

# Ep #124: Solo Parenting with Rob Gorski, The Autism Dad



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Lisa Candra

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You're listening to episode 124 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, Solo Parenting with Rob Gorski, The Autism Dad.

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 to today's topic, I want to remind you that I will be hosting another live webinar, How to Keep Your Cool During an Autism Meltdown on July 22<sup>nd</sup> at 7:00pm Eastern. During this live presentation I am going to walk you through my three step process for keeping your calm while your child is dysregulated, and I'm going to answer your questions. To register for this webinar, go to the show notes and sign up now.

Alright, for this week I have a treat for you. I had the pleasure of speaking with Rob Gorski, who was also known as the Autism dad. I am so excited to bring this conversation with you and to share his perspective with my audience because I thought it was spot on and wonderful. There were so many pearls of wisdom that Rob dropped during this interview, but the one thing that he said that really stands out to me and I really want to impress upon all of you is, he says, "I am doing my best and my best is good enough."

And I think that that is not only so true of all of us, but it's something that we need to remind ourselves of over and over again. For those of you who are not familiar with Rob, I'm going to give you a little bit of background and then we're just going to dive into the conversation. Rob is a solo parent of three sons with Autism. He lives in Northeast Ohio, and he runs a popular blog and podcast called *The Autism Dad*, where he shares his experiences and offers support to other parents raising children with Autism and other disabilities.

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Rob's three sons, Gavin, Elliott and Emmett, are all on the Autism spectrum but have unique characteristics. As Rob will share with you, he originally began his blog as a pure accident. He originally started writing about his experiences as a therapeutic method for himself, but lo and behold, that blog was public and people found it, and they loved it. Since then, Rob's platform has evolved into a global resource featuring articles, podcast interviews and practical advice for parents of Autistic children.

So, if you can imagine and some of you will remember that there was a time, long, long ago when we thought that we could write words on the internet and we would be the only people to see them and that's just not so. And luckily for us, Rob's work is public and it's been an inspiration to so many people. Alright, with that, let's turn it over to Rob.

Lisa: Welcome, Rob, to the podcast. I am so glad to have you here. If you could, just take a minute and introduce yourself and tell us a little bit about you.

Rob: Sure. Thanks for having me. I appreciate it. My name is Rob Gorski from *The Autism Dad* blog and podcast and all that stuff. I am a single dad to three autistic kids. My oldest is 24, he just moved out a month ago at the time that we're recording this. And I have an 18 year old and my youngest just turned 16 yesterday.

Lisa: Yeah, I saw that Emmett, right?

Rob: Yeah.

Lisa: Very nice. So, if you could, just tell us a little bit about what you do as *The Autism Dad* and how you got into it and how it's evolved over the years.

Rob: Sure. So, I started out about, I don't know, 15/16/17 years ago, something like that. And it started out inadvertently. I was struggling with my eldest's diagnosis, and I wanted to kind of find a way to process this

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stuff. So, I thought, if I write down in a journal or something like that, it might be helpful. But I do everything online digitally. So I found WordPress and I thought I'll just use that as a private diary, I thought, because I had to sign in to use it, sign in to read it.

And it wasn't private and I had been kind of dumping everything that I was feeling and experiencing onto these pages, thinking no one was ever, ever going to read it and it was very public. And I did that at a time when there wasn't anyone else doing that. And so, people would find me by default, any time they would search for Autism, they would find all of my deepest, darkest parenting thoughts and I was mortified when I figured it out. But what I found was that people actually were comforted by it.

And it's not bad stuff but it's all those things that parents tell ourselves that we're not allowed to say out loud or things like that. And so, I found that to be very therapeutic for me and I found it to be very helpful for the parents and it just sort of grew until today. It's been rebranded as *The Autism Dad*. It used to be *Lost and Tired*. And then I had the podcast five years ago, something like that. We're on season seven, half way through season seven right now.

But the idea is just to kind of provide for people what I didn't have available to me back then and that's just validation and comfort in knowing that you're not the only one going through this. That you're allowed to feel the things that you feel because you're human. And help people to kind of navigate the things that I've already been through just by kind of lighting the path and sharing my mistakes so that hopefully people can learn from them and avoid some of the same pitfalls, many pitfalls that I've found myself trying to dig myself out of over the years.

