

## Ep #120: The Grief of Missing Out



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Lisa Candra

## Ep #120: The Grief of Missing Out

You are listening to episode 120 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, The Grief of Missing Out.

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. In this week's episode I want to give a voice and a name to the experience that so many Autism moms have of missing out on parenting experiences we expected and the childhood we imagined for our kiddos.

This is what I am calling GOMO, the grief of missing out, and it has two parts. There's the GOMO of our own experiences, of missing out being the parent we imagined being, cheering our kid from the sidelines of a soccer game, coaching basketball or going prom shopping. And the GOMO we feel watching our kids miss out or struggle to participate and enjoy experiences that they want for themselves.

This episode was inspired by some recent coaching sessions with clients about the end of the school year. The field trips, the field days, the ceremonies, the graduation parties, all things that look different for them and for their children. For example, one of my clients, her son, had field day this week and she spent a week prepping her child for field day. All the activities, what they would be, figuring out when he could take breaks in between activities. Having snacks at the ready for him so he could participate in field day with the rest of his friends.

And so, he had a great day which was nice, but being there and seeing how effortlessly the other kids moved from station to station and watching the other parents just sort of sitting back and taking pictures. It really hit my client just how different her experience is from other parents. And not only that, seeing her son there alongside of his peers really did highlight for her

## Ep #120: The Grief of Missing Out

the differences developmentally and socially emotionally, between her child and peers.

I have another client whose daughter is graduating eighth grade and she is one of several kids on the block who's graduating eighth grade and there's going to be a little party for them and everyone is really excited and really looking forward to it. And while my client is really proud of her child that she's graduating eighth grade, she's also terrified. She's terrified of high school, what that will look like for her child, how she will cope with a new school, with new people, with new routines.

So, while she is proud of her child, she's not feeling that excitement that she's watching the other parents experience and she's got some GOMO about this. And so, I will say to you what I've said to both of my clients is absolutely, of course you do, that's totally valid. This does not mean you don't love your child. It does not mean you're not proud of them. It does not mean you're unappreciative or ungrateful. It means you are experiencing a loss, a loss of your expectations of what you wanted it to be, what you hoped it would be.

And here's the thing, this isn't just a one and done, GOMO isn't limited to rites of passage. My clients aren't only feeling GOMO about things like field day, they're feeling it, we're all feeling it on a day-to-day basis. It shows up in the everyday mundane things that we imagine most people take for granted, like being able to do things spontaneously without having to prepare and preview. This is a huge challenge for our kids. They like their routine. They like their structure. They like things to be the same.

So going to a different restaurant or leaving a place early or going early, all of those things can be really disruptive for our kids. And we just miss out on that ease of being able to do things spontaneously, the invitations that we get and we decline, or the invitations that we don't get at all. There's that feeling of loss when your child's not able to fully participate in family traditions.

## Ep #120: The Grief of Missing Out

I have one client who was really upset this past holiday season when grandmom took a picture and posted the picture on social media that said grandma and the grandkids. They were all baking cookies and her child wasn't there. And even more than not being there, he wasn't invited because it was just assumed that he wouldn't be able to handle it. And so, he missed out on having that experience and my client missed out on seeing him have that experience and having that ability to bond with his grandparents and to bond with his cousins.

And then there is the GOMO that we feel just out in the community, again doing the everyday things. Going grocery shopping and seeing a child who's sitting nicely and quietly in their shopping cart and not trying to knock over racks or running from you. There is seeing children in the park being able to approach one another, make friends, play, take turns all on their own without having a parent prompt them. For so many of us, this is not our experience, and there is grief at it, there is loss.

And then there is the GOMO that we have for our own children. The grief of watching them miss out on experiences that they want to have, like having friends, being invited to parties, being able to play on sports teams. For me, this has been the most heart wrenching aspect of parenting is watching Ben see the differences between himself and his peers. And I have to tell you, I really wish Autism had spared him this.

I wish so many times that he was the stereotypical version of Autism I imagined where he doesn't care and he doesn't notice because it's more painful to know what you're missing. He's come home from playdates and birthday parties with neurotypical peers and he's been so sad and so frustrated because in his words, "I don't know how to talk to them." He will be able to ask them things like, "How are you doing?" He's really good at initiating conversation, but not so good at keeping it going.

And he also misses out on those subtle social cues, this is despite years of therapy and social groups. There are some things that you just can't teach, that shorthand that friends have for communicating with one another, the subtle looks, all of those things, they are missed by my son. And he's left so

## Ep #120: The Grief of Missing Out

confused and all he wants to do is just be one of the guys. And I can't fix this for him, no matter how much role playing that I do because I'm not in the moment with him.

