

Ep #77: Defining Success for Your Child with Autism (MVP)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Lisa Candra

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You are listening to episode 77 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, Defining Success for Your Child With Autism.

The school year is right around the corner or has already begun, depending on where you live, and of course, depending on whether you have school age children. Nevertheless, with each new school year, challenge or opportunity that our kids face, whether they are 2, 12 or 23, the topic of success is one that is important for us to consider or really to reconsider. This is because, generally speaking, what we think about when we think of success, i.e. good grades, activities, friends, going to college and getting a job is based on the standards for people who are neurotypical.

So then when we look at our children and compare them to their peers, there are often gaps, socially, emotionally and developmentally. And this can be really difficult to see all of the work, all of the effort, and there are still gaps. These gaps exist not because our children are not working hard or because we have not done enough to support them. They exist because the standards that are out there don't account for the differences that our children present.

That is why it is so important to decide what success means for your child on their terms. This does not mean that you don't challenge your child or have high expectations for them. It means that you have appropriate expectations, given the fact that they are Autistic plus, because most of our children with Autism also have another comorbid diagnosis.

When we do this, when we measure success by appropriate standards, standards tailored to our children, we can celebrate our kids' accomplishments and foster in them a sense of self-confidence. So that they continue to work towards their goals from a sense of being capable versus being behind. And we get to enjoy and celebrate our children for who they are and not who we think they should be based on standards that are not inclusive of who they are.

That's why for this week's episode, as school approaches or maybe it's already begun, I want to do a replay of an MVP podcast episode that I did

Ep #77: Defining Success for Your Child with Autism (MVP)

around this time last year. In this episode, I talk in detail about defining success for your child with Autism in a way that feels good to you and is supportive of them.

Now, listen, none of this is easy, we all know that. And I have firsthand experience with working really hard to support my child and seeing him work so hard, but still there are gaps between him and his peers. And as he's gotten older, those gaps have gotten bigger and that is really painful. If this is something that you are struggling with personally, I can help you with this. I understand the struggle and I also know how I can help you because I have helped myself through very similar situations.

So take a listen to this episode and if you are like, "Yes, but still I need some help, I'm not feeling great", schedule a complimentary consultation for my one-on-one coaching program. During the consultation, we'll talk about what you're struggling with and whether it makes sense for the two of us to work together. Alright with that, enjoy the episode.

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.

Okay, onto today's topic, defining success for neurodivergent children. I want to shine a light on how our beliefs about what success is, drives so much of the fear, anxiety and sadness of parenting a special needs child. This is because generally speaking our views of academic, social and emotional success for our school age children are based on standards, modeled on neurotypical children and imposed on everyone else.

Ep #77: Defining Success for Your Child with Autism (MVP)

And look, I am not saying that these standards are serving neurotypical children, but they certainly are not serving our neurodivergent children because they don't even account for them. Just think about the typical classroom rules. So, I pulled these from different classroom posters I found on Amazon, and teachers websites, and from a couple of school districts around the country. And here are some of the most common rules that I found.

First, follow directions the first time given. Okay, are you kidding me? Seriously, the first time, does that mean I can't ask questions? What if I didn't understand? What if the directions weren't clear? Use indoor voices. Okay, what does this mean? My voice is the same inside and outside, please explain. Be courteous and respectful at all times. Okay, does this mean looking people in the eye? Because that's going to be a problem. Or does this mean that I can't hold my ears when my classmate with the squeaky voice is talking? Because again, a problem.

Four. Actively participate in class discussions. By actively do you mean running around the classroom? Probably not. Five. Stay seated during classroom activities and events. Okay, no, that's just not happening.

These are pretty daunting standards for most children but nearly impossible for neurodivergent kids. Neurodivergent children measured by these standards are not being set up for success. They are being set up for judgment. And here is the thing, these standards modeled on neurotypical people are everywhere, classroom rules, school curriculum, testing, there is virtually no area of our children's lives where they are not being compared against a standard that does not account for their uniqueness. Again, standards that see their uniqueness as a problem.

As long as we are participating in the society we really can't get away from these standards. But that said, we don't have to adopt them as our personal standards of success. Now, this is so much easier said than done because we have been breathing this air for a long time. But I do think that there is so much benefit to challenging these standards of success and

Ep #77: Defining Success for Your Child with Autism (MVP)

creating our own because when we don't, here's what I see happening. First, we see our children's differences as problems to be solved.