Lisa: Yeah, we'll just make new mistakes because that's just how it goes. So, I'm curious, what was the initial reaction of people seeing your blog and reaching out to you?

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Rob: Very positive, I mean it was very positive. There were some people that would say things like, “Why would you say something like that out loud or why would you share this?” And well, I didn’t intend to share it. I didn’t go into this thinking, I’m going to help people. I was trying to just cope with my life. And there’s been unpleasant people along the way but overall, it’s been very, very positive and I’ve developed thicker skin. So, I was just talking about this to someone else a little bit ago. I just don’t care what other people think anymore.

So, people who have a problem with me can try and tell me that. I just don’t pay attention to the negative anymore. But it’s been overwhelmingly positive, and that’s been a very good thing.

Lisa: So, you said that one of the things that you were looking for or are looking to provide that you didn’t have was validation and support. Can you just tell me a little bit more about that for you as a father, because as you know, I am a mom of a child with Autism and I also coach moms of children with Autism. And they definitely, when they come to me, the validation and the support is really helpful.

But what they’re coming to me a lot of times with are feeling like they’re not doing enough and they’re not doing the right things and just always in this perpetual state of not feeling like they’re enough. And so, I’m just curious, is this a similar experience that dads have?

Rob: Sure, yeah. And I think in a lot of ways, well dads, I think deal with it a little bit differently. Dads tend to be fixers and if you can’t fix it, then you’d shut down and you don’t know what to do. I wake up every day knowing that on my best day I’m not going to be enough. There’s not enough of me to fill even one of my kids’ needs and I have three Autistic kids. And what I have learned over the years, what I try to share with parents now is that we’re human.

There’s this thing that people talk about where we’re superhuman Autism warrior parents or whatever. And that’s great, whatever works for you, I

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guess. But to me, I think a lot of parents feel like they have to live up to this expectation that they're never going to live up to because they're human. And we have very real human limitations. We are going to feel things. We are going to experience stuff. We're going to get depressed and anxious and resentful and angry and sad and happy and all that stuff.

But instead of feeling guilty about it now, I just recognize that I'm human and I'm giving my kids the best that I can. I know that oftentimes they need more than what I'm able to give them, but it's not a shortcoming on my part. It's not that they're too much, it's just that we're human and doing this alone, like we talked about before, is really hard. You don't have that person to kind of tap in and take over for you.

And every decision, again we mentioned, falls on your shoulders, you have to carry all that weight. So, if it goes, great, it's fantastic, but if it goes wrong you're responsible for that. But if you remember that you're human and you can't be perfect and you can't always have the answers. And you're not always going to know the right thing to say and you're going to make mistakes. But you pick up and you learn from them and you move forward. And you do the best you can and you give what you can and you take care of yourself so you have more to give.

And for me, that was probably one of the biggest lessons that I've learned to kind of help me continue to keep going. It is just recognizing that I'm never going to be perfect and I'm never going to be enough, I guess, if that makes sense. But your best is enough because that's all you can give. And if you're giving all you can, what more can you give?

Lisa: Yeah, I love that perspective. And there's so many things that you just said that I want to hit on. And one of the things that you said early on was this sort of idea, and I think this really comes from people of not neurodivergent kids where this idea of there's been some sainthood bestowed upon us because we're managing these kids and it's so hard. And only special people get these problems and you're so blessed kind of a

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thing. And that can be, one, really off putting and two, it puts this really high expectation.

And then third, as the parents, we already put high expectations on ourselves. And so, the combination of all that, feeling like not only are you dealing with all of this, but you have to hide it because otherwise you're going to fly in the face of what people think you should be because you're a special needs parent.

Rob: Sure. Yeah. And not everybody agrees with me with this and again, that's fine. We all do what we need to do. But I have a fundamental issue with building people up like they're these superhumans. There is nothing special about me that makes me any different than any other dad. I love my kids, I do what I can for my kids, just like any other dad should. The problems and the challenges that I face may be more complicated and everything's relative, I mean.

And I know there's people out there with tougher challenges than I have, but I just think we set those expectations so high even if it's meant in a positive way, trying to build people up. It sets us up for failure because we are never going to hit that mark. We're never going to be superhuman. We're charged with a job that requires superhuman abilities at times, but we don't have that. So, all we can do is the best that we can do and live with it.

