



TURN AUTISM AROUND
WITH DR. MARY BARBERA

Transcript for Podcast Episode: 047

*Dietary Intervention for Autism, Mindset & Parenting:
Interview with Autism Dad Len Arcuri*

Hosted by: Dr. Mary Barbera

- Mary Barbera: You're listening to another episode of the Turn Autism Around podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Mary Barbera, and I have a special guest today; someone who I met in person a year ago, but I'm excited to talk to today in this interview. His name is Len Arcuri and I'm going to introduce him in just a second.
- Mary Barbera: Before I do that, I want to give a listener shout out to Harper B, who left a five star rating and review on Apple Podcast. She said, "Wow, such amazing info for parents and professionals. Mary, thank you for helping so many. This podcast is beyond amazing." And I know that a lot of work from me and my small team goes into producing these podcasts each and every week for both parents and professionals. So I am thrilled when I read podcast reviews like this. So please, if you haven't subscribed, do that. If you haven't left a five star rating and review and you love the podcast, I would love it if you would do that. It helps me spread the word.
- Mary Barbera: So let me introduce Len Arcuri. He is an autism dad and a parent coach, but he spent decades helping corporations improve their operational processes as a six sigma master black belt. And he and his wife have two children, and their son was diagnosed with moderate severe autism very early on at the age of 18 months. But now he is 12 and thriving, fully conversational, and we talk all about that in this episode as well as the impact that it's had, the diagnosis has had on his marriage and his family. His son also has allergies and that's kind of where it all started. So he and his wife have become experts on dietary intervention as well. So we talk all about that and how, whether we're parents or professionals listening, how we could get into a better mindset to help ourselves as well as our children and clients. So I'm excited to present this interview with Len Arcuri.

Welcome to the Turnout Autism Around podcast for both parents and professionals in the autism world who want to turn things around, be less

stressed, and lead happier lives. And now your host, autism mom, behavior analyst, and bestselling author, Dr. Mary Barbera.

Mary Barbera: So I'm so excited to welcome Len to our show. Thanks for joining us today.

Len Arcuri: I'm so excited to be here. Thank you for having me.

Mary Barbera: Awesome. So first I always like to start with, describe your fall into the autism world.

Len Arcuri: Sure. Well, I guess my fall I've been on this journey, a healing journey with our son and my wife and my daughter, it's been around 11 years now, so it's over a decade that we've been on our journey. And when it started, we were living in Brooklyn, New York, and my wife and I had our corporate careers. And then, you know, she surprised me on my birthday with the news that she was pregnant and I couldn't be more overjoyed and thrilled. And so we started preparing for a baby and it was about a month later that she for her work went to an autism fundraiser and she went there and then came back and she shared with me what she learned, the stories, what the families went through. And we both really had a deep conversation and we both looked at each other and we said, we didn't think we could handle something like that. Like that just seemed so hard. And we left it at that. And then fast forward, our son was born two days after Christmas. I know that's a familiar date for you.

Mary Barbera: Yeah, that's Spencer's birthday. December 27th. Wow. And what year was that?

Len Arcuri: That was 2006. So he was born and you know, he came into our world and he everything was really kind of fine, generally speaking for the first year. And his first year, he was great. He met the developmental milestones, you know, it was a really good first year, but then basically everything changed when he had a tiny taste of peanut butter. And that's how we found out that he had a life threatening allergy to peanuts. So that basically wrecked his immune system. We wound up in the emergency room within 15 minutes. He had hives all over his body and his immune system was wrecked. He probably issues that we hadn't really seen. But otherwise, that was like the big seminal event.

Len Arcuri: Really after that happened, we started to see, you know, you then turn one years of age and we started noticing some symptoms. We started noticing some things that didn't seem right. He basically lost a few words that he had. He was getting kind of clumsy, but even more importantly,

he was just kind of in his own world. He didn't... The social contact wasn't there, he wasn't playing with other kids. He wasn't really playing with his toys appropriately. And he just had a real fat obsession with wheels and anything that could spin. So he would spin any object. It'd be amazed what he could actually get moving. He would like take a stroller and take it outside just to play with the stroller wheels.

