tools and strategies to help their child live as independent a life as possible so that they too can get their independence back. I hope you enjoy our conversation and please check out the show notes where I will have links to Michelle's podcast and other resources.

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.

Lisa: Alright, so Michelle, welcome and thank you so much for being here. I am so excited to have you here. If you would, please introduce yourself to the audience.

Michelle: Hi, my name is Michelle Rogers and I'm excited to be here as well. I am an Autism mom and life coach for parents of children with Autism. I run a group coaching program called the Champions for our

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

Children Masterclass where we guarantee results specific to what I like to call the big three. And these are the three life skills I believe every child on the Autism spectrum needs to have a chance at a life of independence.

So the first one is potty training, the second one is communication and the third one is reduction of problem behavior so your kids can sit and attend and learn. So I'm very excited to be here. That's what I do. I love it, and we've been doing masterclasses going on three years now. So it's been a really exciting ride. We've helped so many families worldwide. And it's just been a crazy trip and I'm excited to be here today.

Lisa: That's so amazing, and I can attest to everyone here about how passionate Michelle is about what she does. She and I met in a coaching program and a business coaching program. And in a lot of these business coaching programs you're going to have a lot of weight loss coaches, you're going to have a lot of business coaches. And so when you find another Autism mom coach, it's like we're people automatically.

And the way she speaks about her work, the way she speaks about her clients and the passion that she has for helping them is truly inspiring. And I know that doesn't come out of just thin air, Michelle. So can you tell us a little bit about your story and how you became to be the boss Autism mom coach that you are?

Michelle: Yeah. So, it's interesting because I always go through this process with the moms that I work with in the sense of that this identity of this really in your face, balls to the wall type of parent isn't born, this is kind of created. And what I tell my moms is that, "Listen, up until the point where my daughter was diagnosed on the spectrum at two, I had taken a lot of face first hits in my life." And at that point I remember as a child I was bullied from kindergarten I think till middle school and every day I'd come home crying. It was just a disaster.

And I remember always thinking, why isn't somebody coming in to save me? Why isn't somebody coming to say, "Hey this is a total injustice. You

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

shouldn't be tormenting this girl every day.” And this was day after day for years of my life from kindergarten till middle school. And I remember this one incident and I'll never forget it, where the same bully was just fucking with me like he normally did. And in that moment, I kept having that same thought, somebody needs to stop this here.

I mean, there's teachers around, people saw this happening. And then I just snapped and it was the first time I ever had the thought that nobody's coming, it has to be you. And it was a really interesting moment because it was the first time I ever stood up to this bully and he never fucked with me again. And in fact, nobody really messed with me again after that. And it taught me that I could be my own hero. I could be my own savior. And it was just one of those things with this, it was just nobody's coming ever. It has to always be you.

And then in that moment I just learned that the more that I stepped into the role of the savior I was looking for, the more I could create results in my life. And it was just a really pivotal moment, that kind of I stepped into this different identity. I went from this really, believe it or not, I was a very shy girl to now this badass. And listen, life wasn't roses and cupcakes after that. My parents broke up. We lived in poverty. I remember there was a time where we had no heat, we had no food in the fridge.

And I always believed in myself like I did that day, I'm a master problem solver and I could figure out what to do about this. It was an abusive home with my mother. I ended up moving out when I was 18, living paycheck to paycheck. I remember even one point driving around with a car with no car insurance, I even got pulled over. I still don't to this day, don't even know why I wasn't arrested. And I wrote checks that I knew were going bounce. And I came back from all of that.

So by the time I had Juliana, I wouldn't say we were rolling in it. I'd say we were still living paycheck to paycheck, maybe a little bit better than that. I had about \$40,000 in debt from a business I started that failed. So here I am in this situation, but still feeling like a survivor. I think I've just identified

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

this person that always scrapped and just did whatever I could to make it to the next day.

