

Ep #119: How to Stop Worrying (MVP)



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Lisa Candra

Ep #119: How to Stop Worrying (MVP)

You are listening to episode 119 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, Worrying and How to Stop It.

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. For this week's episode of the podcast, I am going to do a replay of two previous episodes, what is worrying and how to stop it, all in one. I wanted to replay this episode because I think worrying is something that we can always be talking about because we are always doing it. And as necessary as we believe worrying is, because it's become such a habit, it's actually not. And I want to revisit that by replaying these two very important episodes.

But before we get to that, I want to remind you that next week on June 17th at 7:00pm Eastern, I am doing a live presentation of my very popular training, Keep Your Cool During a Meltdown. But this is going to be the 2.0 version. I originally created this training about three years ago, right in the middle of the COVID lockdown from everything that I was learning about how to keep my cool inside of a 1200 square foot apartment with a teenager with high anxiety and raging hormones.

But since then, a lot of life has happened and I've had the opportunity both personally and with my clients, to apply these principles over and over again. And as things have gotten more challenging in my own life and clients have been bringing me bigger and bigger challenges, I've evolved the way that I think about this and the way that I teach it. And that is what I want to share with you next Monday afternoon.

So, this training is open to everyone, but you must register for it. You can do that by going to the link in the episode notes and registering there. Also, if you follow me on social media, on Instagram and Facebook, I'm going to

Ep #119: How to Stop Worrying (MVP)

be posting it in my stories, in the comments, in my bio. And of course, for those of you on my email list, you are getting plenty of reminders to register for this event.

So again, this coming Monday, June 17th at 7:00pm Eastern, we're going to go for about an hour and a half. Half of that's going to be teaching. I'm going to answer questions and I'm going to tell you how you can do this work with me one-on-one as your coach, as somebody who has not only developed these tools. But I have implemented them in my life over and over again and I've taught them to clients who have had great success.

In addition, while the topic here is keeping your cool during the meltdown, the things that I am going to teach you can be applied to any situation where you feel triggered, where you feel reactive. And instead of reacting from your emotion, you want to respond deliberately and calmly but I teach you about meltdowns can be applied to anything in your life, calls from the school, IEP meetings, disputes with your spouse.

Any time you feel yourself getting activated and ready to react, this training can help you. So again, go to the episode notes and register now and I hope to see you there. Alright, and with that, let's talk about worrying.

We are going to talk about something that we do all of the time because we are humans with human brains. And because of this we have the amazing ability to mentally simulate future events. We can think ahead of time.

We can anticipate obstacles or problems and we can take steps to prevent them or mitigate them in some cases. This is truly an amazing tool that we have but it is also one that we use against ourselves because we confuse our ability to think ahead of time, anticipate obstacles and course correct with the ability to bring certainty and control to the future. And of course, we can't do this at all. This is just an illusion. It's a really uncomfortable reality that we would rather avoid, so what do we do instead? We worry.

So, what is worry, after all, let's start with a definition. Worry as a verb is defined, to give way to anxiety or unease, to allow one's mind to dwell on

Ep #119: How to Stop Worrying (MVP)

difficulty or troubles. So, worrying is an action. It is something we do. And what do we all know about actions? If you've listened to episodes five and six of this podcast, the Think, Feel, Act Cycle and The Self-Coaching Model, you know that actions don't just happen out of nowhere, they all have a reason.

There's a circumstance in our life, we have a thought about it, the thought creates a feeling and the feeling drives an action. And in this case the action we are taking is we are worrying. So, let's just dig into this a bit. Why do we worry? What is the purpose of the action of worrying? Because our actions or our behaviors, if you will, just like our kids, they all serve a purpose. Maybe they are not effective but they still serve some purpose. We're doing it for a reason. So, what's the reason?

Well, some of us have the conscious belief that worrying is helpful. We think worrying motivates us to take action. But this is just wrong. When we are worrying the action we are taking is the worrying. When we are worrying we are not moving forward, we are not taking productive action, we are stuck. Some of us think worrying is preventative. If we worry long enough and hard enough then the thing we are worried about won't happen, or it just won't be that bad, or at least I'll be prepared.

And then of course some of us believe that worrying is just something you're supposed to do. I mean we're moms, we're moms of special needs kids. We're supposed to worry, it means we care. Now, not all of us consciously believe that worrying is helpful but as you know we have about 60,000 thoughts a day and most of them aren't conscious at all, they are subconscious. And whether we are aware of it or not many of us do have the subconscious belief that worrying is useful.

Again, after all, why would we do it? Actually, the crazy thing is that for chronic worriers, there is a reward loop that gets created because if you worry about everything there will be things that you worry about that either won't happen or aren't as bad as you expected. And you will consciously or subconsciously credit worry with a better outcome. But this is simply isn't true. It is a thinking error. It is similar to magical thinking which is the belief

Ep #119: How to Stop Worrying (MVP)

that one's thoughts and actions can influence the course of events in the world. Worrying is not magical. It is useless.