And if we recognize that we're human and we're not any different than other people, we're just charged with more responsibility, then when you don't hit that, you're not beating yourself up. You don't have these unrealistic expectations that you're going to be perfect and you have to always know what to do. I feel my way through the dark all the time. I mean, I'm 24 years into this now and I don't feel like I know what I'm doing most of the time, honestly.

I mean, I've got a lot of experience, sure, but I make mistakes all the time. I'm making new ones every day. Navigating the whole transition to

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adulthood thing is something that even with all this experience, I was not prepared for that, not even close. And so, I just feel like we need to just kind of reframe how we look at this stuff and there's nothing wrong with just being a regular human parent dealing with tough things, I guess. I don't if that makes any sense.

Lisa: Yeah. No, it makes perfect sense. And when you talk about the superhuman ability, I mean, I wouldn't call it superhuman. But really the thing that makes us stand out is the resilience if we can cultivate that. And I think so much of that comes from recognizing our limitations, not as a deficit on us or on our parenting, but just there are limitations and that's okay. And when you're not constantly beating yourself up about that, you have more energy to focus on the things that you can control and the things that you can do.

Rob: Yeah. And in the superhuman side of it, I guess, I don't mean that literally. I mean we have to do all of these things and oftentimes we have to do it without sleep, without support, without financial ability, without being able to work out of the house sometimes because it's impossible for some parents. It was that way for me. You can't be a full-time caregiver and have a job outside of the house. So, to me that's just how I visualize it.

Superhuman abilities would be, to me, being able to function at my best, never getting any sleep and never taking care of myself and never having to worry about anything else. But the reality is that we don't have that. We can't function without sleep. We can't survive without a paycheck. We can't do a lot of these things. And so, we have to just find creative ways of accomplishing these things. And then it's constantly juggling and triaging things in real time.

We're constantly having to decide what we have to keep in the air and what we can drop to the floor. And it's just 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, sometimes for the rest of our lives. And we have to do that in real time. And so even when you do sleep at night for most parents or a lot of parents, you're still not sleeping, sleeping, because your brain is still

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worried about whatever. You're still listening for your kid to get up and leave their bedroom in the middle of night.

It's really tough to be human and try and manage everything that you have to manage a lot of times when you have kids with these types of additional needs. And so that's kind of what I mean. I mean, I don't mean flying.

Lisa: I didn't think you did. I think we were just talking about how other people sort of impute that [crosstalk].

Rob: Yeah. It's like every kid with Autism, there's super abilities because it's not always the case. And so, generalizing things like that, I just don't like to generalize things, I guess.

Lisa: I completely agree with that. So, I want to know, three children with Autism and solo parenting. How did you do that? How are you doing that? Let's start there. And then I really want to talk about the transition to adulthood because I think that is something that is just not getting talked about enough. And more and more of our kids are transitioning into adulthood, this is going to be a huge population that's very much underserved and so, I want to hear all you have to offer.

Rob: Sure. How do I do it? I have no idea, to be honest with you. I have made plenty of mistakes along the way, not taking care of myself and burning out and having to build myself back up, stuff like that. So, I've learned those lessons. To me, I mean I don't know anything else so it's my normal. I don't have a basis of comparison or a reference to what it's like to be a parent to neurotypical kids. I just don't know.

So, objectively I think it's much harder what I'm doing, but it feels normal to me. So, I just get up every morning and I do what I have to do. My kids do what they need to do, and that's just life for us. So, I don't feel like I do anything special in order to do this. I go to the gym. I do all the advocacy stuff that I do with *The Autism Dad*. Those are things that give me a direction for all that anxiety and negative energy and whatever.

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Everything is relative. I mean, I could step into your shoes, I think we mentioned this on my show, I could step into your shoes and be like, “Holy cow, I don’t know how you do it.” You could walk in mine for a minute and be like, “Oh, wow, this is different. I can do this.” So, it’s kind of relative. So, I don’t know that my life is so much harder than everybody else’s. I just do whatever I feel like dad should do, I guess, if that makes sense.

Lisa: I guess I’m not really, yeah, and I totally know what you mean. It is all relative. I have clients who have twins, they don’t know from not having twins. So, they’re like, “This is just how we roll.” But just from the perspective of having three children with needs, if you would talk about, are your kids exactly the same place on the spectrum? I’m doubting that’s not true and so how it is navigating the needs of needy children and who are all different.

