

Ep #116: Picking Your Battles



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With Your Host

Lisa Candra

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You are listening to episode 116 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, Picking Your Battles.

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. In this podcast, I am going to share with you the tools and strategies you need so you can fight like hell for your child without burning out. Let's get to it.

Hello, everyone and welcome to the podcast. I am so glad you are here and I hope you are doing well. Before we get started, I want to talk to you about my limited six week program to set you and your child up for success this summer. As an Autism mom, I know full well that summers are not easy breezy for us, in fact, they can be the most stressful time of the year.

Changes in routine, lack of structure, limited support, all of that has a profound impact on our child and we are left juggling so many things, trying to find camps that will actually accept them. Hoping that they don't get kicked out of those camps, balancing between camps and extended school year and therapies. There's a lot going on during the summer. And then you add to it things like community pools and barbecues and 4th of July parties and vacations. And all of those things plus Autism are really challenging and just thinking about this can exhaust us before we even get started.

I don't want that for you and I don't want that for your child. I want to help you set your child up for a successful summer, and that starts with you. That's why in this six week program, we are going to hit the ground running. Think of this as your Autism mom bootcamp. I am going to cover with you everything you need to know to create a successful summer for your child. And we are going to work together to create your plan. And you will have my support throughout the summer as you implement the plan.

And know this, things will go wrong, obstacles will arise and you will know exactly what to do and how to handle it. I want you walking into the summer feeling capable and confident that you can handle whatever comes your way and that you can do it with grace. You're not going to let

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disappointments take you out. You're not going to waste time beating yourself up. You're going to get back up and you're going to keep going. Because you're going to know exactly what to do, and you're going to have my support in doing it.

So, run, don't walk to my website, theautismmomcoach.com and schedule your consultation now. If this sounds good to you and you're all in and you don't even need the consult, let's go. You can email me or message me now and let's figure out our date and time for meeting to get you ready and to get your child ready for a successful summer.

Alright, now on to today's topic, picking your battles. This topic was inspired by my Facebook group, The Resilient Autism Moms group. We were having a discussion last week about boundaries, creating them and enforcing them. A few moms pointed out that their approach to enforcing boundaries was along the lines of picking their battles, which I completely understand. I think this is such a great point, especially in the context of kids with Autism that hard, fast rules never really work. And we always need to be able to be flexible and to pivot for what works for our child. And we are the best people to be making those decisions.

If you are picking your battles, if you're evaluating situations and making on the spot decisions about whether the decision to say no or to enforce the boundary, however, that looks, would create more harm than good. Then that is your call to make. This goes beyond picking your battles. Picking your battles doesn't really do justice to what's happening here. It's way more nuanced.

You are using all of your knowledge of your child, of the situation, evaluating their level of dysregulation, your environment, where you are, what time of the day, where you are, are there people around. There are so many things that are going into this decision and I want you to recognize that and to give yourself credit for it. Maybe picking my battles to you feels strategic and empowering, but maybe it doesn't. Maybe it feels defeating. Maybe you feel defeated when you say that. Maybe you feel like you don't really have boundaries or you're not good at enforcing them.

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I think this is an easy rabbit hole to go down as Autism parents, because we're probably not always enforcing boundaries the way we think we should or the way the old school disciplinarian in us thinks that we should. Kids should do things because we said so and that's it. And that's not the way it works with our kids with Autism. It's really probably not the way it works with most kids, period, but it certainly does not work with our kids.

So, I really want you to acknowledge yourself for that and give yourself credit for that. You're not being lazy, you're not bailing out. You're making a strategic decision by being flexible and that may be exactly what's called for in the moment. The point of boundaries is not to have rigid rules, it's to create expectations and follow through, and sometimes that's possible, and sometimes it's not.

However, it's one thing to not enforce a boundary in the moment because you've assessed that it's not the appropriate time, the appropriate place, that the consequences of enforcing the boundary would far exceed any benefit. And it's really important to recognize that with our children when we enforce any boundary, we will experience resistance, a lot of it.

If our children are used to coming home every day, throwing their book bag on the floor, running to the refrigerator to get a popsicle. And then one day we say to them, "Hey, book bag needs to be hung up or you're not getting the popsicle." They are going to lose their shit 100%. And so I don't want you to confuse picking your battles with avoiding the discomfort that will come with creating and enforcing any boundary with your child. Because if you do this, then there will be no boundaries for anything because our kids are going to flip their shit.

I know for my son whenever I introduced a new boundary and I'll tell you what, when I started introducing boundaries, they were new to him because I didn't have many for a while. And when I did, he was like, "Wait a second, what's this? This is new. We've never done this before. What are you talking about?"

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So, there was this one time he mouthed off to me, I forget what he said to me. I think I heard him curse at me under his breath. I said, "Alright, hand over your Nintendo Switch." I unplugged his PlayStation. I took the phone and that was that. And he was looking at me stunned. He's like, "I just don't understand." And I said, "I told you that if you cursed at me that I would remove your electronics." And he's still looking at me like I have 10 heads. And he said, "Yeah, but I have done that before but you never took my stuff before." And he was right.

