

Unexceptional Moms Podcast
Episode 35 Transcript – Let's Talk About Resolutions as Parents of Kids With Disabilities

Ellen 0:27

Hello, and welcome to Episode 35 of the *Unexceptional Moms* podcast. I'm Ellen Stumbo.

Erin 0:33

And this is Erin Loraine, and today we are talking about New Year's resolutions. Ellen, do you make new year's resolutions?

Ellen 0:42

Not the typical way because when I have tried to do those resolutions, it never happens. And within the first few weeks, it's like okay, I just give up.

Erin 0:54

Right. Right. Yes, I would agree with that. You know, the New Year is a new start for me, like in my mind, it's a new start. And so I appreciate that. And I do think through things and things that I'd like to do differently and maybe change, but I don't do anything formal. Because I do feel like I'm setting myself up for failure if I do. Because the truth is, it'll last if I'm lucky through mid-year, and then it'll be gone. But,

Ellen 1:24

I also feel like for those of us who have kids with disabilities, we already have so much extra on our plate, that sometimes those resolutions, it's like adding something extra, but we haven't taken care of the other things that make our lives a little bit more challenging or more difficult. At least for me. So if I'm fighting school, let's say for whatever reason, and an IEP is coming up. I'm not solving the issues that I'm fighting with school. I'm just adding more things to do.

Erin 2:00

Right. So one of the things that I have kind of said this year is that I'd like to read more. And that's great, because we're on break still right now and I'm on my second book of the year, but routine, and life is going to come back here very soon and then let's see how much I'm reading. So what does read more mean to me, right? I mean, I'm not a person that's going to say, I'm going to read 56 books this year, because I will stress out over achieving that.

Ellen 2:33

You're like, Ellie. Oh, yeah.

Erin 2:37

Oh yeah, right. So if I just say read more, that can be flexible for me, right?

Ellen 2:42

Now for me, I am someone who more than resolutions I do like to have goals. So I do like to make goals. For example, my goal for reading is to read three books a month. So that's 36. And I decided to be an overachiever for myself, but it helps me, I have so many books in my bookshelf,

books I've bought and I've never read. So I decided to pick all those books that I haven't read and I already picked them. And those are the books I'm going to read.

Erin 3:15

Okay, so you don't get to buy yourself new books.

Ellen 3:18

Well, we'll see how that goes. I was just talking to someone today and they mentioned a book and I said, "I already have my 36 books." I said, "Well, I can swap it for one of them. They've been waiting on my shelf. They can wait another year." We'll see.

Erin 3:34

I have a list of about six right now that I have lined up that I want to read. I love memoirs, and my books, they're all, almost, memoirs. I probably should consider branching out from that too. But if you have any, anyone out there has memoir recommendations, I'm all about memoirs.

Ellen 3:52

And we'll see if you haven't read them yet. So for me, goals do work for the resolution. So rather than, "this is my resolution," it's like, "This is my goal."

Erin 4:07

Isn't that just a different word for resolution?

Ellen 4:10

Maybe?

Erin 4:11

Come on, Ellen!

Ellen 4:12

I do like the idea of a new start. So for example, I do have goals for my writing. And I think in other previous years, I felt so overwhelmed by, "these are all the projects, all the things I want to do." So for this year, I sat down and I said, "There are 12 months. And these are all the projects I have." So then I actually broke them down. So basically I have 12 smaller goals, and once I had them, I actually gave myself a deadline and I wrote them in my calendar. I thought, "This is super doable." So I'm not expecting to do all these projects at one time. I am spreading them throughout the year and that seems so manageable, that for the first time I feel very excited and very hopeful and even made myself a little cheat sheet with what I want to do so that I can do a checklist, almost like a to do list with a checklist. So for me that works. And then I will fill it out throughout the year, because I have 12 goals.