There is a standard of what 'normal' kids should be doing and our kids aren't doing it. So, time to get to work and make them as normal as possible. Again, whenever I say normal, imagine it in quotes, and what normal means I mean it's really anyone's guess. Now, no judgment here. Being normal essentially means being safe, to the primitive our brains and our nervous systems who just want to keep us safe and protect our young, being just like everyone else is safety. Of course, we want to feel safe.

Of course, we want our children to be safe. But just ask yourself, what is more dangerous to your child, being different or believing that there is a problem, being different or believing that there is something wrong with them because they are different?

The second thing I see happening is we don't see our children. When we are hyper aware of all the things that make our kids not like the others and hyper focused on their deficits we are not able to see them, who they are. We only see what we believe is wrong with them. And because of this we really are missing out.

Third, When we are not defining success for ourselves we don't really celebrate the small stuff. And for our kids the small stuff is actually the huge stuff. So, for example, your child is five years old and they are finally potty trained, woohoo, so exciting. And while you are thrilled by this and you are excited, you kind of temper your excitement with, well, I mean they should have been potty trained by the time they were two. I mean, five years old, that's way too old.

Or let's just say your eight year old finally knows how to recite their ABCs and again you're super proud and you really are excited for them but you remind yourself, well, I mean he is eight years old after all, he should have learned this when he was in kindergarten. So, you see what I'm saying here. You're excited but not really. You're excited but then you're still

Ep #77: Defining Success for Your Child with Autism (MVP)

comparing it to the model of what you think it should have been, instead of just believing that this is an amazing success, period.

So, these are just some of the consequences that I see of not defining success for ourselves. We suffer, our relationships with our kids suffer and our relationships with ourselves suffer. But here's the good news, you do get to decide what success means for you even if no one agrees with you. You get to decide that your child is a raving success even if they never meet an IEP goal, even if they never play a sport, even if they never step foot into an integrated classroom.

To do so though you need to challenge your own mental rigidity and all or nothing thinking about what it means to be a success. But to do this we need to challenge our own mental rigidity and all or nothing thinking about what it means to be a success. We need to challenge the standards that we have been force fed all of our lives to do this. But when we do this we can focus on our children's strengths and potential instead of counting their deficits and constantly trying to catch up.

And when we do this we get to see our children for who they are and not who we think they should be. Here is what I challenge you to do. Finish the following sentence, my child is successful because. And then put your brain to work on finding evidence of your child's success. You can do this by asking yourself questions like, how is my child strong? How are they resourceful? How are they hardworking? How are they loving and kind? Why is my child the hardest working person I know?

What are some examples of my child displaying their genius in a way that is not capable of testing or standards? What are some examples of my child displaying genius in a way that is not capable of being captured by any standardized test? And then finally, every day challenge yourself to spot a success, any success, big or small.

Maybe success is getting on a school bus with a new busy driver. Maybe it is wearing headphones in a crowded lunch room. Maybe it is trying to play a sport at lunchtime. Maybe it is communicating a want or a need. Maybe it

Ep #77: Defining Success for Your Child with Autism (MVP)

is rebounding from a setback or a disappointment. Put your brain to work on spotting success. We are so good at spotting deficits because really that's what we've been trained to do and there's no judgment there. But you can put your brain to work on spotting success and I promise you, you will find them.

And you can make this visual for yourself and your child by creating a success jar. This is just a clear jar or a container where you can add a note each day as an example of their success. This will help you remember especially on the hard days that there is always light. And you can also use it as a tool to foster self-confidence in your child by encouraging them to add their own examples of their own success.

Okay, that's it for this episode but before I go I want to remind you, the school year is fast approaching and now is the perfect time to have a coach. So, if you are interested in learning how you can transform your relationship with Autism, with your child and with yourself, I encourage you, schedule a one-on-one consultation with me and let's see if coaching is the right fit for you. Now is the perfect time as we begin the new school year to step out on a completely different foot.

So, you can do that on my website, theautismmomcoach.com. If you have any questions for me you can email me at lisa@theautismmomcoach.com. Thank you so much for listening and I will 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.