Len Arcuri: So we noticed a lot of these, well, not typical things. And basically scheduled an appointment with the developmental pediatrician and at 18 months he got his formal diagnosis, which was moderate to severe autism.

Mary Barbera: Wow. That's really early.

Len Arcuri: Yeah. It was early. We are thankful that we had the right influences at the time that kind of said, Hey, this doesn't seem right. So we scheduled that appointment, got that formal diagnosis which was technically PDDNOS, basically the catchall autism diagnosis.

Mary Barbera: Which is no longer a diagnosis, but it was back then.

Len Arcuri: It definitely was, and you know, the developmental pediatrician basically, you know, she told us to focus on lowering our expectations, you know, that we can, you know, spend more time, you know, focusing on giving him life skills and focusing on him, learning that, but you know, that, and then we could do what we could to try to reduce the behaviors. But there was never any real hope that he could heal or, or progress or get to a better place. So, you know the developmental pediatrician was probably our first experience of more of a fixed mindset versus a growth mindset.

Len Arcuri: And that's outrageous, you know, we, we walked away determined that we were going to do something about it .and two weeks later our daughter was born because my wife, we were having our second child. So we had a new baby and an autism diagnosis. And that was a real tough time as we tried to navigate, you know, what was going to help. But since we were living in New York City , we were really fortunate from a services perspective and when we did, we did all the paperwork, we hit it hard. And, you know, through the city of New York, we got initially I think 30 hours of services.

Mary Barbera: Did the developmental pediatrician recommend ABA programming?

Len Arcuri: Yes.

Mary Barbera: And then that's what the mostly the 30 hours a week was?

Len Arcuri: Yeah. I think it was mainly that with some occupational therapy, physical therapy, and a little bit of speech thrown in, but it was mainly ABA and we were given the recommendation not only from that person, but others, you know, to hit it hard, to do as much as you can one-on-one. And so yeah, thankfully through the city we were able to get those services, which we know lot of people aren't in that position. And so it was quite the gift. And so we did that. And that progressed.

Len Arcuri: And then simultaneously a couple of weeks later I was on a flight across the country to go to my first autism conference. And that's where I started to learn that, wait, you know, some healing is possible. There are things you can do to help address what's going on. And it's more of not a fixed thing in the brain, it's more of something that if you improve the body's functioning, you can see improvements. And so that gave a lot of hope. And my son's name is Ry, R Y and his initials are RDA. So I had business cards printed for that conference for RDA standing for Ry Defeats Autism because at the time I was in a war, right? I'm like, we're gonna beat this thing. We've got this, he's not going to have autism for long. We're going to reverse it. So I had that in my head that was...

Mary Barbera: Very black and white thinking. I actually just did a webinar last week and it was like, I had very black and white thinking. Like there was going to be a recovery party one day and it was going to be a finish line like I was going to be done with autism. And while there is a lot of hope as over the past two decades, there is a lot of hope, especially if a child like yours is caught so early that there's a lot of hope. You know it was proven three decades ago with the Lovaas study that there is hope for recovery, whatever recovery looks like. But in the kids that I've seen that have healed and essentially recovered and some of them have avoided the diagnosis or lost the diagnosis, then those kids still might have ongoing issues of maybe anxiety, maybe a speech articulation issue, maybe a learning disability like dyslexia.

Mary Barbera: But then also, you know, I learned over the past two decades it's like there really is no such thing as Joe Normal. Like every child, you know, may have issues and will have issues and every adult will have issues that come up. And so I really like the fact that you've now taken your corporate job work and translated it to more coaching and you know, being bringing hope to parents, bringing resiliency no matter what happens, no matter if it is moderate to severe autism and like Lucas stays at moderate severe autism or like your son. So how is your son doing now? And how old is he now?

Len Arcuri: So yeah, he's 12 now, going on 13 in December, but he's progressed really, really well, especially since we started to help support his body more. But fast forward, he's in a public school. He's in sixth grade. He just ran for student council president, so he made it into the primary and then lost the general election. And he's okay with that because he's just a happy kid. He's friendly to everyone and no, he's achieved a way of being just content and happy with himself which is something I'm still striving towards. So like I think in terms of what's the goal, he just, we're blessed. He's a very happy connected kid. He loves people and he's just progressed so far from being in his own world.