Rob: Yeah, that’s a good question. So, they’re not all the same. My oldest, they were never diagnosed with levels back then. It was just high functioning, low functioning or whatever. My oldest was diagnosed, he has childhood disintegrative disorder so he experienced massive regression. So, he is very cognitively impaired, but he’s doing pretty well. My other two were just kind of born the way that they are so I don’t know them any differently. And I think they each have needs that can overlap and then they can each have needs that are conflicting with each other.

So, I might do something for Elliott that is triggering for Emmett, but Elliot needs it, but if I do it for Elliot, then it’s going to set Emmett off, especially when they were younger. And then there’s a lot of things with Gavin, my oldest, that I’ve had to do just because of the way he’s wired, that just rubs the other two kids the wrong way. And they just cannot wrap their heads around why I handle him the way that I do. And it just kind of is, it’s like three different languages.

There’s very few things that I can just apply once and it works across the board. And it’s a lot of moving targets because their needs change over time and what they need shifts and it works today, it may not work

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tomorrow. So, it's constantly this very fluid dynamic situation where you're just exhaustively trying to find what works in the moment and it's just not always the same thing every day. I guess that makes sense.

Lisa: That is such a great point. I know when my son was younger and we found anything that worked, let's say with a teacher or a one on one aid, I would just be like, "We have to be with you forever because this is working." But that's never the case. And so, we are always evolving, the folks that are in our kids' lives, what's working in terms of therapies, medications, environments. And so, I had to learn early on not to get too wedded to any one thing because it was going to evolve.

Rob: And that makes it hard because it makes it less predictable. And one of the things that as humans we want to do and that we benefit from is planning things out and knowing ahead of time. And there's very little about my life that has been predictable aside from unpredictability. There's so much that's just outside of my control. And I'm somebody that likes to have influence over my environment and what I'm doing and how I'm feeling, everything, and there's just some things.

I mean I can give everything I have into this at times and it has no impact because it's just totally outside of my control and we have to weather the storm and get through it, whatever. And with my oldest, when he was still living at home, he's an amazing person and he has come so far but he was driving everybody crazy. He had outgrown the house, developmentally. In order for him to continue to grow, he really needed to be sort of untethered or detached from us so that he can make his mistakes and do his thing and grow.

And we had dinner with him last night, and it's only been a month since he moved out, and it was good to see him and all the stuff but it was very apparent that he's very different. And it's very difficult to coexist with him at times. And I don't know how we did it for as long as we did. And it's not anything against him because he's not doing anything wrong. It's just how

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different everybody is and how conflicting those differences can be and triggering each other. I mean they trigger each other all the time.

So, it is very tough to navigate a lot of this stuff with any set pattern or any way that's predictable, but you can have sort of more neurotypical side of parenting which is relatively predictable. I guess that makes sense.

Lisa: I have clients where they have children who are close in age and sometimes both the kids are Autistic or one's neurotypical, the other's Autistic. But there are situations where the parent has to pick one over the other, one's happiness or comfort over the other and then they have great guilt about that. And I'm just curious how you decided to handle that, given that was just the norm for you.

Rob: Yeah. So that's tough because it was kind of squeaky wheel in my house and squeakiest of all the wheels was Gavin. He had a lot of serious health issues, a lot of behavioral issues. And when I became a single or solo parent like we talked about before, you're one person and you have to manage. It was like constantly putting out fires is what it feels like. And so, the kids who have, there's less demand, they tend to get less attention. Not because you don't want to give them attention or you love them any less. It's just that it's like, okay, well, you're doing really well. You can keep doing this. I've got to go deal with your brother.

And it does breed resentment because I have kids that very much resent that. They understand, and they know that I wasn't ignoring them or whatever. They understand the concept of what happened, but it doesn't change the way that it made them feel. And that's what matters. I mean I think it's important that they understand you weren't forgotten. We did everything that we could, it wasn't that you were less important but I had to keep you guys safe. And part of keeping you safe, then I had to manage this behavior.

So, what felt like you were being ignored in the moment was me trying to keep you away from something that you didn't need to be exposed to. But it

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does, I mean, it doesn't matter what the intention was because the impact is still the same, and they still feel that way. And we're working through some of that stuff as they get older because they're vocalizing that now. And I try very hard not to take it personally, because I know that I did everything that I could.