So when she was diagnosed I already had, even though when I got the diagnosis, I was a lot like all of us now. I thought this was a death sentence. I thought her life was over and I thought mine was too. I think what happened for me was that I'd been so practiced at overcoming major obstacles in life that even though I didn't know the how, I'm not a special education teacher, I'm not formally trained in anything to do with Autism. I'm just a mom who got her experience from walking the streets of hard knocks.

So I think because of that, I just knew that I was going to solve for this. I didn't know how, but I knew I was ready to take the challenge on. I'd prefer not to believe you me. I would have preferred to not have had this journey in some aspects back then because it was so hard. And I never did anything like this before and I made a lot of mistakes. I went from this point of I was so thankful to even be able to have a baby because I thought I wasn't even going to be able to have a baby. And I have this beautiful baby, then I feel like God wrecked this baby and I was so pissed at God.

And I was like, "You just took this beautiful gift and just wrecked it. And then I remember thinking after I kind of, we all talk about this and I think Lisa talks about this as well is that we all go through a grieving process when the diagnosis comes and it's not that the child died. It's the thought of the childhood we thought we were all going to experience had a death.

Lisa: The life not lived.

Michelle: Yes, exactly. So you just have to process that. And I believe when you get to, a lot of parents don't get to acceptance, that's the fifth stage of grief that they all say is acceptance. A lot of us just stay in the bargaining, the anger or the depression. But I believe that if you can get to acceptance. There's a sixth stage which is creation, meaning acceptance is not sexy. It's

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

not like we all want to be there. It's definitely not. It's the not fair. It's not right. This makes no sense. This was sent to our family.

We don't have a history of it, but it's what is. And if I can create from what is, I can make the best of what I have. And that's kind of really my motto with the masterclass and helping people.

Lisa: Well, that's so interesting because when you say creation because really I think I know there's work that I haven't studied a lot, but I'm aware of it, it's posttraumatic growth. So once you get through the acceptance and through the pain, then there is opportunity for the and now what. And I think that that's what's available. But I also think acceptance is not something that's one and done. I think it's something that happens every day. It's a choice that you're making every day with the new things that are happening is that I'm not going to fight this anymore, this is what it is.

Michelle: Yeah, exactly. I remember just having a feeling of surrender towards it, to be honest with you, a feeling of, yeah, I guess you recommit to the process. Any time we feel like we're doing well and then I get hit with life with a side of Autism with her. Then it's just like okay, that suck.

Lisa: And now this.

Michelle: Yes, exactly. And it's funny because I look at Lisa's journey with her son and my journey with my daughter is very different but we still have our challenges. And sometimes I get side swiped. I don't see the train coming and I get whacked and I get whacked pretty good. And it is a moment where you just have to remind yourself, okay, this is just what this is and it's not a problem. It's when it becomes, when you start making it, keep fighting the resistance of I shouldn't be here. Why is this [crosstalk], this sucks.

And when you keep playing that tug of war with yourself, it just makes things so much more painful. And it also keeps you in the mental mud and not looking at solving the problem that's in front of you.

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

Lisa: Exactly. So I want to shift to what you do, but with saying you became the hero that nobody was coming. And I say that to my parents all the time, specifically when it comes to the decision to make time for their own wellness, it's like the calvary is not coming. There isn't like a Calgon take me away day unless you create it for yourself. And I apply that to anxiety and burnout and a lot of those issues that my moms have. Talk to us about the moms who you serve and how you apply that mentality to the work that you do with them.

Michelle: Yeah. So what I try to do, they all come in specifically to get a problem solved. And I love that because I'm a master problem solver. So they're coming in specifically saying, "Michelle, I want you to pull back the curtain and tell me how you have a 100% success rate for potty training. Because I've been potty training my 10 year old for the last five years and I still haven't had this fixed."

And what I always say is, it's my ethical approach to this is that I sell you what you want and we do give you tactical but I'm going to give you what you need, which is this ability to potty train was available to you all along. You had beliefs that was stopping it from happening. And sometimes those beliefs cause massive suffering.