Mary Barbera: Does he know he has autism?

Len Arcuri: You know, it's funny cause he doesn't in a sense that we talked about autism and like I'll mention it, but early on we didn't put the label on it. Because one we didn't think it'd be helpful. Two, I still had issues at the time with that term and didn't want him to have that term. So it's never been something that's defined him. We, he knows he's different, he knows he's a different learner. We accentuate, you know, Hey, you have unique gifts and that's wonderful. And you have other areas where there's areas of opportunity. So he knows he's different than other kids, but he's never identified himself as autistic and having autism.

Len Arcuri: When things were at there... The biggest challenges? We did the, you know, well we've done an ATEC and autism treatment evaluation checklist on him throughout and he started as a 78, which was more on the moderate to severe. So the higher the number, the let's say more on the spectrum you are. And so he's gone from a 78 down to where he is a 4 now.

Len Arcuri: So it's great he's progressed. He doesn't have a lot of the behaviors and communication challenges and the physical issues he had. But he's absolutely a different learner. He's got things that he's really focused on and a bit obsessed upon. You know, he loves math, he loves puzzles, he wants to do puzzles with everyone. And he just has his own unique gifts and his own unique challenges that we continue to work through. So there's no, Hey, we made it and it's not as if I'm going to have my recovery party when he gets to zero. Because he might never be at a zero. It's not about the autism going away, because if I wanted to, I can pay the developmental pediatrician say, Hey, can you please give an evaluation and not give a diagnosis? And you know, that does nothing.

Mary Barbera: Right. And yeah, it's such a hard thing. And your daughter, is she typically developing?

Len Arcuri: She's neuro-typical and didn't exhibit a lot of the behaviors and symptoms that he had. She didn't have a lot of the digestive issues because that was the other thing. He had gigantic digestive issues and he was actually diagnosed with bowel disease and we were changing diapers 10 times a day. And so once food became a big part of his healing, because he had all these allergies, you know, you had the peanut allergy, but then he was allergic to everything else. He was on a liquid medical food for over a year, only because any food he ate, he became allergic to. So that basically taught us that food's really important for our family. And so since he had such a restrictive diet, we said as a family, if he can't eat it, we're not going to eat it either. So we all kind of ultimately adopted a very clean eating program, you know, fruits, vegetables, some of the right proteins and that helped him to progress. And it also enabled our daughter to have a stronger foundation early on. So she's never had, you know, anything. She was never diagnosed. He's neuro-typical but she's her own unique self too. So I totally think we're all on the spectrum in some way. And you know, it's all about being unique.

Mary Barbera: Yeah. Okay, great. So why don't we switch gears a little bit and talk about, you are now, you and your wife both are coaching parents, not just parents of kids on the spectrum, but you do have that under your belt as well. But so this is warrior parent coaching and you mostly at this point work one-to-one with parents. And what are some of the struggles specifically for parents of kids with autism? What are some of the overall themes you see, or I know each coaching session in each coaching client would be different, but just in terms of helping the parents and professionals that are listening, what are some of the stress points and things?

Len Arcuri: Well, again, there are definitely some themes and we've kinda created our coaching around those themes. But the first one starting out the gate is the mindset, and I guess to take a step back, it depends on how you develop, what the problem is. The problem that we're trying to help people with is how the parents are feeling throughout the journey. Because everyone's got their own unique journey. It's gonna last however long it lasts. But it's all about how they're feeling. Everyday doing what can help and being with their child. So if the mindset isn't one of a growth mindset, one of, Hey, I'm going to do when I can, I'm going to try. I'm going to make mistakes. I'm going to constantly learn, you know, versus that fixed mindset that you know, Hey this, there's really not much I can do. And then that's where you start getting into a victim mentality.

