

Ep #87: Talking Back to Fear



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With Your Host

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You are listening to episode 87 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, Talking Back to Fear.

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. Before we get to today's episode, I wanted to announce that I will be hosting open coaching calls in November. The theme of these calls are going to be the podcast. We're going to talk about fear. We're going to talk about processing fear. We're going to talk about resentment and the holidays. And you are going to get a chance to be coached by me on these topics or to watch other moms like you being coached.

In order to join these calls, you need to be on my mailing list. So if you are not already, go to the show notes and subscribe now. If you are following me on Instagram or Facebook, you can go to my link, [inaudible] link and hit subscribe to mailing list. Once you're on the mailing list, you will be the first to receive updates about when these calls are going to be, the theme, and you're going to have your own chance to be coached.

Alright on to today's topic. We are going to conclude our three-part series on fear with talking back to fear. I chose this order on purpose because I think it's important to recognize first the significant physical manifestation of fear in our bodies and learn how to create safety for ourselves, to process the fear without judgment before we begin the process of talking back to

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fear. Because the fact is, if we are still in a fight, flight state, we're listening to the fear. We're not yet ready to talk back to it.

So what exactly does it mean to talk back to fear? I want you to recall from episode five, the think, feel, act cycle. Thoughts in our brains generate feelings in our bodies, which in turn motivate our actions and our inactions. In this cycle fear is the feeling resulting from our thoughts. So to talk back to fear, we must become aware of the thoughts, both subconscious and conscious, that are fueling and creating this emotion for us.

Remember from our discussion about the nervous system, when you're in fight, flight, emotions are high and your brain only has access to the playlist of thoughts that fear is feeding you. It doesn't have access to rational thinking. So when you're in that fight, flight state, you're not distinguishing your thoughts from reality, you're just believing your thoughts. And these thoughts, they're real, but these are just thoughts. Yes, they are real in that you are having them, that you are believing them and that they are spiking your cortisol but that does not make them true or helpful. Just the opposite.

When you are in a fear state your brain is offering you tons of thoughts that are far from true or logical. These thoughts are also known as thought errors or cognitive distortions, which are exaggerated or irrational thought patterns. And these irrational and exaggerated thought patterns run rampant when your body is in a state of fight, flight. Let me give you six examples of cognitive distortions that I'm betting you have engaged in or are engaging in on a regular basis.

First, black and white thinking or all or nothing thinking. This sounds like he will never talk. She will never have friends. This will never get better. Jumping to conclusions or mind reading, no one cares about our struggles. No one understands. People are ignoring us. They don't care. Personalization, listen up, we all do this one. This is my fault. Something I did or I didn't do caused this.

Number four, shoulding using language that is self-critical, that puts a lot of pressure on you. I should be doing more. I should be doing something right

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now for my child. I should understand how to fix this. I should be the one to fix this.

Number five, future tripping. This is when you're going into the future. It will never get better. If it's like this, what's it going to be like when my kid is 10, 15, 20? What's it going to be like when I'm not around? You get the idea.

And number six, catastrophizing, which is a combination of fortune telling and all or nothing thinking, where you're just blowing things way out of proportion. Another call from the school today, they're going to kick him out. I'm going to have to leave work early. I'll probably get fired. If I get fired, how am I going to pay for all of his therapy? He's never going to get better. Or he hit his sister. He is a bully. He's not going to have friends.

If any of this sounds familiar to you and I'm guessing that it does, the good news is these are cognitive distortions. These are blown out of proportion thoughts. But the problem here, when you're thinking thoughts over and over again, well, we have the tendency to sometimes make them true. So, for instance, if you're thinking that no one understands and people are leaving you out, then you're likely also to hide. You're likely also to judge other people. You're likely also to not engage with other people.

And so sometimes when we are letting these cognitive distortions run the show, when we are letting our fear thoughts run the show and we are believing them. We get into these rhythms where they feel true because we're making them true or they feel true because that's all we are living. We are never stepping outside of the thought and examining it. That's what it means to talk back to your fear. So I am going to give you three simple steps and we're going to call it the three C's, for you to start talking back to your fear.

And the first is catch the thought. You can't talk back to your fear thoughts unless you notice them in the first place. Now remember, just because you're thinking it, doesn't make it true. So you have to start to do the work of recognizing when you're having a fear driven thought. This is what it

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means to catch the thought. This is the difference between you having the thought and you observing the thought.

And one way to do this is to create a little bit of distance between yourself and the thought. You can do this with language like my brain is telling me that, insert the thought. I'm having the thought that, insert the thought. And just by using that phraseology you're creating some distance between yourself and the thought.

Number two, challenge it, ask yourself, is this a cognitive distortion? Is this thought even true? What evidence is there to suggest otherwise? Even if this thought is true and this is for all of you who like to catastrophize, then what? Remember, the thing that you're afraid of might happen, does that mean you just shrivel up and die? No. You have choices to make.

So if you are in the habit of catastrophizing, make your brain go to the worst case scenario and then ask yourself and then what? Because in that way you actually are talking back to your fear. Instead of being afraid of the what if or the worst case scenario, you're actually confronting it and you're problem solving. And my favorite way to challenge any thought, because guess what? When we're in a fight, flight state, we could convince ourselves that our scariest thoughts are true.

So the question I like to ask myself always, is this thought helpful? And what that means is when you're thinking this thought, how are you showing up? Is it freaking you out? Are you stressing out? Are you frozen? Is it helpful for you to think this thought? And I'll give you a perfect example.

I've shared in the podcast the situation with my son, where he has been removed from multiple residential schools. Now, if I have the thought, or if I let the thought, we're never going to find a place for him, if I let that thought run me, I'm going to be under the covers and not getting out of bed until I don't know when. This is not a useful thought for me. It scares the crap out of me. It makes me think of all of the things that can go wrong, all of the things that have gone wrong, all of the ways it might be my fault. This is not a useful thought.

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Same for you, if you're having the thought, my child is never going to talk. How is that helping you? Maybe you think it's going to motivate you, but that's actually not really what fear does, not long term. You're going to just create more stress for yourself. It's not a useful thought.

And then finally, the third C, choose. You get to decide how you want to think and you get to decide how you want to relate to a thought. Because here's the thing, when I say you get to decide what you want to think. That does not mean you are not going to have crappy thoughts, you will, but you get to decide how you want to relate to these thoughts. Do you want to invite them in? Do you want to indulge them? Do you want to find more evidence for them?

Or do you want to hold them lightly like a cactus and just observe them, just notice them or like a cloud going by, just let it go by without attaching to it. Because when we attach to our thoughts, we find more evidence for them. When we find more evidence for them, we put ourselves deeper and deeper into that fight, flight state or even a state of shutdown. So when I say you get to choose how you think, you get to choose what you want to think on purpose, so what you want to think instead of the thought that's scaring you.

But you also get to choose how you want to relate to the crappy thoughts when they come knocking on your door because they will. Your brain is a pattern making a machine. You've thought these thoughts before. There are certain things that trigger these thoughts for you and then you run with them. That's the part we want to pause, instead of running with them, instead of indulging them, noticing them and letting them go.

Alright, that is it for today's episode on talking back to fear, the three C's catch it, challenge it, choose it. If you want more practice with this skill, again, get on my mailing list, because this is one of the issues we are going to coach about in my upcoming coaching calls this November. Alright, thank you so much for listening, thank you so much for being here and I will see you next week.

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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.