And all of these things happen in a nanosecond, in the moment and other kids just get it. They know how to navigate the situations and the social cues. And my kid feels like he's an alien on another planet. Another thing that my son has experienced is he really likes basketball and he wants to play on a basketball team like his best friend. And he did get an opportunity to play on a unified team.

But again, he understood that the unified team was different than the regular team where all of his peers and friends from elementary school were playing and that's the team he wanted to play on. And that just wasn't in the cards for him for a number of reasons. And so that experience that we all have of having to be there with our kid and sit with them and letting them sit with their pain about the things that they're missing out on, that is so painful for our mama hearts.

So, this is all to say that your experience is real and it is valid, you are not alone, but now what? So now I want to shift from giving this a name and recognizing it to talking about what to do when we are in it and how to not get stuck in it. Because I will say, and this is from experience, a recent experience, it is so easy to go all the way down the rabbit hole and get stuck in the anger, the sadness and the resentment and the grief.

So first, what to do when you're feeling GOMO for yourself or your child or both. One, recognize what's happening. Validate your experience. Validate yourself without judgment. Of course, I feel this way, any mother would. And then allow yourself to feel the grief. Allow yourself to feel sad. Allow yourself to acknowledge your loss and feel the sadness that comes with it.

And look, it might be helpful for you to have a tantrum or a pity party for yourself too. Maybe this is your way of getting it out, the fuck the world, the fuck everybody else, this sucks, this is not fair. Get it out. But you don't want to stay stuck in it. Because there's really just no value to staying stuck

## Ep #120: The Grief of Missing Out

in it. It will only make you feel worse. It will only make you feel more helpless and hopeless and that's not good for you, and it's certainly not good for your kid.

So, what I like to do in these situations is do the equivalent of what we do with our kids when we set a timer for an activity or even a timer for worry. I've had this experience because my son has really high anxiety and a few of my clients, they do the same thing, is they give them a worry clock where they have certain times of the day or a certain amount of time that they're allowed to devote to all of their worry, but then they move on.

Now, I'm not saying that you can just set a clock on your grief and that you will no longer be grieving. Grief doesn't work that way. But some of the things that we do around our grief, like the tantrum or the pity party, we can control that. We can put a stop to that. We can put the brakes on that. And that's what I encourage you to do.

If you are having some GOMO, decide how much time you're going to let yourself devote to it. For me, I gave myself a weekend this past weekend. The backstory is I had a bunch of kids at my house on Friday. I have a college student staying with me over the summer, she's a friend of the family and she had friends over and then some friends of my son's came over because they knew she was there.

And so, I have all of these kids at my house and it was so great and so wonderful and so sad at the same time, just watching them together, the ease in which they interacted. And knowing that my son would want nothing more than this. He wants nothing more than just to be one of the guys hanging out. And so, this started off as jealousy and then it became anger and then it was grief and I was in it.

And now because I've been coaching myself for so many years and I get coached, I know my tells and I knew that I was going into the death roll of my own grief. So, I gave myself that night and the next day to just be in it, to let myself be angry, to let myself be sad and to validate myself. But then that was it. Now, does that mean that I don't still feel sad about this? No, I

## Ep #120: The Grief of Missing Out

do, I feel sad, but I'm not giving into the temptation to wallow in the sadness and the anger and the frustration and the resentment.

Instead, I just want to recognize it for what it is and allow it to be there instead of making it worse on myself. So that is my advice to you, whenever you're feeling GOMO, recognize it. Recognize when you're in GOMO, figure out what is happening in your brain, in your body when you're feeling that grief of missing out. Do you automatically go to anger, resentment or jealousy, or do you go to sadness?

Figure out what your tells are so you know when you're having the experience. Then you validate it. Validate yourself for having this experience, of course you're feeling this way, it's totally normal and then allow it. Allow yourself to feel the feelings, the sadness, the anger, all of it. But so, you don't stay stuck in it, decide how much time you're going to give yourself to be in it. If you're going to throw yourself a pity party, throw yourself a good party, but make sure it has an end, put it on a timer.

The same thing with an adult tantrum or whatever you want to call it, get it out, let it out but then let it go. Again, I'm not saying you're letting go of the grief and the feelings that you're having, but you're not making it worse on yourself by doubling down on your own pain.

Alright, that is it for this week's episode, I hope this 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](http://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.