Erin 5:12

You're inspiring me. I read somewhere that you should take your goal and cut it in half. And that that would be more achievable. So I don't know, maybe I do need to set something a little more firm for my reading or whatever. I also started working out again, on Christmas break. And again, I mean, that's such a stereotypical New Year's goal. But again, it's a new start, and I had

not been working out at all lately, but again, life is about to get back in motion, and I'm not going to be able to get up in the morning and workout. So, I see that one fizzling pretty fast but you know what, if I do it two days a week, that's two more than I had been doing

Ellen 6:00

Yeah, you know, we talked about this, for me, it's really hard to come up with an exercise goal like that because the New Year happens and I live in Minnesota, so it's winter and it's really hard for me to tackle those health goals during winter because it's just gray and dreary and the days gets so cold so

Erin 6:27

The reason I'll never moved to Minnesota. We were at the park today, Ellen.

Ellen 6:32

Yeah. Not going to happen here.

Erin 6:35

No, I don't imagine it would.

Ellen 6:38

But you say that you read that you should cut [resolutions] in half. And I get Marie Forleo's emails and she actually had one about New Year's resolutions and I happened to watch it. And she recommends doing actually something similar, she says to basically write all [your resolutions] down. All your resolutions, all your goals, you write them all down. Then you kind of pat yourself on the back, "Yay, these are all my resolutions!" And then you cut out everything that's not realistic. Yes,

Erin 7:08

Yes. Well, because it boils down to being realistic because I think when we, a lot of people, when they make New Year's resolutions, they say, "Okay, I want to eat better. So I'm going to go whole 30." Well, that's great. But is that maintainable? So when you instead say, "I'm going to make my lunch during the week, instead of eating out." That's more doable, then if you go beyond that, like, this is my personality, then if I go beyond that, it's all bonus for me. I've still got my goal, right?

Ellen 7:41

Yes. So at The Mighty they did the 52 small things, and it's for self-care, but I always thought that that was probably a good way to also look at resolutions instead of having these big dreams and plans which for some, it works right? I think for most of us, it doesn't. Instead you just choose one thing each week that you want to do that's small but that can make a difference. So it could be, "I want to drink more water this week." So maybe you have a water bottle or a mason jar that has a certain amount of water and you determine, "I'm going to drink two of those each day." And that's what you do that week. And then the next week maybe you say, "I'll have a salad for lunch every day." So those small things, I feel like that is more doable and realistic than going the whole 30 or a special diet.

Erin 8:39

On Facebook today, someone posted a little meme. And it goes along with what we're talking about. It's a lady writing her list of resolutions and it says, "Achievable New Year's Resolutions." That's what it says under the picture. So on the picture, she has a big pad of paper and it says, "2020" at the top and these are her achievable New Year's resolutions: 1. Get older 2. Gain weight 3. Do stuff 4. Drink coffee 5. Try not to die.

Ellen 9:11

That's really great.

Erin 9:13

Those are very achievable, right? Then everything you do above that is all bonus.

Ellen 9:23

You know what, resolutions are hard. So my only goals are the reading. And really because Goodreads reminds me, "What's your goal for the year." And I'm happy to do that. And my writing goals. That's it. Those are my only resolutions.

Erin 9:40

So because I knew we were doing this podcast, I've been pondering, you know, resolutions for the last week or so. And I think that I tend to have pretty stereotypical resolutions, but it's because I fall off the bandwagon throughout the year. And again, it's a new start and a time to pick up so I've been looking at, well reading is one for me that is self-care. I tend to, especially in times of stress, watch Netflix and sit on Facebook a lot, because I'm trying to escape. And so, interestingly, I was talking to my therapist just the other day about this. And I told her, "I've started reading," I said, "but I don't know that it's that much better because I'm still escaping. I'm just burying myself behind a book, you know?" And she said, "I'm not the person to ask to tell you not to read, to me reading is totally different." So reading is self-care for me. So picking that back up for me, exercising again, which I know is going to go away soon. But you know what, it's more than I had before. Eating better for me is just what I said. It's just making a wiser choice here and there. I don't go gung ho. And then there was another one. What was it? I don't remember. It'll come to me. And then I'll tell you.