Lisa: What are those beliefs, what are the top beliefs that you see?

Michelle: Well, one of the biggest things, and I just wrote about this yesterday, one of the biggest things we think is that they believe that the Autism diagnosis, the circumstance of the Autism diagnosis is the reason why their child can't potty train, the reason why their child can't communicate. And it's not, it's your thoughts about it. The thoughts about the diagnosis, the thoughts about being told that they're severe on the spectrum, the thoughts they're being told that a 30 year old.

Somebody just wrote this to me, a 30 year old has the mentality of a three year old. How hard are you going to push a 30 year old to get out of diapers when you think he only has the mental capacity of a three-year

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

old? It's the emotions that come from thinking shitty things about Autism that create the shitty actions we take or no actions because we're like, "Well, why bother, I mean, I'm dealing with a 30 year old that's got a three-year old mentality, why even bother trying to teach him anything? He can't learn anything."

And then I get the result of the shitty life that I want to change. It's more of the same. So it's a crazy eight, nothing changes so I have to start to see, listen, it isn't just about the tactical, and I've got bull for tactical. I can teach you anything, pretty much teach anything to anyone about anything because I believe that about myself. But it's not about the tactical. You have to be willing to change your thoughts about your child and then that's like putting gasoline on a tactical fire that I'm going to give you to get the results that you came for.

Lisa: Yeah. So can you give us an example of that, a specific parent, a specific transformation that lights you up?

Michelle: I guess, our best ones are the potty because potty seems to be the biggest. It's funny, when I started this work, I'm like, "I'll help you with anything Autism." But what everyone seems to be coming to me with the majority of time is potty training and communication. So I guess one of our biggest transformations that I can recall was, a family had a 21 year old that needed to be potty trained. And they said they had potty trained her for years and years and years and it wasn't in the cards. And she was graduating out of her school and going to an adult school when she graduated.

And somehow they didn't know that the child needed to be potty trained to go to the school. And they're like, "I'm sorry, she can't come here. She's in diapers. You have to be potty trained." And all of a sudden within a matter of weeks she was potty trained. And here's the thing about that. She had the ability to potty train all along, but their thoughts were that she's severe on the spectrum, this just can't happen. We've tried and quit multiple times.

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

But when they were backed into a corner, when they realized that they couldn't take her to the school that they wanted to, then all of a sudden the circumstance dictated the reason that they moved forward. There was absolutely no option on the table. She had to potty train. So that's just a good example of she had that ability in her the whole time but when they were backed into a corner, that's when all of a sudden it happened. And I don't want that to happen for parents.

I want it to happen from a place of, if I can create it that way, I want to be able to create it of my own device at any time. And another example I have of that is, and this is a better example because this isn't a circumstance dictating the result they want. This is more of them creating it. I had a mother, I'll never forget this, I don't think she'll forget it either. I was on vacation in Florida on New Year's Eve and she wanted to join the program. She's hysterical, crying.

And she said that her son had just been hospitalized with a kidney infection, which was a complication to her trying to potty train him. And she lived in a rural area, and she found a school that would let him go to school full-time so that she could go back to work but he had to be potty trained. And she was desperate to get him potty trained but in the same instance just recovering from being in emotional trauma of having her kid in the hospital with a kidney infection from attempting to potty train.

So she's still wanting this but scared to death this was going to happen again. And one of the reasons she felt he had gotten so bad is because he had Autism. She knows shit about Autism, just like we all do and he was pre-verbal. And I'd said to her, "Listen, you can't look at what happened at the hospital as a fail. The only true fail, I believe, is quitting on our kids, that is a learn. Now, it's a painful learn. We don't want to learn that again and I don't think we would."