Len Arcuri: So for our clients, they all show up to some degree with some growth mindset. They know that they can do things. That's why they're on the

call with us. They're seeking help. But I think the key thing is that everyone's growth mindset, wherever it is, can always be further grown and developed. And so we try to meet them where they are to help them kind of get the growth mindset as big as it can be. Because if you truly have a growth mindset as you're doing interventions or as you're trying to help your child and bring them to therapy, if you have that mindset, then you can never really make a mistake. You can't fail because every failure is just a learning opportunity. So the mindset is key just to get momentum out of the gate. And it's also key to ensure that you have resiliency to stay the course. Cause no matter what you're doing, you're going to have your ups and downs. And it's like, it's how do you continue to get up and continue to persevere?

Mary Barbera: Right. And while there's a lot of clear action steps you can take to make things better, you know, there isn't a lot of control over the actual outcome of anything. And it's like, you know, on the drive home from the hospital when Lucas got his diagnosis, you know, he's in the back seat completely silent. I'm crying in the passenger seat. My husband saying things like he'll never get married. He'll never, you know, go to college and all these... You know, my whole mind was blown. Like I thought I was married. I had a master's degree in nursing administration. I lived in the suburbs, I had two healthy kids. They of course would grow up. They would go to college. They would both get married. And like as he's saying this, I'm like, how do we know Spencer's not going to have an accident, God forbid, or have some issues?

Mary Barbera: And I'm like, your brother, your 40 year old brother never went to college or never was married. Like all of a sudden my whole expectations when you said the developmental pediatrician said, you know, just lower your expectations. My whole expectations of my whole life just suddenly went like wait a second I shouldn't have expectations. I have no control over how my life is going to turn out, or what kind of... I also say that, you know, once you draw the autism card, your name is still in the lottery for a bunch of other stuff that come down the pipe to like, you know, family members still get cancer and other typically developing kids have issues and you might go bankrupt or whatever. Like more stuff is going to happen and so that's why I really like your whole philosophy of bringing hope and resiliency.

Mary Barbera: So it doesn't matter. I mean, yes, I think Lucas's life would be easier if he didn't have moderate to severe autism. I think my life is, you know, he needs care and that's why my goal is to turn autism around and have each child reach their fullest potential. Be as safe, as independent, and as happy as possible. Like that's the goal. It's like people are like, well, what

do you mean by turn autism around? There's no such thing as recovery. There's such thing as hope and resiliency and getting each child to their fullest potential and each adult.

Mary Barbera: And so like, let's just move forward and have that growth abundance mindset that Hey, I'm going to figure out what I can, I'm going to, you know, basically be resilient no matter how your child does because you in the end have little control over it.

Len Arcuri: That's right. That's right. And what you can control is internally how you're showing up, what you're choosing to believe. And again, that's the excitement is that's all totally within someone's control, but they have to want it. You know? So when we think about the people who work with us, they need to, for them to be a fit, they need to know, number one, that their child can get better. You know, forget about recovery and all that. Just have the child get better. Can they get stronger? Can they get happier? There's an opportunity for growth.

Len Arcuri: And then the second question is, do they feel as a parent that they can get better, become a better problem solver, and become, you know, better from... They have limiting beliefs that are holding it back. Do they have an opportunity to break through some of those things? That can free up a lot of energy. And can they get better at self-care, which you've talked about. Can they get better just in trusting their intuition? This is all internal work. And some just people, if they have that desire or that awareness that they can get better, their child get better and they're willing to do inconvenience stuff, which it's amazing how many people are just so afraid of things that take effort. If those three are in alignment, then the amazing thing is there's so much they can do to just start to feel better, to feel more optimistic and for that to come from within, not from something that someone else is telling them. And from that position they can do so, so much more.

Mary Barbera: So tell me about things that are inconvenient, that people resist doing? What are we talking about?

Len Arcuri: So much. But diet is the first one and you know, and so going in, you know, you have people who let's say tried gluten free and they say it doesn't work. You know, for us gluten free was mandatory because our son had a true allergy to gluten and wheat. So we had no choice. But the idea is going in, do you believe that food really matters? Like so in other words, don't even bother trying to go gluten free. If you really don't believe it's going to work, then it probably won't. It'll become a kind of a self-fulfilling prophecy. So even if you get past that hurdle then, well

gluten free, especially back when we started, was much more difficult than it is now. It's inconvenient because if you can't go pick up food anywhere, it's absolutely incredibly costly. And not many people have the ability to have that much of an increase in their grocery budget.