And I know that their feelings are valid and they're allowed to feel however they feel. And I can't change what's already happened, but we can talk about it and work through it so that they can heal from whatever traumas when they were younger and what they experienced. So that we can move forward and they could have the best, happiest enriching life that they can. But it's tough, trying to manage three kids is tough. And you do have to make cuts sometimes and you do have to make choices that maybe in other situations you wouldn't.

And it does feel like sometimes people are expendable or you have to keep everybody surviving, you have to keep everybody above water. And the highest demanding kids tend to get the most attention. And it's like that, if you have an Autistic kid and a neurotypical kid, I mean, it's really hard to find that balance.

You have to be very deliberate in your choices and make sure that you set time aside whenever you can for one-on-one time, even if it's just a few minutes, even if it's hurtful or you find it upsetting that they express their feelings about feeling forgotten or whatever. They have a right to feel that way because it absolutely, it's how they experienced it. And they may not understand the reasons behind it necessarily in the moment but you don't want to be dismissive of that.

You want to acknowledge it and validate it and help them to understand that it was just the way that things were then and was never meant to come across that way. But you understand and you respect that and you want to help them through it and learn from it so you can move forward and do better.

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Lisa: I think that's such an evolved way of looking at it because I think as parents, especially when you're making those hard decisions, at least I want everyone to understand my decision so everyone feels good about it and no one feels bad. And then just getting to the part where they're allowed to be upset, they're allowed to be pissed, they're allowed to be resentful, they're allowed to kind of understand, but not really care and I have to be okay with that.

Rob: It doesn't fit nice and neatly in a box.

Lisa: No, it doesn't.

Rob: One of those people that likes to square peg, square hole kind of thing. It's not going to be that way. And the sooner you let go of that expectation and just embrace things, yeah, because I've been resentful of my kids over the years. I mean, not because they're bad kids, but because I hit my limit and I want it to stop. I want to get off the ride. My brain just needs to shut down and you can't sometimes. And you can want to be able to hang out with friends or go have time to yourself to watch your show or whatever, and you can't.

And as humans, we feel those things. So of course, our kids feel the same thing. And if we tell our kids that it's okay to feel that way and we understand and we respect that, why can't we as adults feel the same thing and allow ourselves that same grace? So, I think it goes both ways and we have to not only be accepting of how our kids are feeling, but we also have to be accepting of how we're feeling and then maybe model how to manage that behavior in a healthy way.

So that your kids know that, look, yes, I know your brother drives me crazy too, I get it, and we drive him crazy. He wanted to move out, it's not he was just driving us crazy, we drove him crazy too. He was so tired of living with his brothers and being micromanaged and all this stuff. And so, it was a mutually beneficial thing. So, do I feel guilty that I helped him to move out?

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No, because it was the best thing for us, but it was also what he wanted, and it was the best thing for him so they can all coexist.

Lisa: What does showing up for yourself look like for you?

Rob: Currently showing up for myself is getting sleep, therapy, when I'm in therapy, working out, eating right, spending time with my girlfriend. Having a life outside of being a dad is kind of showing up for me. And I used to feel guilty about it. But the more time that I spend with myself, the more independent my kids are becoming and that's a good thing. And as I put back into me I'm better able to give to them. I give them a better version of me.

So, I've reframed this for myself because I'm really big on reframing things so that I can process better. I feel like when I put into me, it's the kindest thing that I can do for my kids because I'm giving them the best chance of having the best version of me present in their life. And I know that there's a societal thing where we have to give everything we have to our kids all the time, they always come first. But I mean maybe there's some situations where that's possible short term, but it's not sustainable, it's not realistic.

And we hold ourselves to that standard. So, when we don't do that, we feel guilty or when we need a break, we need to put into ourselves we feel guilty because it feels like we have to take away from our kids in order to do that. But if we don't put into ourselves, we're ultimately taking away from our kids.

Lisa: Exactly right. And look, if you're dealing with a one off emergency, yes, you can go full in. But we're talking day in and day out, rinse and repeat and so it's not realistic at all. And I definitely noticed that with my son, I had so much less patience for him when I wasn't taking time to just do simple things for myself.