And I told her what happened to him in that hospital could have happened to a neurotypical talking child. There's plenty of children that just have a high threshold for pain and that could have happened to anybody. We start

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

putting it in the Autism spin cycle, It's because of Autism that happened, and I fucked up as a parent because I didn't know the signs. It just sends you into that crazy eight loop. And I'm so grateful for the fact that she even took the time to talk to me through her fear, because she really needed him potty trained but she was so scared she was going have another situation where he was going to the hospital.

So I said to her, “That learn actually taught you that the signs of when a kidney infection could be imminent.” I said, “The only way you would have had that is going through this experience so don't use it as a deterrent not to get potty trained. Use it as a motivator, now, I know what signs to look for. And then if you're working with me, I'm going to help you not to get it to that point.” Because the major issue with them is that they didn't create desire for him to want to do this.

He had a little bit of potty phobia, we had to solve for that first. Then we go into the actual potty training with creating desire. And once we were able to do that, he potty trained in two weeks. And that mom did her testimonial video, I just won't forget it because I said to her in that video, I said, “You were really scared to sign up on New Year's Eve.” And I said, “You signed up, two weeks later we got him potty trained.” And this was March because she had spent three months in the program.

And I said, “If I had told you on New Year's Eve that on March 9th or whatever day we had that testimonial video that your son would have been potty trained in two weeks, not even two weeks, even by March, would you have believed me?” And she said no.

That's what's so powerful about doing this work is you could have had, and I even had that too, where we had a mother of a 15 year old join my program. And she had had a consult six months prior and then finally said, “Alright, I want to do it.” And we potty trained in two weeks, a 15 year old. And she said, “I could have had that two week transformation six months ago.”

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

Lisa: Yeah, so I'm curious, how do you manage what I would anticipate would be the double edged sword of parents wanting the result and then having so much shame for have failed in the past or even now I got the result, but I should have gotten it sooner? Do you see that?

Michelle: Yeah, I just wrote about this because I could just say it's a double edged sword in the sense of all the awareness that Michelle is bringing to this call is, oh my God, I can do this, but oh my God, I could have done this six months ago. It's my fault. And here's the thing with thinking it's my fault. When you think that it makes you feel like shit because the way it's even worded, you feel guilty, you feel like shit and like whatever.

But listen, there's a blessing in it because if you want to take responsibility that you created the results you have, guess what? You can change the way you show up to get new results. So instead of looking at it as just it's my fault. Say, "You know what? I'm going to take radical responsibility for what we have now and knowing that I'm responsible for that, I can create new actions to get new results. I'm not a victim of the Autism circumstance."

Lisa: Yeah. And just always having to focus on moving forward.

Michelle: Yes, always forward momentum, I love that, yes.

Lisa: So tell me, how do you create desire for potty training?

Michelle: It's all the secrets. No, that's fine.

Lisa: Because maybe I'll do it with my cat.

Michelle: Yeah. I potty trained my cats. Potty trained my cats. I potty trained my puppy. I potty train anybody. Anybody needs to be potty trained, as long as you pull your pants up and down, I always tell them, "They can operate an iPad, they can flush a toilet." So what we want to do is think about the iPad, that's a perfect example. So we have an iPad and they absolutely love it. They'd do anything to have access to it.

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

Then we have the task of potty training. I don't see the value in doing that. You change my pants. You change my diaper, I can piss and shit in it. I can just stay and do what I'm doing, wet my pants and you're going to come and clean it up. I don't see a desire to want to use the toilet. So how do we create desire is we create a reward system for him to want to go, him or her. So not only can we do that, you also start creating negative consequences by getting rid of the diapers.

So if they're pooping and peeing their pants, most kids won't like the way that feels, oh, that sucks and now I've got to stop what I'm doing. I've got to help mommy clean up the mess. So even if they don't like it, it's not, I'll get the unicorn people. The unicorn syndrome people are like, "Oh, I hear you Michelle, but my kid is very different." Everyone thinks they have the unicorn. So they'll say, "Well, my kid doesn't care if he's wet." Well, he'll care when he has to stop what he's doing and he's got to get on the floor with you and clean up the mess.