Len Arcuri: So it's extremely inconvenient. It's costly and it's very easy to say I'm not going to do it or I don't believe it's going to work. Now it happened for us that was really important and for other people... But for other people it really makes a difference in some other people it doesn't. So you won't know until you experiment. But the key thing is if you feel like you're informed enough to think that this might help, then get yourself immersed in understanding why and really make your belief that food matters strong, and then dive in and really, really give it your all and then at an appropriate amount of time, then you can go back to, okay, is this helping at all?

Mary Barbera: Before we go on to any other things that are inconvenient, because I think this is really key. Because you know, it's one thing to tell people I'll be more optimistic and everything, but I like the fact that you're going to give us some things that people are sometimes resistant to that could make a difference. But let me chime in here. Kind of be devil's advocate. So a lot of people, a lot of behavior analysts listen to the show and researchers and they have this belief that, you know, diets, gluten case free diet. Some people believe that it's pseudoscience. There's no controlled studies proving its effectiveness for autism and that you should just stick with ABA. Now I could just answer that, but you know, why don't you tell me your thoughts on if you get that reaction? Have you ever heard that?

Len Arcuri: Oh sure. Yeah.

Mary Barbera: So what, so what, how do you respond?

Len Arcuri: Well, and that's where there is no right or wrong, and there is no categorical answer as to whether gluten free helps or not. It's all such an individual thing. I would say..., I spend time at conferences, I really do my due diligence and there was a lot of science. There's a lot of research that points there is a connection. Now whether it's gluten or casein, or...

Mary Barbera: Or just GMOs, triglycerides or whatever.

Len Arcuri: You have to hang on to what speaks to you, what makes sense to you, and the only way you truly know whether it's going to help your kid is if you really dive in and you try it for an appropriate lifetime, then say it

again. Some summit majors, some that makes a huge difference. Others, it's so individualistic as you know. But I do feel like if you want to believe that it doesn't work, it's easy just to take that stance. But if you really look at real peer reviewed research, independent research, there's absolutely a connection between the gut and the brain and the mortar. The gut is healthy and doing what it's what it's meant to do, you will see an improvement in symptoms across the board, including neurologically. So I've been so immersed in the people who believe this and the research that's out there. I feel like it's common knowledge, but I appreciate it's not for everyone.

Mary Barbera: Right? And it doesn't have to be, you know, this double-blind, which is impossible. You can't double blind a food study because you know what you're eating. And so it's really tough. Plus you got to think about who's going to fund a double blind study on diet or supplements like Omega threes or something because it's not in the pharmaceuticals best interest to fund such a study. And the pharmaceuticals and the food industry now are so tied together that, you know, I really feel like, I'm a behavior analyst and, but I'm also a registered nurse and I'm also just a mom and like you, this is not pseudo-science. What you put in your body is important whether or not we can, you know, have real research in the autism world right this moment. There is a lot of research to show that we are getting addicted to sugar and flour and processed foods and it is not good for our health.

Mary Barbera: It's not good for our neurologic health, but it's also not good for our cardiovascular health and a bunch of other things. So I just wanted to make that point. I am not on some diet crusade. Lucas is not on a gluten free diet. We tried it and I believe that if we were back when he was young... But the diet was just coming out when he was diagnosed, and I was swimming with what I was gonna do. He was extremely picky with eating. We actually did a feeding program at children's hospital just so I could try the gluten free diet. And I think, you know, I have had hundreds of clients directly and some of them have been on diets and it's not just gluten case and free, you know, some kids benefit from a ketogenic diet or no processed food diet or whatever.

Mary Barbera: And I'm not, like this podcast is actually more about mindset and I, so I don't want to get too much into a tangent. I'm not going to be producing loads of blogs or videos or podcasts, you know, on diet. Actually, when my paid online members, you know, start talking about diet or supplements, I'm like, Whoa, Whoa, Whoa. We're just talking about my core stuff because there's too much. And then, Oh, I heard a study about blah, blah, blah. It's like, I don't want to talk about that. And I don't think

the majority of our members... I'm curating a specific strategies and information about how to help kids get better, as better as they can with talking, with tantrums, with sleep, with eating. You know, I'm not able to even consume any of these studies, you know, for kids with autism or you know, and that focus may change over the years. But I do think that it's an important thing to bring up because in the autism world right away you start talking about anything biomedical diet, it gets shut down in some people's minds.

