

Ep #131: Behavior Barometers 2.0



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With Your Host

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You are listening to episode 131 of *The Autism Mom Coach*, Behavior Barometers 2.0.

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, welcome to the podcast. I am so glad you are here and I hope you are doing well. This week's episode is going to be a continuation of last week's discussion about behavior barometers. If you have not yet listened to last week's episode, I highly suggest that you do it, but either way I'm going to give you a synopsis.

Last week I talked about the importance of becoming more familiar with our children's behaviors and their meltdowns so that we could scale them based on intensity. This is important because like I said, not all behaviors are created equally. And it's important for us as Autism parents to be able to distinguish between the levels and intensity of behaviors for our children, because that's going to impact what they need and how we need to respond.

So, in last week's episode, I focused on gathering the information about your child so that you could rank their behaviors using a scale from one to five, one being regulated to five being the highest level of a meltdown for your child. For some people, that will be a child who is dysregulated and crying for five days straight. For some people, that will be a child who is aggressing themselves, aggressing others, destroying property. It's really individualized to the child.

But in any event, the purpose of the exercise was to get really familiar with your child when they are regulated and to see the trajectory of their escalation from becoming mildly agitated to full blown meltdown. Now, the 2.0 version of this is to create our own parallel behavior barometer and

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really what I mean is our response barometer. We want to decide ahead of time how we want to respond to our child's varying degrees of escalation.

The reason this is important is because decisions ahead of time when you are not escalated, when you are not triggered in your fight or flight response. They are going to be made with your highest level of rational thinking. When you are calm and regulated, you have full access to your highest level of thinking, problem solving, and strategizing. So that's why decisions ahead of time are so important.

So, here's how I suggest you do this. First, go to the show notes and download the behavior scale that I provided with last week's episode, and I'm also going to provide it with this week's episode. And using the guidance that I provide on the template of the various levels of behavior from one to five for your child. Create your own behavior barometer, that is individualized to your child.

Then once you are familiar with the behaviors of your child at each of those levels, what they do, what they don't do, decide at each level, what are the things that you want to do. How do you want to respond to these behaviors? And making those decisions now ahead of time, gives you the ability to problem solve ahead of time as opposed to when you are in the middle of a meltdown, when your fight or flight response is triggered and you're going to have less access to your rational thinking.

So, for instance, you can decide, when my child is at a two and they are mildly agitated, I'm going to back off. I'm going to give them some space. I'm going to speak less and I'm going to let them resolve it. And then you can be as specific as possible. If after 10 minutes they're not able to resolve it or I see that they're escalating then I will do this. In this way, you're giving yourself very clear information about what you are going to do.

So again, when you are triggered and your mind is going to go to that, oh my God, I don't know what to do, you can rely on these decisions ahead of time. Now, the one thing I want to call out here is on the scale, one to five.

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One is when your child is regulated, when they are doing well, when they are calm, when they are happy, when they are engaged. I want you to decide ahead of time what you are going to do during those times.

Because what I see from so many of my clients and I was guilty of this as well, is that when your child is doing well, a lot of us don't enjoy it. We are confused, sometimes happily confused for a bit, but most of us are on edge. We're waiting for the other shoe to drop. We're walking on eggshells. We're not actually enjoying and savoring the moment of when they are in a good place. And I encourage you to do this because there's really no benefit to you being on edge when they are in a good place.

It's not going to prepare you for when they do melt down. And the only thing that happens when you do that is that you enjoy nothing. You don't enjoy the good and then most of us don't really enjoy when they're melting down. And so, you have the situation where even when things are good, you're not enjoying it. And so, for so many of you, the biggest part of this work of creating your own behavior response barometer will be your ability to enjoy it, to savor it, to let down your guard, and love it when your child is regulated.

As to how you respond to your child's behaviors as they progress up the ladder of intensity, that's going to be based on the information that you have gathered about what works and what doesn't work. And this is going to be individualized to your kid.

Now, in broad strokes, some of the things that I see that don't work are getting hyper verbal, giving your child lots and lots of options, lecturing your child, reminding your child of the conversation you had the day before and how they promised not to do this anymore. None of that helps when your child is escalated. They are not available for a teachable moment. And chances are if you are talking to them like that, if you are lecturing like that, you are stressed and your voice, your tone, and your body language is reflecting that to your child and in turn they are reacting to it.

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So overall, something I don't think is helpful is talking. What I do see is helpful is being quiet, being present and being clear with very simple instruction. Other things I have seen is helpful are standing back, giving your child space, letting them try to work it out on their own. And this is really important because when you are starting to freak out by your child's behaviors, they're getting the message that one, you're afraid of them and you're afraid of their behaviors. But two, that feelings and their emotions are scary and that they should be scared of them.

We don't want our children to be scared of their emotions. We want to normalize them as much as possible. So, to the extent that you are going to use verbiage, use verbiage that is calming and validating to your child. And like I said before, you can use the two for one, when you use your tone, when you use your voice and you use your words to try to calm them, you can do it for yourself too. A calm voice, a soothing tone, all of that signals to your nervous system and to theirs, safety.

Now, for some of us as we move up the ladder of intensity and we're getting to a five, some of those behaviors can be very challenging and some of them might even be dangerous. And I know that these are difficult decisions to make and they're not decisions that any of us take lightly. But I think it's really important for all of you who are dealing with behaviors that can get into that category, to have a very clear plan of what you will do and when you will pull the trigger to do it.

I know for me, I struggled so much with this and I would wait and wait. Sometimes I wouldn't call the doctor or call 911. I would avoid it, telling myself that I could handle it on my own. And the more that I did that, the worse it actually got. So, for those of you who are dealing with bigger emotions and behaviors that are dangerous, you have to start to make these decisions ahead of time.

Even though these are decisions none of us ever want to make, it's important that you know ahead of time when you are going to pull the trigger. Because even in the most intensive situations, knowing what you're going to do, actually does bring some peace and some comfort to you.

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Alright, that is it for Behavior Barometers 2.0. Again, I encourage you to download the PDF and to create a behavioral barometer for your child. And I also encourage you to, side by side, create one for yourself. So, for each rung of your child's behaviors, you know exactly what to do and what not to do both in terms of what you do and don't do for them and how you support yourself as the intensity grows.

And finally, if this is something you struggle with or something that you want help with, I can help you with this. I talk behavior barometers and meltdowns all day every day with my clients. And I am happy to support you in becoming the calm, confident and capable mom that your child needs you to be. If you are interested in doing this work one-on-one with me and joining my community of amazing Autism moms, schedule your consultation call now.

And for those of you who do sign up for coaching with me, the one-on-one coaching, you not only get the one-on-one coaching with me. I invite you to my membership community of past and current coaching clients where you will not only get my support, you will get the support of other moms like you who are struggling with the same issues. So again, for those of you who are interested in changing the trajectory of your parenting experience, I encourage you to schedule your consultation call now. Alright, that is it for this week, I will talk to you next.

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.