Ellen 11:07

I have also found out that my resolutions work better if I'm not doing them on my own. So the example that I have is with Andy, my husband. And some of it is just the exercise, fitness, kind of a thing. He has some goals. And because he does have goals -- and he's pretty goal driven -- he really enjoys achieving goals so he can push himself to achieve some of those goals. It makes it easier for me to say, "Hey, I'll join you in that. So if you're saying that you're not going to eat anything after dinner, so no snacking at night. I can do that too." So having someone else to do it with, I feel like it makes it a lot easier, especially if they live with you. And some of your goals, let's say to eat healthier or to exercise or whatever, if you can do it with someone else, it makes a difference... or with a friend.

Erin 12:07

I thought of my other one. It was more time in the Word. Again, very stereotypical New Year's resolution. But the stress of life does bog me down and doing my Bible study gets pushed to the side pretty easily for me. And so I'm looking right now at maybe like an online study that, you know, you sign up and everyone starts at the same time. And so there are actually people doing it with you all around the world. I'm thinking about something like that, I just haven't decided officially yet what I'm doing.

Ellen 12:42

The challenge though, continues to be we already have so much going on. How do you add extra stuff?

Erin 12:50

Yeah, there's that and I think that's part of the reason that I keep saying it's gonna' fizzle out. It's gonna' fizzle out because that's exactly what it is. It's extra stuff. I guess it's just about making it routine. You know? I guess if a little bit of it sticks, that's better than nothing, right?

Ellen 13:11

It is. I do personally find that I waste a lot of time. I find that I waste a lot of time on Facebook, social media, and I waste a lot of time actually watching TV, which I talked about Netflix that I end up doing those things because I'm exhausted. Because it's mindless. Because you don't have to think or interact and you just kind of sit there. But it doesn't leave me feeling energized or feeling really good about myself. Like it doesn't change anything. It just kind of numbs me. But getting to the point of saying, "I'm not going to do that." That's the hard thing. So when I look at what I have to do -- and I think maybe it would be similar to when you have a resolution, cut it in half -- maybe when you look at everything you have to do, what can go? What's not important and it's not urgent? What is not really impacting your life day to day? Which on the other hand, so many of us as parents of kids with disabilities need connections, and a lot of them are mainly online via social media. So then that there's that.

Erin 14:20

I know. But you know, that doesn't mean you cut it out completely. So for me, Netflix, we recently went through a particularly stressful time, and I found myself folding laundry and watching Netflix while I was folding laundry, or I have to do stuff to prepare for Anya's g-tube feedings, and so there's prep work, and so I would watch Netflix while I would do that. and it was saying, I can still watch Netflix, it just doesn't have to fill my day, you know, those parts of my day. So now, every evening after the girls go to bed, Larry and I watch a show together and that's it. I don't need to be watching it through the day. So now I am folding laundry with nothing else to listen to, so I listen to a podcast or a sermon, or something that fills me a little better, right? And then, of course, the other option I have now is a good book.

Ellen 15:23

I do a lot of books on tape.

Erin 15:25

Yes, I did those for years. Lately I'm loving having a book in my hands.

Ellen 15:31

If I have to do chores, I just want to be listening to a book on tape. Now I can't do it when I'm cooking, because I don't multitask very well. And this is something I talked to Andy about, like some people can multitask or do several things at one time. I cannot. So if I'm cooking, there's not enough brainpower in there to listen to something and go through what I need to do. But for other things, like cleaning, laundry, those things that are just so brainless and I can [do both]. I can't go shopping and listen to a book on tape either. But I can drive. But once I'm shopping and I'm going through my list, looking at the different brands, that's where I lose that concentration. But to me, that's a way to get some of my books read. I listened to them and they count just the same.

Erin 16:27

Yes, absolutely. So resolutions aren't impossible. They're just probably more challenging and need to be thought through a little more for those of us that have... what's the word I should use to describe our lives?

Ellen 16:46

Chaotic? Sometimes irrational? Sometimes more challenging?

Erin 16:55

More challenging, yeah. Yes.

Ellen 16:57

And really, for so many of us, a crisis is a reality, right? Something is going to happen, and it's going to be a crisis. And it could be medical. And it could be behavioral. It could be emotional. It could be so many different things. And at that point, I think it's good to say the most important thing is for you to make it through. It's not about all the list of things that you would like to do, even the goals you have. All that goes out the window, you just have to get through that crisis. And then after the crisis, once you feel ready, you can get back to doing life and adding extra things. And sometimes it takes a long time to get back up.