And he's got to hand over hand, bring the dirty underwear into the laundry basket and he's got to go to the bathroom and clean him up. The idea here is to start creating desire not to live the life of a child or an adult who pisses and shits their pants like that's okay. And create desire, "Hey, baby, if you do it here, a much better life." And that's how we teach it in a nutshell.

Lisa: Alright. So let's move on to the other two of the big three, first is potty, then what?

Michelle: Communication.

Lisa: Tell me more.

Michelle: By the way, there's no set order. It could be, and you can work on any of them in any order. So the second one is communication. I believe these are the foundational skills. If a child on the spectrum has potty training, communication and no problem behaviors, they have the

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

foundation to have a chance of a life of independence. I believe that about all children no matter where they fall on the spectrum.

So the second one is communication. So depending on where your child is on the communication route is where we kind of create our starting point. One of the biggest things for Juliana, my daughter when she was diagnosed, she had language and lost it. And I never thought that she would not get it back and I didn't know that. This is studied and believable and 100% true that in behavioral therapy, if you had a behavior and lost it, you can get it back.

If you had it once, that means you can repeat it again. And that's just one of the foundational principles of behavioral therapy. And I didn't know that. All I knew is that she had words and she lost them. But I was always in the belief that because she had them, that she'll be able to get them again. I didn't know how. And see how that thought is from the problem solver identity that we talked about earlier. If I always believed in the idea whether or not it was true, I didn't know and it is true because it's been studied to be true, that if she had it, she could have it again.

I was motivated by that thought and I was willing to do whatever it took to get her voice back. So for Juliana, I can only explain it like this is that if we have thought on one end and voice on the other and the neural pathway between the two is asleep. What I teach my parents is we want to create a bridge form of communication that's going to connect the two and kickstart that neural pathway. And that's by using either sign language, PECS, or an AAC device. And with Juliana, we did sign language.

It was one of the most beautiful moments of being her mother, where I went from cursing God to saying, "Alright, listen, I just need you to work in parallel to me." To, oh my gosh, now I believe that Autism was sent to me so I could help heal my girl so I could help other families do the same for theirs. And one of the biggest come arounds for me that started to bring my girl back to me was sign language.

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

And I remember we started to do PECS and she had this thing where she'd take things and just twist them in her hands and she drew a lot, she'd just keep twisting it. So when we started with the PECS, she'd take the cards and just twist them. And I knew after a day or two, [inaudible], this isn't going to work, she keeps twisting them. So I said, "What else have we got?" And they said, "Well sign language." I'm like, "Well, great, now she's never going to talk."

And I can debunk that myth because studies have shown that if you have a pre-verbal baby and you teach them a bridge form of communication like sign language, PECS or an AAC device, you have a more likely chance to have a verbal talker. But I didn't know that at the time. So I couldn't explain. I just went with the flow because I was willing to try everything. So I said, "Okay, let's do it." Even though I'm like, "I don't even know, if we teach her this, why she'd ever talk."

And within about a day, by the end of the day, she was signing for cookie. This is more. I can teach more in my program because [crosstalk] more everything. So we make more mean cookie for Juliana. And by the end of the day, she had learned to sign for cookie and I was floored because at that point I thought she was lost. And I didn't even realize at the time that I wasn't even talking to her. I was talking about her in front of her as if she wasn't there. I wasn't even talking to her in the car.

I was barely even talking to her when nobody else was there because I believed that she couldn't hear me. And when I saw that and I saw her do that, and then she ended up learning 10 more signs within a week. I was so on fire with motivation. I'm like, "Everybody, nobody gives her a fucking thing unless she signs for it." And by doing that, by building out her ability to have her voice in those ten signs, she was tantruming non-stop, immediately was gone. 90% of her tantrums were gone because she was able to express herself.