And the good news for all of us is that it's 100% optional. It is an action we are taking and we get to decide what we do and what we don't do. We always have a choice. But easier said than done. We have been honing this skill for a long, long time. Some of us worry so much that we don't even notice it, it's just like breathing. So, the first step in curbing this nasty brain habit, because ultimately that is what it is, is to notice it. Notice the behavior of worrying, notice when you're spending time spinning in your mind and then get curious.

Play detective with yourself like you do with your child, ask yourself, why am I worrying? And just write it all down, get it all out of your brain and onto paper. And then ask yourself, is this behavior moving me towards taking productive action? Is it keeping me stuck? What else could I do instead? Take the time to practice catching yourself and interrupting this neural loop. This is the first step in rewiring your brain, this is the first step in creating intentional thoughts and thinking on purpose.

This is the first step to reclaiming authority over your own life is deciding what you want to think, how you want to feel and the actions you want to take.

High school is just a couple of weeks away and I am surprised and happy but mostly surprised to say that I'm not worrying about it which is not how I handled the transition to middle school. I started worrying about middle school a full year before it even happened. I worried about how my son would handle a new school, more kids, new expectations. I also worried about how I would be able to support him while working full-time outside the home. And you know what happened? COVID happened.

We spent middle school in the same room, a year of worrying about the transition to middle school to be hit by a global pandemic and that's life, right? It reminds me of one of my favorite quotes by Mark Twain who said, "Some of the worst things in my life never even happened." This is so true.

Ep #119: How to Stop Worrying (MVP)

When I think of all the things I've spent time worrying about in my life, a lot of them never happened.

Like failing the bar exam which is the test that you have to take after you graduate from law school before you can be licensed to practice law. I spent so much time worrying about the bar exam that to this day and it has been almost 20 years to the day that I took the exam and I still have nightmares about it. All of that worrying and for what? It's not like the worrying helped me pass the exam. Of course, it didn't help me because it's useless.

Do you remember the song, Everyone is Free to Wear Sunscreen? It's a spoken word song by Baz Luhrmann. I will put the link in the show notes. And he makes the point that worrying is useless, much better than I do when he says, "Don't worry about the future, or worry but know that worrying is as effective as trying to solve an algebra equation by chewing bubblegum. The real troubles in your life are apt to be the things that never crossed your worried mind, the kind that blindsides you at 4:00pm on some idle Tuesday."

This one really hits home for me, the things you never even imagined to worry about like a global pandemic, or an Autism diagnosis. But here we are. In addition to being useless, worrying also keeps us stuck and prevents us from taking productive action. This is because when we are worrying that is what we are doing. It means we can't possibly be doing anything to make our lives better when we are actively worrying because the worry is taking up all of our brain space and all of our energy.

But like I said before, for so many of us, worrying is as natural as breathing, we hardly notice it. But once we do, once we catch ourselves in this nasty little brain habit we can choose not to do it. Like you know when you are about to watch a YouTube video and they give you the option to watch the entire commercial or to skip the ad? Well, imagine that worrying is the commercial. You can skip it. You don't need it. You do not need to buy what it is selling you anymore, thanks but no. Easier said than done, I know.

Ep #119: How to Stop Worrying (MVP)

Again, worrying is second nature to so many of us and it is so socially accepted and even expected for women, especially for mothers. But just because something is hard doesn't mean we can't do it, in fact just the opposite. So, let's get to the strategy that I want to teach you so that you can gain some control over this nasty little habit, it is called divide and conquer. Here's what you do.

Get out a piece of paper and divide it into three columns. At the top of the page, write down one thing that you are worried about. For example, my child's teacher is going on maternity leave and I am afraid they will not respond well to the transition. Then in the first column write down everything you do not have control over. This would be things like the teacher's pregnancy, who the replacement teacher is, whether that replacement teacher has experience with Autism, whether your child likes the replacement teacher.

For the things on the list where you have no control there is no use in spending your precious energy focusing on them. You have no control means move on. Now, you are going to have to make a conscious choice to redirect your brain every time it pops up and is like, "Hey, maybe you should start thinking about that thing you have zero control over." No, thank you, skip ad.

Then in column two write down what you do have control over. So, this would be things like previewing it to your child, creating a social story, working with the school to support the transition. These are the things that you can control. And then in the third column, for all of the things that are under your control, write down the actions you can take now to move closer to your goal which in this case is a smooth transition. This is how you divide and conquer.

Now, a reminder about the things you can control. Your children and other people do not belong on this list. What your kids do, what they think, how they feel are never ever in this column of things that you can control. Please remind yourself of this as often as you can because as parents we have bought the lie that we should be able to control our children. We can't.

Ep #119: How to Stop Worrying (MVP)

We can influence them but we can't control them. So, when you're putting together the list, remind yourself of this.

You can do all of the things and you can do them perfectly but ultimately what other people do and don't do, including our children, is not within our control.

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.