Rob: Sure, because you're on overload, you ran out of bandwidth. We maybe say the same thing about having boundaries for the people in your

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life. You're either on board or you're gone. We can love you from a distance and that's great, keep that door open in case you decide to get on board. But you have to devote your limited resources to where it does the most good. And sometimes that's putting into you. Sometimes that's giving back to your kids. But not taking care of yourself is just not sustainable long term.

And setting boundaries is a form of self-care. Sometimes setting boundaries is the best thing that you can do for yourself and your family. You feel guilty about it maybe, and you shouldn't have to do it sometimes. But there are just people who just chew away at that bandwidth, because they either don't get on board or they always have an opinion about what you're doing or they undermine you. You know what I mean? People just don't get on board or don't understand it.

And boundaries can help put that buffer in place to help protect you from kind of that bleeding out so that you're not losing everything that you have. Because everything you put into that, trying to deal with that, takes away from your kids.

Lisa: Absolutely. And it tanks you emotionally. So, I'm curious, I have a few clients who are single parents and some of them have struggled with the idea of having partners and nobody would choose this life. And so, I'm just curious about how you navigate that with your partner.

Rob: Well, I feel like I'm very lucky. Well, I know that I'm very lucky because she has an Autistic daughter as well. She's very new into the journey, because it's only been about two years, I think, since, well, about a year and a half because we met right after her daughter was diagnosed. But I think that it's tough. We're actually going to be recording an episode about this because there's a lot of people ask questions. They just assume that it's never going to work.

And I think generally speaking, I think it's harder for moms than it is for dads because women tend to be more nurturing and they tend to be more

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on board with something like this. Whereas guys tend to be like I don't want that noise. I don't want to deal with that, and that's tough. It's totally not fair. But I think if you find somebody who is supportive, who understands and is willing to learn, I think is the big thing and sees you for you and everything else is just part of the deal because we don't come without our kids.

And in my case, I am so incredibly lucky. I realize that every single day of my life. And having somebody who is actually supportive makes all the difference in the world. I mean, I've had relationships where they didn't understand necessarily. And then there's not a refusal to learn, but just a constant second guessing. It's constantly, why are your kids doing this or why can't your kids do this or we need to get your kids here and they need to be able to move out, all this stuff.

And I mean, they're not wrong necessarily, but it's an artificial timetable. You feel rushed, which then puts pressure on things and it just makes it difficult. And when you find somebody who gets it, it's just peace. And it's not easy to find, I don't think, but it's out there. And there is somebody for everybody. There's a lot of parents of kids that have Autism or ADHD or something else going on that are looking. And you're just not, I mean I don't think you find them necessarily on dating apps because nobody really advertises that necessarily.

But generally, I think it's harder if you're trying to be in a relationship with somebody who has kids that are neurotypical, just because there tends to be that clash of ideas. And there's always something that comes up and I think it can be challenging. Definitely not impossible because I know lots of people who have found a way to make it work and they're amazing, but it can be definitely challenging.

Lisa: I think it's totally possible. And I love that you talk about it because I have had clients where they've gone in with that attitude, but I have also found men who have really gone the distance in learning about their children and becoming involved and things like that. And so, I'm always saying, I know that that is something you might think, but it's not true.

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Rob: Yeah. When I got divorced, when my ex-wife left and it was just me and the kids, I'm thinking holy cow, my life is over. That part of my life is over because there's no one that's going to ever willingly walk into my life knowing that I have all these different challenges. And what I found was, I think I found a lot of the wrong people, which helped me learn what I needed to learn in order to be ready for the right one.

And when Kelly and I met, we weren't looking. We both had stopped dating. I was going to just focus on rebuilding my life. I had just gotten out of a relationship that was not good for me. And I wanted to just devote time to building myself back up, recovering from my divorce, all of that kind of stuff. And then we ended up connecting and then became really, really good friends and started dating a few months later, and it's been the best year of my life.

And the right person is out there and the right person makes all the difference in the world, all the difference in the world. I never feel pressure or judged or my best is always enough. And that has never been something that I have known until now.

Lisa: I love, I think that is the go to mantra, your best is enough. And one of the things that I found with people, whether it's relationships or just friendships is, Autism is a great litmus test. Because I've always said, if you find somebody who's not okay with this, then you have your answer very quickly. You know, are these people that are going to invite to their home, are these people going to go to their home and I'm going to expect them to be understanding. You find that out really quickly.