And I say sign language was the path to bring my baby back to me because anytime she needed something she had to come find me and

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

show me the sign. I hold sign language folks near and dear to my heart because that was our personal journey to getting Juliana to start making sounds, to then start making word approximations to speaking. And what I can describe to you is that when we gave her, her voice with sign language, it kickstarted that neural pathway.

And all of a sudden she started making lots of random sounds. This is exactly what we did in the program, they start making lots of random sounds and then we started. She could do the sign, but we'd also have her repeat the sound back us. So it was water, wah, wah, whatever. She used to go for goldfish, she couldn't do gold, she used to [crosstalk]. So she used to go for goldfish. She's done it, let's go get her some goldfish. And I never thought this is taking too long. This sucks, I have to teach her everything. I was so excited.

I never, one of the things I hate, I really hate and I use it in my marketing material only because it's just so commonly used is the word 'non-verbal', because I'll even have parents tell me that they have non-verbal children that can say any word, they just don't use it functionally. Why do you call them non-verbal? And I'm not saying that everybody identifies non-verbal like this, but the majority of us do. When we think non-verbal, we think can't be changed forever, no fixing this.

They never even came into my vocabulary. Nobody ever brought it to my vocabulary. I never even knew about it when she was that way. I always believed that she was going to get this back and I always tell my families, "Don't say non-verbal, say pre-verbal."

Lisa: Yeah. And it's so interesting with Ben because he made noises all of the time even when he wasn't speaking. But I will never forget, I have this vision of, I don't know if you've ever read or watched the Helen Keller Story, but we lived that Anne Sullivan scene where you're rip roaring around and, "No, you're going to ask for this, no", over and over and over again. And then that one second where it's water. We've made the connection between

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

the two of us. I did something, you understand that I got it. We understand one another and it's like boom, it's amazing.

Michelle: Yes, it is. Helen Keller, that's a really good example because I was so fascinated with that as a child. How interesting, I watched that movie over and over and over again as a child and this is my life now. But yeah, I mean, it was that moment. It was that type of connection that I realized that she was in there. It was the first steps of her coming back to me. I'll never forget it. I'll always have a place in my heart for sign language.

Lisa: We used sign language a teeny bit, but it was a lot of text and that was really helpful. My guy was really visual so I would always make him these, almost like these story books when he was little with different pictures and we would go through them. He's still very much like that. He loves his pictures. But I just remember, it was so funny, he would always just walk over to me like here's my popsicle picture. And I'm like, oh, you figured out how to use this to your advantage. It was just funny personality, things like that, that start coming out.

But I do remember when he started to talk and then really he never stopped is he would say things to me like, "Remember something." And I'd be like, "What?" And his very specific memory of times where I didn't understand that he even understood what was happening because he wasn't talking. Kind of like what you were just saying. And that hit me like a ton of bricks of all of that experience he was having, and it almost reminded me.

My grandmother had a stroke and somebody trying to communicate with you with their eyes but their body and nothing else cooperating and that just really broke my heart but also let me see how far we had come.

Michelle: Yeah. And that he was there all along. That was the real thing for me was like, oh my God, this whole time I thought she was lost. And she wasn't, she was there all along. I don't even think of Autism as less

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

anymore. I think of Autism as just different, the brain just operates at a different frequency, and if I can learn to teach that brain, meet that brain at that frequency I can teach it anything.

Lisa: Yeah. Alright, tell us about the last.

Michelle: So the last one is problem behaviors and a lot of the times, nine times out of ten, problem behaviors exist because a child can't communicate. So sometimes when we work on communication, a lot of the problem behaviors parents see, well, they'll see an immediate dip with the problem behaviors because now this child has a voice. I always teach my families think about the 10 things that your child asks for every single day and create a way for them to get it without getting aggressive, showing that.