Mary Barbera: So. Okay. So let's move on from diet, and are there other things that people are resistant to that are not convenient that you think is important?

Len Arcuri: I think that there are so many, but the thing that jumps to my mind is self-trust because it's really easy to advocate decision making to a doctor or to what other people are doing. So what we found with clients is that, well everyone has this level of self-trust. There's no question about it, but it's almost like we give them the space to allow them to see that and to allow themselves to tap into their inner knowing. Because I guess with that, it becomes very inconvenient that if you trust your gut and you make a call that goes against what your pediatrician recommends, people are so afraid of then being accountable and for the inconvenient things that will happen if they choose what they feel is right for them and their child.

Len Arcuri: And those inconvenient things are other people's judgement. And perhaps if maybe some harm does come, like their son becomes aggressive in some way or whatever that may be. So it's really inconvenient to tap into your inner knowing and do something that you know is right with other people who might object. And so that's not to say just do everything your own way and don't pay attention to what other people recommend. There's pediatricians for a reason, they have knowledge, and they have insight, but seek those opinions out. Give them all the data and then take that in, and then trust your gut. Like, check in with your gut, see what feels right for you and hold firm and make that call even if it means that you're kind of lonely and maybe out there. But it's very inconvenient to do that because if something goes wrong, there's no one to blame. And your kid, your child's health is too important for you to not do things that you know in your heart are right for them.

Len Arcuri: And that's where I feel like people's journey... They feel worse than they need to when they're doing something that they don't really believe in their gut tells them something else. So we try to help people tap into that

and to step into that stronger version of themselves that says, Nope, this feels right and I don't care what other people think. Or it's okay if my pediatrician maybe recommended something else. Because I don't think the, the knowledge of what's going to help your child, there's nothing stronger than the parent's intuition and especially the moms of tuition. So Cass, my wife, Cass and I both have intuitions, we both have a sense of what might be right and we differed sometimes and when we differed we had a really... Fortunately our relationship got stronger by this and we know we're very lucky with that. Things broke our way.

Len Arcuri: But we'd have a conversation on it and if we differed, if her intuition said one thing and mine said another, she wins because the mom's intuition is stronger and she has a stronger connection with the kids than I do. And it was really powerful for me to understand that and accept that it was a little bit difficult. But you know, I do, I believe that firmly right now that the ma, there's nothing more powerful than the mother's intuition. So we like to help clients understand that, see that and then have the freedom to trust their gut and to make sometimes courageous decisions.

Mary Barbera: And you know, we're not just talking about autism either. Like there's professionals out there and most of the people that are listening are actually female and moms that... And usually it is the mom that becomes the gung ho parent that becomes the captain of the ship. And so that's why I'd like to also interviewed dads.

Mary Barbera: How has... You said your relationship you feel is stronger now, but were there rough times? And what kind of advice do you give couples if they have different beliefs or have different... Like my husband was like pessimistic, he'll never get married, you know, he's a physician; and I was more optimistic and like, we're going to fix this. Do you see that a lot, and like any strategies for helping marriages survive this?

Len Arcuri: One suggestion I would make is if the discussion can as early as possible change from I want this versus you want that and there's like you're at odds just to frame it from a standpoint of what's going to be useful for the child. And I know that sounds obvious, but if both parents can get aligned with it, that's how they're going to evaluate everything. Then sure. For a topic like whatever it is... If one parent says one thing and the other says something else, air your reasons, air like why it's important to you. And really I think the key thing is just for each parent to give the other one time to get their thoughts out.

Len Arcuri: Because a lot of times the conversations are back and forth and people aren't really heard. So if let's say the dad lets the mom explain why she

wants to do a certain intervention or try a certain therapy, whatever the case maybe. For the dad to really listen, our magic number is like seven minutes. So for seven minutes one parent shuts up the other one talks and explains and kind of says whatever's on their mind, and then you reverse and you have the other parent do it. At least then both parents have like a better understanding of why the other person's advocating for whatever they're advocating.