Our kids are going to resist the boundaries. They are going to huff and puff. They are going to flip out. And I think that part of creating and enforcing those boundaries is for us to expect that so when it happens, we're not freaking out by it. We're not even viewing it as a problem. We're viewing it as something we expected. And this right there, our ability to feel that discomfort without giving into it, that is the way through. That is the path to actually having and enforcing boundaries. It's not pleasant and it's really loud and our human biological instinct is to make that shit stop.

So that sometimes looks like giving in and giving up. If you've ever done this, don't shame yourself about it. That is not the way forward. We all do, and it's okay, but just know that you really do have the ability to grow your tolerance for the discomfort. But sometimes just know that the discomfort that your child is going to express to you, that is the growth.

I remember coaching a client on this issue last year. I think it was midway through the school year she decided that she wanted her son to hang up his book bag when he got home from school. And up to that point he hadn't been hanging up his book bag at all. He'd been throwing it on the floor and running to the refrigerator to get his popsicle. So, imagine his reaction the first day where she says "No, you're going to hang up the book bag." And now, as we all know, hanging up the book bag is not heavy lifting, it takes three seconds.

And they got into a battle of the wills. The kid was like, "No, that's not how we roll, I get my popsicle." And mom had to stay firm and stay strong and it

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was not pleasant. But guess what? The child eventually did hang up the book bag and then he got his popsicle.

Another example with my son, when he was playing certain video games and he lost, he would yell and scream from the other room and it was really jolting to me. I didn't like it at all and it just, it was too much. And so I told him, "If you yell and scream while you're playing the video games, I'm turning off the Wi-Fi." And then he wouldn't have been able to access them at all and after a couple of times of doing that, he stopped yelling and screaming during Zelda or whatever he was playing but that was not smooth sailing. There was a lot of screaming, there was a lot of banging, there was a lot of crying. This is what they call the extinction burst.

Our kids' outbursts actually get worse around whatever it is before they get better. And this definitely was the case with my son but eventually he knew, if I scream or I yell during this game, Wi-Fi's off and I'm done. Now, if we're in a doctor's office or in an airport while our plane was delayed, and my son had an outburst, I probably wouldn't take the video game away from him.

In those moments when my son is waiting to get a needle and I need him to stay in the waiting room or we're in a crowded airport, I am going to assess that situation and decide in that moment this boundary will not be enforced. I'm going to give him a warning, but I'm not going to take the iPad or the Nintendo Switch away in this moment because the juice just isn't worth the squeeze there. The consequences of doing that to him, to me and to the general public just aren't worth it.

To sum up, when creating and enforcing boundaries for our children, we are always doing it from our position as the experts on our children. Our decision to enforce a boundary in any given moment is subject to our assessment of the situation. And there will be times where we will decide based on the circumstances of the situation, that we're not going to do it and that is okay. Just because you don't enforce a boundary in some situations does not mean the boundary does not exist and it does not mean that you relax or are lazy with enforcing boundaries.

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But that said, the concept of picking your battles should not be overused to avoid any situation where enforcing the boundary would create discomfort for you and your child. Because boundaries, especially when we first start to create them and enforce them, they will do exactly that. And if we're ever going to get over that hump and create boundaries for our children and enforce those boundaries, we have to be prepared for that discomfort. We have to be able to stand steady even when our kids are losing their shit, because that is the path forward. That is where the growth is for both us and for them.

Now, look, this all sounds really simple, but it's not easy, it's not easy to implement. When our kids are melting down our biological response is to want to make it stop and make it stop quickly. And most of the time we're not dealing with one-off tantrums, we're dealing with a lot of them, is to shut it down quickly. I completely get that and I also know that you can teach yourself how to expand your window of tolerance, your capacity to handle your child's meltdowns, their discomfort, their whining, their crying, their protesting.

And when you do this, you're going to be able to stand steady and to be the solid object while they lose it. And the more you're able to do that, the faster you will help them calm down and co-regulate. This entire process from start to finish, it really starts with us. It starts with how we are showing up, the energy that we are bringing to the situation, how we are handling it. All of our energy, our level of stress, all of that factors into how our children react and overreact to us.

If this is something you are struggling with, I can help you with this. This is exactly what I do in my coaching program. I teach my clients how to understand their own triggers, regulate themselves so that when their child goes high and they're out of control and they're dysregulated, you can stay steady. You can stay steady and you can stay in control. And the more you do this, the more confident you're going to be enforcing boundaries and letting your child be upset and be dysregulated because you will know that you can handle it.

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Again, if this is something you struggle with, I urge you, schedule your consultation now. I can help you with this. You don't have to live a life of walking on eggshells and picking your battles. You can show up to these situations feeling calm and confident in your ability to handle anything.

Alright, that is it for this week's episode. If you are ready to set yourself and your child up for your best summer yet, if you are ready to start creating and enforcing boundaries like a boss, schedule your consultation with me at theautismmomcoach.com. Alright, 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.