I had a mom yesterday who adopted a three year old and he gets very aggressive. So I said, "You know what?" And she came for potty training. I said, "You know what, let's shelf potty training." I want to create harmony in the home so he's not throwing shit and getting aggressive. So we created pictures of all the things that might trigger him to have a meltdown and put them on a wall and he can just go to them and point to them and there's no misinterpretation. If he wanted a cookie and I give him the wrong cookie and he snaps out, now I'll know I have all the different cookies on these pictures, so that's going to avoid it.

So one of the first things I teach with problem behaviors, I call it the Autism mommy's bomb squad method. We want to try and deactivate the bomb before it blows. So one of the first things we want to do is try and figure out a way to prevent a bomb from exploding. So that was one of the examples I'm giving here is that because this kid would always freak out because they give him the wrong cookies. So there's 10 different cookie options in their pantry and they give him the wrong cookies and that would send him into a tear.

Now we're creating a system where there's no way he's going to get the wrong cookie. He's going point to it. They're going to give him exactly what

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

he needs, and we're going to avoid that situation from reoccurring. So that's the first step in problem behaviors is if we don't have a communication protocol in place, we want to get that rolling as quickly as possible, especially for the things that can cause meltdowns.

The second step to solving for problem behavior is understanding that there's five functions that all problem behaviors land in. It's an acronym in the behavioral world called MEATS. And every time a child has a problem behavior, the function of that behavior falls into one of these five categories. And the first one is M stands for medical. That means that if they're having problems because they're in pain. The second one is E, that's for escaping. They want to get out of the unpreferred activity, want to get out of an unpreferred room, event, whatever.

The third one is A for attention seeking behavior. They're doing the behavior to get attention. The T stands for tangible. They want to get access to something or someone or an experience. The fifth one is sensory. That means it feels good to do this problem behavior. So if I have a child who scratches every time as his problem behavior, we can't lump them all into one box. We have to compartmentalize each incident of the behavior, even if it's eloping, if it's hitting, if it's tantruming to figure out the function of it, so we can create the solve.

So we can really go step by step through this. So if we have a child that maybe like this child that was screaming for the snacks. He wanted access to a tangible. Now, when the bomb is going, we don't reward bomb behavior with throwing a bunch of different cookies at him. There has to also be negative consequence in the sense of like, "Listen, this is an inappropriate behavior, you get nothing when you act this way, no attention, no whatever." And if they get physical, then we move them to a place where they can't get physical and they cannot get anything in that state.

Then we come out and we say, "Okay, we have to understand the ABC's of all behavior." So if we're not sure, for example, I know in that situation he wanted a tangible. He was crying because he wanted a tangible. If you're

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

not sure of the function, this is what you're going to do. You go to the ABC's of the behavior. The first one is antecedent. What happened before the behavior? What was going on before the behavior erupted. Then the B is for the behavior. What is the behavior? What does it look like? Who does he attack? Does he attack himself? What does it look like?

And then C is the consequence. What happens after they do this behavior? And once I understand that, now, let me tell you something, you're not going to be able to do your ABC's in the middle of holding this kid down. It's got to be like, I have to take a step back, get out of my fight or flight, and then go back and look at the function. And then once I understand the function I can always create a solve.

Lisa: Yeah, that all makes sense. That's very much in line with training and work that we've done over the years with my son. And so what this sounds like to me, Michelle, is one, it's very tailormade to very specific situations. So when clients come to you, they're not getting like, "Here is what you do generally."

Michelle: That's how they want to approach it too. A mom will come to me and say, "My kid just smacks himself in the head so hard and that's all he ever does." And that's the fight or flight response when you look at it like that. Because I want him to stop. He's hurting himself. He's hitting himself so hard. And I want it to stop. When we're looking at it like that we're not really looking at it like I want to solve for this, I just want to put the fire out. And that's how it [inaudible]. We've got to stop putting fire out and just instead of looking at this from the battlefield, I need you to get that aerial view.