Len Arcuri: And then from that foundation for both parents to say, okay now we need to come together on what's going to be useful for the child. And if they look at it from that perspective, as opposed to who's going to win, there's a better chance that they can actually get aligned. And if sometimes the compromise is we're going to try X, Y, and Z for three months and then we're going to be evaluated. So it's not like it's a permanent decision. A lot of times people like hold firm to their turf because they feel like whatever decision is made is permanent. It's never permanent. So I feel like just hearing the other person and understanding the why behind what, why they're feeling what they're feeling.

Len Arcuri: And then for the parents to just basically agree, we're not going to do anything that's going to cause more harm. We're not going to do anything that's going to hold our child back. And the number one thing that they could do to hold their child back is them not agreeing, and one does one thing, one does another. They give an inconsistent message to the child and they see parents who are battling back and forth, which from a modeling perspective has its own consequences for the child. So just for the awareness and just getting behind a lens that says for the child what's best, not who's going to win. It's the best starting advice I could give. And that really helped my wife and me.

Mary Barbera: Yeah, I like the whole, you know, letting the other person talk for seven minutes. I think that's wise advice. And then also, you know, you can agree to try it for three months or you know, you do have to give it a try. Like if especially you're talking about ABA therapy or a diet or a new therapy company or a new speech therapist, like sometimes you do need to give it as long as the child is safe and you know, not, you know, not in an unsafe situation, but sometimes you need to give it a few sessions or a few weeks and months to really see. And you have to be consistent. But we do have a lot of families that listen to the show that they're separated, divorced, they're single parents. And I know sometimes being consistent is hard when they go to dad's house. And especially for kids with autism, I'm sure that you have seen that where then you have the child who doesn't transition well, doesn't need consistency and then is getting two sets of very different expectations.

Len Arcuri: Yup. And that is hard. And when that's happening, particularly let's say if it is diet related, there are some of these things that make no sense to do something four days a week, and then the other three days are doing the opposite. So if there is no agreement, then it makes it real hard for something like that to even have a chance of working if it's not, you know, 100% for a certain period of time to see if there's any impact. But yeah, no. So there again, it all comes down to those two parents, particularly if they're separated or divorced, again, having a conversation saying where can we get aligned and having that intention and if there's stuff that's getting away from them, headlining that intention. And obviously that's where counseling and the like works in so it's a complicated topic, but it's just giving the space to hear the why of why the person's feeling the way they're are, it's just so powerful. And you can do that without having to see a counselor.

Mary Barbera: How is your coaching different than counseling?

Len Arcuri: The way I like to describe what we do is it's all about how people are navigating the journey as opposed to what they do. So it's all be at that inner work. And guess with a couple of, we're coaching both mom and dad if any kind of no relationship type issues pop up and they're comfortable talking about it, great. We can talk about it. But otherwise we don't pretend to be therapists. We would stop a conversation and recommend that they, you know, a certain issue that they do seek professional help. Just like we wouldn't pretend to be doctors and say, Hey, this worked for our kid. Why don't you try that? We don't get into any of that. If someone's got a specific issue and they want our, you know, what worked for us, we can share that. But otherwise it's all about just meeting the person where they are in terms of how they're navigating and helping them, giving them the tools to be navigating with greater clarity and with more confidence and basically with more ease.

Len Arcuri: Because if this journey feels incredibly hard from day one and always feels hard, even if you have a successful outcome, whatever it is you're wanting for your child, I mean that's not a great trade because the entire journey felt horrible. So we're about yes, want some outcome and try to do things to get there. But we try to give them the tools for the journey to be, to feel better and for them to stay connected with their child, and to enjoy the moments they have with their child while trying to get to a better place. Because if you're just constantly striving on that outcome, like mine initially was autism to go away, then I pivoted to, I just want a stronger connection with my child. And that changed everything. But it's all about how do you just everyday show up and for it not to feel as hard as it as it could.