Rob: Yeah. And I actually get a lot of people reaching out to me. I get a lot of women that will reach out, and I do get some men, not nearly as many. And they'll just be like, "Hey, my girlfriend has an Autistic kid and I'm just trying to know how can I be more supportive? What can I do?" That kind of stuff. I get a lot of women that will be like, "Hey, I', dating this guy, he's got an Autistic kid. I want to be there for them. The kid's amazing." And I kind of

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get emotional just even thinking about that because that's such an amazing thing to have that.

To have somebody who sees not only your value as a person, but your kids' values. And not asking you, how can I change those kids, how can I change him? It's what can I do to be more supportive? Where can I go to learn about this? What can I do to be there and not overstep." There's all these amazing questions that people will come at me with and it's really good to see that there are people out there who just want to learn.

I think the biggest thing that they can do is what they're already doing. They're present and accepting and wanting to learn and grow and not expecting the other person to be the one who always changes.

Lisa: Yeah. No, it's so interesting because I was recently at an Autism walk here in Connecticut. And so many of the people who came to my booth weren't parents of children with Autism, they were the aunts, the uncles, the friends, the grandparents who came to the walk, and they wanted to learn more and I thought that was amazing.

Rob: It's very cool. That gives me a lot of hope because there's the right person out there for everyone. And I think it's just a matter of knowing what you need, not being afraid to say no, and being ready for that person. Because it's tough, you've got to divide time and balance everything out because you're already balancing things out already and it's tough. And it can be tough to balance when you add another person and bonus kids into the mix to find that balance. But when you do, you do and you just do whatever you have to do to hang onto that. It's an amazing thing when you find it.

Lisa: I am so glad that you did. And I can't wait to hear you interview Kelly. Is that how it's going to go on your podcast, are you going to interview her?

Rob: Yeah, well, she's done episodes. We've done a couple of episodes together, but people ask a lot of questions like, well, how do you manage

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relationships whether you're married or dating or whatever when you have Autistic kids. I mean, I think it's all about finding balance. And for her and I, we're just so in tune with each other. We don't even have to really say anything, you just know and you don't have to explain.

If her daughter had a big meltdown and she's exhausted and frustrated and overwhelmed and just needs to shut down for the day or whatever. Okay, well, we can reschedule and you go have your alone time because I know what that's like. There's times when I just don't want to see another human. I just want to be alone in the corner of my room.

Lisa: Absolutely.

Rob: And so not having to explain yourself and having people understand is, I mean, there's such peace that you find in that. And until I met her, I'd not experienced that before. So now that I know what it's supposed to be like, I could never go back. I just want to go forward.

Lisa: I know transitioning to adulthood is not something that we hear about a lot and what we do hear is usually not great. So, if you could share your experience, that would be wonderful.

Rob: Sure. I started way too late. My biggest mistake I think was being so focused on my kids' limitations and their diagnoses when they were younger, that I was raising the diagnosis more than I was raising my kids. Kids with Autism or ADHD or any disability are still kids. And I made a lot of excuses for behavioral things and wrote a lot of stuff off to being Autism or ADHD or whatever else was going on at the time. And I wasn't doing things like holding them accountable and allowing them to fall so they could pick themselves back up and move forward and learn from mistakes and the consequences and all that kind of stuff.

And so, as my kids got older and I started to recognize those things, it was like, oh, man, now it's playing catch up when they could be petulant teenagers. They don't want to hear this stuff now. Gavin was an adult. He

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doesn't want to hear this stuff now. And so, the best advice that I have for parents is, the moment your kid is born, assume that they are going to grow up to be adults. And if they have an Autism diagnosis, they're going to have that Autism diagnosis all throughout their life because Autism is always. It doesn't go away, you don't outgrow it.

And use every day to help prepare them for adulthood. Not robbing them of a childhood or accelerating stuff, but just allow them to make mistakes and help them learn from it. Hold them accountable for their actions. There's developmental things that are outside of their control, whatever. But kids need to know there are consequences for things that they think, say and do. And just like anybody else, they need to be held accountable, learn that accountability and again, developmentally appropriate.

My kids' therapist used to tell us, "You don't punish someone for not being able to see. But if they got into a car and drove and ran over three people, they're held accountable for that." And Autism isn't an excuse to just have free rein or a free pass because life is not going to allow for that. There's going to be a time when I'm not around and society is not going to care. And I'm dealing with that with my oldest right now. There's going to come a time where he is going to have to learn the hard way with some of these things.

