

Ep #118: The Oxygen Mask Fallacy



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With Your Host

Lisa Candra

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You are listening to episode 118 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, The Oxygen Mask Fallacy.

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 and enjoying the summer weather. I am so glad it's hot outside because I just love the heat. I love the sunshine. I love being able to walk outside without a coat. I don't love the pollen, but no one does.

So now it's getting hot outside, it's summer time, the kids are out of school, I thought that this was a perfect time for a new take on my most popular training, How to Keep Your Cool During a Meltdown. I created this training a few years ago, first for myself and as a way to teach myself how to stay calm and regulated while my son was dysregulated and was having a lot of behaviors, and aggressive. But since then, there's so much that's happened in my personal life, what I thought was a 10 in terms of behaviors, apparently wasn't, it was only a six.

And so, I have had a lot more experience with dealing with aggression, with dealing with behaviors both in my own life and from coaching so many clients that have come to me with similar issues. So, I want to take everything I've learned and distill it into a new training that I am going to do live on June 17th at 7:00pm Eastern.

This is going to be in a webinar format. The webinar is open to everyone, but you must register for it. In order to register, go to the episode notes and click on the link. If you are already on my emailing list, you're going to get an invitation in your inbox. If you want to be on my email list because you never want to miss an invite like this, you can get on it by going to my

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website theautismmomcoach.com, wait for the popup. You can enter your e-mail address and you will get this invite in your inbox.

Alright, onto today's topic, the oxygen mask fallacy. I've been meaning to do a podcast about the oxygen mask analogy that gets thrown in our face every time we tell someone who doesn't have an Autistic child, that we feel tired, frustrated, overwhelmed, whatever it is. They tell us, "Well, you need to put your oxygen mask on first." And I find this incredibly irritating. Not because I don't agree with the importance of self-care and its connection to how we show up for our children.

It's just because for me and so many of my clients that the oxygen mask analogy is really unrelatable. Because first of all, if we're taking it literally, which, yes, I understand it's an analogy, but the analogy is based on a situation where you're in an airplane, the cabin pressure is falling for whatever reason, and you need to put on your oxygen mask or you're going to pass out. And so, you have the decision, do I put it on my child and risk passing out and not being able to help myself or my child or do I put it on myself first?

That's an emergency situation. That's a once in a lifetime, if it ever happens to you situation. It's a rescue and sure if that is what we are dealing with as Autism parents, things that come up once in a lifetime, things that are really rare, yeah, maybe we would put the oxygen mask on first for ourselves. But the truth is, is that the challenges that we face are constant and unrelenting. It's actually not possible for us to put the oxygen mask on every time. And all of us know that guess what? You can operate without the mask, sometimes quite well. We have all done it.

We have all sacrificed sleep, nutrition, connection with other people, and sometimes our own safety to put our children's needs first. So the whole, you have to put the oxygen mask on first. Do you? I don't think so. Is it preferable? Maybe, but not necessarily, not in our situations, not in the lives that we live. And so, for these reasons, I just find this analogy unrelatable.

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It really misses the mark for me, but that's not really why it annoys me. The real reason is when I hear people say this to me who are not Autism parents, it comes off as so dismissive. I mean it is a cliché after all, and it's a really overused one when it comes to self-care. But it implies that self-care is just this simple choice that will instantly solve all the challenges of Autism parenting and we know that that's not true.

And second, it really oversimplifies our day-to-day realities. The oxygen mask has nothing to do with living in a situation where you are facing back-to-back emergencies as a way of life. Living with your head on a swivel. Managing meltdowns and sensory overload. Creating structure and routine. Educating other people about our kids. Navigating the educational and medical systems. These are not brief and intense bursts, they are ongoing and unrelenting challenges, rinse and repeat.

But no matter what's going on, we get fed this one-size-fits-all prescription. You need to put your oxygen mask on first. I've heard this so many times in the last few years and there have been times I've wanted to shout, "When, at what point when I'm working full-time, driving my son back and forth to PHP, sitting on the phone with an insurance company, in line at a pharmacy or going back and forth about whether or not I should call 911. When the hell am I putting this mask on?"

This is the one-size-fits-all prescription that we hear every time. You have to put your oxygen mask on. And actually, it doesn't feel good. It feels like another thing I have to do, another thing that I'm not doing well, another thing that I'm failing at. I'm working my ass off. I'm working full-time. I'm driving my son back and forth to PHP programs, back and forth to the doctor. I'm sitting on the phone with the insurance companies for hours, in line at a pharmacy, doing all of these things.

And I'm hearing, "Well, you have to put your oxygen mask on." And you just want to scream. Again, not because I don't see the value in it, I absolutely do, and I will be truthful here. Whenever I hear it from another Autism parent, I'm like, "Yeah, you're right, absolutely." It's just a different experience when you're hearing it from someone guessing, at least for me.

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I drop my defenses and I'm able to see the wisdom in it instead of feeling defensive and isolated.

So, if you are ever feeling a bit irked when other people tell you, this may be why. It doesn't feel good. It doesn't feel like support and it feels beyond reach. So, what to do. Well, first, I am going to make a suggestion on what not to do based on my own experiences. And right now, I'm going to be a little bit vulnerable and tell you that when I feel unseen or misunderstood, I have a tendency to dig in. Maybe this is the lawyer in me. Whether I'm arguing out loud or silently fuming in my head I find myself listing all the reasons why I can't take time for myself.

It's as if I'm trying to prove them wrong to show them I'm not exaggerating, I'm not being dramatic and I'm not being lazy. I'm desperately trying to make them understand the gravity of my situation. But here's the thing, by doing this, I'm essentially trying to prove a point by making myself feel worse. And then it becomes this vicious cycle that only leads to further neglect of my own needs and my own wellbeing.

If you find yourself in this situation where you want to dig in, stop. The truth is, other people won't get it, they can't. No matter how much you explain, argue or try to convince them, they will never truly comprehend the depth of your struggles and the constant demands that you face. And that's okay, it's not their reality, and it doesn't have to be.

But here's what's not okay, you digging in deeper into all the reasons why you can't take care of yourself just to try to prove something to other people that they will never understand. This will only backfire on you because it perpetuates the cycle of self-neglect and frustration. Instead, in these situations be your own oxygen mask. Remind yourself that while they might not get it, you do. You understand the challenges you face, the sacrifices you make, and the unrelenting nature of your responsibilities.

So, when you feel the urge to dig in and prove a point, step back, breathe and acknowledge your feelings and validate your own experience. Don't let

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someone else's lack of understanding or one size fits all prescription for all of your problems dictate how you treat yourself. Be your own oxygen mask.

Alright, that is it for today's episode. I hope you enjoyed it. I hope it was helpful 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.