What happened here from every aspect? And I have to understand that just because he scratches for the cookies doesn't mean it's the same function when he scratches when the therapist comes in and he doesn't want to work with them. Do you see what I'm saying? And I have to understand what caused it so I can create the solve. Solving for a tangible is going to be very different than solving for a sensory reason, solving for attention

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

seeking behaviors can be very different than solving for escaping. See what I'm saying?

I created this guide, it's called the Autism Mommy's Survival Guide For Any Problem Behavior. It's free and I'll send it to you and you can share it with your podcast people.

Lisa: Perfect.

Michelle: But basically what it is, is it just basically talks about the MEATS. It talks about you can't solve, you can't do the ABC's in the moment. You have to give yourself a minute. You have to calm down and even if it's a day or two, depending on how traumatic the event was, to go back and say, "Okay, I need to analyze the data of exactly what happened before, what did the actual behavior look like and what happened right after? And then see, how can I handle this differently next time to get a different outcome?"

Lisa: I'm curious to your perspective on two things and one of the things is that I have always found mind blowing as a rule follower is that kids and it seems to be, I don't want to say especially Autism kids, but I've seen it a lot in Autism kids is that all attention is good attention. And I think that kind of blows parents' mind. It's like while I'm taking the iPad away. I'm doing all this stuff and he's still doing it. And I had to learn that, the dance I was in with my son where he would explode, I would explode and then I would comfort him.

Michelle: Yeah, I know, it's to payout, you just reinforce the behavior.

Lisa: Exactly. And I learned that. Then when I stopped it my son was like, "Whoa, wait a second here, lady."

Michelle: Yeah. And then there's the thing too. So basically what happens is we've got to undo some of the habits that we get into as parents. So just to explain how negative attention and positive attention to a child are equally as valuable and I've looked at this too. One of the things that I've

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

learned, and I agree with it, is that attention, no matter how you receive it, means that I matter to you. I have your time. I have your attention even if it's not the desired way to get attention. I matter in your life. I'm valuable to you.

So I'm going to take it any way I can get it even it means I'm going to put me into getting aggressive, getting a time out, I still get that time with you. So when I have a child where I see a lot of that, that's your cue as a parent, I want to give them more, load on lots of attention when they're doing shit right.

Lisa: Yes. Alright, Michelle, we have covered so much and I know that you have so much more to offer, but I also know you have your own podcast.

Michelle: Yes, I do. We just launched *The Autism Mom's Potty Talk Podcast*, so yes.

Lisa: I love it. Tell us where we can find you, how we can support you and you say there is a couple of free offers that you have or freebies, tell us everything and we'll link it in the comment.

Michelle: Perfect. So we have *The Autism Mom's Potty Talk Podcast*. We're going to be offering a giveaway. We're going to be giving a scholarship to the masterclass. So if you sign up to the podcast, you'll hear all about that. You can also follow me on Instagram, that's Michelle with two L's B as in boy, Rogers R-O-G-E-R-S.

And I also have and I'll just give this to Lisa as well, I have a 10 minute video training, a free 10 minute video training that really tells you about my journey with my daughter. She had language, she lost it. So she went from pre-verbal to sign language to word approximations to speaking. And it's really a 10 minute video beautifully done. Better than I could even explain our story and I'm happy to share that with you guys as well.

Ep #73: Potty Talk and All Things Autism with Michelle B. Rogers

Lisa: Well, thank you so much. I am so happy to have had you on this podcast. I am so happy to have met you, a fellow Autism mom coach who is also doing work that is so needed in this world. There is just not enough resources out there for us and so I'm glad to know you. I'm glad for what you are doing.

And I encourage anyone who is struggling in the areas that Michelle helps with to reach out to Michelle, to follow Michelle. You will be inspired. You might be a little scared because she does not mess around. But it comes from a place never of judgment, but of so much passion and compassion. So please follow her and support her and thank you again, Michelle.

Michelle: It was my pleasure.

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.