And so, the more I prepared them as they were younger, the better off we would be going forward. So, I just think prepping as far ahead as you can, little bits at a time, helps to make that transition smoother and easier. And then if you're in the States, you want to get involved with the Board of DD as soon as you possibly can, because they can help with funding and get on the waiver program and stuff like that. There's job training things for people with developmental disabilities.

Here in Ohio, we have Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities, which is what my oldest went through and it's job training and job coaching and mock interviews. And they build resumés and they help them connect with employment. And my son's had his job now for almost a year, it will be a

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year this month at some point and he's doing great. Connecting with those resources and services as they are transitioning from 18, I think 23 is the cut off for a lot of people here.

It just helps you to slowly start bridging those gaps ahead of time so that you don't hit that cliff where it's panic because all the resources have dried up and you don't know what to do. But it's tough because you're trying to survive the moment most of the time, and so you're not thinking about tomorrow. You're trying to survive the next five minutes. And I lived 20 years doing that and I wish that I had approached things a little bit differently.

I mean I know I did things for the right reasons at the time, but it just complicated things for the future. So, if you go into it thinking that your kids are going to be adults someday and they've got to be ready. Start from day one and just start everyday things that you can do to help your kids to be ready. So, you do it over the course of 18 or 20 years and not trying to cram it in when they're 15/16/17, when they're not going to want to listen to you anyway because kids don't want to listen.

And then you have an extra layer of developmental stuff that might be impacting that, so start young and just keep building.

Lisa: Yeah, I think that's such a great point. And it's also sometimes in these moments where we're going to pick the easy out. I've done it, where you're sometimes picking between sleep and not sleep. And so, I always try to encourage my parents, this doesn't mean you do it all the time and you do it perfectly. But there are things that you can do to integrate into your life and especially when our kids are regulated and you can have more teachable moments with them. And so, if they are losing their shit, it's probably not the time, but you can find the time.

Rob: Yeah. And you're not trying to rush these kids into growing up or whatever. And you're definitely not wanting to hold them accountable for things that they have no control over. But they're still kids and kids in

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general make stupid decisions. They make dumb decisions. They do things because they just want to be mean sometimes. And kids with Autism are not exempt from that, they can do it too. And it's just a matter of showing and instilling things in a way that are developmentally appropriate and fair to your kids.

And just help them to learn because it just ultimately becomes easier for everybody. If they learn that there's consequences for sneaking the iPad or whatever it is, then over time they learn not to do that. I mean my oldest required constant repetition, I mean constant repetition, years and years and years of just repeating the same thing over and over and over again until finally it just clicks. And so, if you start younger, the younger you start, the better off your kids are going to be as they get older.

And the reality is, they're going to be existing in a world where we're not there at some point. And the world is not going to care what the reasons are for things. They're just going to care about the outcome. And so, if we can help our kids to be prepared to navigate that world, the better off they're going to be. The more peace we can have when we close our eyes at night.

Instead of staring at the ceiling fan thinking of all the things that could happen, you know that you're already doing everything that you can do to help prepare them for that time. And then squeeze everything else in, like the job training and all that kind of stuff.

Lisa: Well, thank you so much for sharing that. I definitely want to have you back on to talk about that even more because I think it's just such a meaty topic. And I am sure, your youngest is 16, so I'm sure this will evolve for you over time and you'll have more to share.

Rob: It's constant. I mean, it's constantly evolving. You can't plant your feet. You have to be as flexible as we want our kids to be, and yeah, so it is constantly evolving.

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Lisa: Yes, that's such a great point. You have to be as flexible as we want them to be. Because one of the things that I have noticed is that with my son and his Autism, my rigidity popped out real quick, wanting to control everything, control his environment, outcomes, all of it. And so being flexible is just as important, if not more, for us as it is for them.

Rob: Absolutely.

Lisa: Alright, Rob, well, thank you so, so much for your time. I appreciate you coming on here. And the Autism mom meets the Autism dad. I feel like we should go out and fight crime because we're finally doing this.

Rob: Superhero club.

Lisa: And so, yeah, so glad we're doing this and I would love to have you back on again, just because you have such a wealth of information to share.

Rob: Well, thank you for having me. I really appreciate it.

Lisa: My pleasure.

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.