Len Arcuri:

And that's all the inner work. So in terms of counseling, we're not so much giving advice as we're just trying to empower that parent. Because they know 95% of what they got, how they got to where they are and what they need to do. We just offer the space for them to see their blind spots perhaps for the first time. And to give them the space to choose the actions that are right for them. It has nothing to do with us as counselors advising them what to do. So we try to keep the boundaries very clear and it's all about them, you know, basically developing more inner strength. And that's why we call it warrior parent coaching for them to rise up to a stronger version of themselves, but it's not them being warriors against autism or OCD, it's them being warriors against anything that's going to hold them and their child back. And again, there's so much that they're doing that they had the power to pivot and choose something different that can make a huge difference.

Mary Barbera:

So part of my goal is for parents and professionals to be less stressed and lead happier lives. And I know we just talked for, you know, 45 minutes about how to make that happen, but just to summarize, like what are the one or two things you can tell parents and professionals that might lead to less stress and happiness.

Len Arcuri:

Yeah, I think on that it's the whole idea of letting go of the outcome. So in any situation, like you're wanting something, if you're a therapist, you want your child to do a certain thing, you're trying to encourage them to do a certain thing. Or if you're a parent or wanting the child to comply with whatever you're asking, it's so easy to get caught up in, I want this outcome, I want this outcome. But to be able to still want it, but to kind of let go with it a little bit, and... Because if you're just focused on the outcome, particularly with my son, so much stress gets built in my body. If like, let's say he was yelling and using a loud kind of doing some screaming and a behavior that I was not wanting it all. I had a headache, I was frustrated and I just, my whole body would tense up when he would yell or scream and it was because in that moment I wanted it to stop.

Len Arcuri:

So it was helpful for me to be like, Hey, I know I really want this. Let me just back off a little bit. It's not that important and perhaps he's doing it for some reason I don't understand. And just that itself again was something I could control and it didn't mean I still wasn't going to try to help get that outcome, but just to back off a little bit on it and not be so obsessed with it, which is what I was many times, I found that very useful. Want something, want the outcome, but just take your foot off the pedal a little bit and just breathe and reassess and come back with a little bit more with calm and curiosity and to ask yourself, Hey, why is this happening? It might be happening for a reason, I don't understand, but

I'm going to still show up, be excited, be connected and I'm not going to go to that place where... I can only imagine from my son's perspective, he would be seeing it in my face, and that frustration and that wasn't going to help them.

Mary Barbera: Right. And this like kind of getting mad at a child who's sick, you know, you're not... Because a child is throwing up, you know, it is inconvenient to clean it up and you're frustrated and you've got to do X, Y and Z and now this is happening. But it's like, you know, sometimes those behaviors are a part of the puzzle of what's going on. And yeah, behaviors do have a function. And so being accepting of the child and being loving and knowing, and then also the second part is what you said is being curious and knowing that you're gonna try to help them get to the next level, and you're going to help them try to get better. As better as can be in every area and you yourself are going to get better.

Mary Barbera: And like we said before, you ultimately don't have control over the actual outcome that's going to happen. All you can do is give it the good college try, and stay positive and optimistic, which I think has been your message throughout the interview, which has been great. So whether you're a parent or a professional, I think these tips will resonate with both. And so I'm really happy that to have you on today. So how can people follow your work or get in touch with you? Do you have a website?

Len Arcuri: Sure. Yeah. They go to a warriorparentcoaching.com. That's our website where they can find out more about what we do and how we can help. And Instagram and Facebook as well, same thing at work, at Warrior Parent Coaching.

Mary Barbera: Warrior Parent Coaching. Okay. We'll put that in the show notes as well so you can follow up with Len and watch his work. I know he has got big plans, him and his wife, to expand their services and I think that is great whether you have a child with autism or not. I think whenever we can improve ourselves, you know, get counseling, get coaching, improve ourselves get to the next level, it's always going to get us there faster. And I appreciate your time today.

Len Arcuri: Thank you so much. I really appreciate being on and lovely to talk to you.

Mary Barbera: Okay, great. And for those of you listening, if you would like to learn more about my approach and join my online course and community, you can attend a free workshop at marybarbera.Com/Workshop, and I hope you tune in next week.

Thanks for listening to the Turn Autism Around podcast with Dr. Mary Barbera. For more information, visit Marybarbera.com.