Erin 17:40

I've been there. Yeah, absolutely. And if you make zero resolutions, if you're listening to this and going, "I have no interest in resolutions." I just think that for everyone, the New Year is a good time to just evaluate where you are. And so it might not be an actual resolution, but just to look back and see where you've been, and look ahead and see where you want to be. It's just a good time for that. It's a new time for new starts. And I appreciate that about the new year.

Ellen 18:12

Actually, here's our resolution that I would encourage everyone to do if you don't have any resolutions, because as I think about it, I just decided to do this. I would encourage everyone to cultivate thankfulness. And we know from research that practicing being grateful, being thankful, it actually has a very positive effect in our life. And for me, if I finish every day finding one thing to be thankful for, it makes me finish the day focusing on something good and something positive. So even when a crisis comes, even when something is very difficult, I am not looking at my life through the lens of pain, suffering, and hardships. I'm actually looking at

my life through the lens of blessings and abundance, and good life, you know, like not a good life, but goodness in some ways. And not that life is easy, and not that there's not going to be hard things, but that focusing on the positive is super powerful.

Erin 19:27

I don't know if you're aware of this, because I wasn't, but I just looked in the App Store real quick and there are a number of apps that help you track thankfulness. Did you know that?

Ellen 19:41

No, I did not.

Erin 19:42

Yep. There's a gratitude journal and diary. There's one called Five minutes of gratitude. So yeah, there's a number of them. Thankful five. So you know, people love to use their phones. So some easy, quick ways to jot down your thankfulness and keep track of it.

Ellen 20:02

I use Instagram.

Erin 20:11

My dog does too. I didn't create [her account], but I do quite a bit.

Ellen 20:14

I tried to have a journal, and I realized that it's harder for me to do it [that way], but because I'm so invested in social media, because I'm on social media so much, it's easier for me to share those things publicly. So I do it on Facebook and my Instagram and Facebook are connected. So I have an image and I have my thankfulness post, and it's pretty amazing how much happier I feel at the end of the day

Erin 20:57

Yeah, even during challenging times, it helps you to see that there is some good in it because it can feel in those times like nothing good is happening so you have to actually look for it during the more challenging times.

Ellen 21:10

And I think when you look for it and you find it, it gives you something to hold on to, so if everything feels like it's spinning out of control, if you find that good thing, you get to hold on to it and say, "Okay, there is some hope." There is one person maybe somebody showed up to bring you a coffee or give your child a ride, even if it's just one small thing, you can hold on to it and it changes the way that you feel about the situation, or life, or whatever it is.

Erin 21:40

I agree completely. I do love that. I've done that in the past. And guess what, it fizzled out but you know what, again, New Start.

Ellen 21:49

Now when you did it, did you do it privately or publicly in social media?

Erin 21:54

I did it in a journal.

Ellen 21:56

I don't know why that is. I am really curious to know if there is certain accountability when you say, "Okay, I'm going to put it out there for everybody to read and have access to."

Erin 22:11

Is there anything else that we need to talk about with resolutions?

Ellen 22:15

I don't think so.

Erin 22:18

Yeah, I agree. That was a good topic.

Ellen 22:22

It's, it's a timely topic, right? Everybody's talking about this and it's still not too late to think about the resolutions that you want to have. And it's probably a good thing to keep in mind that you don't have to have big resolutions, it's fine if you cut them in half, super simple, maybe make them into smaller goals, right? Like, how would that look for the year? And if you must only make one resolution, resolve to practice thankfulness.

22:58

I like it. Okay. That sounds good. Excellent. Alright, until next time, I'm thankful for you, Ellen.

23:06

Awww... I am thankful for you too, Erin!

Erin 23:09

Yay, we did it for today!

Ellen 23:12

We did. We did the Ellen and Erin show. So, thank you everybody for joining us.

Erin 23:19

See you next time. Bye.

Ellen 23:22

Thank you for joining us today and good luck with your resolutions if you're someone who is going to be working on resolutions. Now, as for the show notes, you can find them at ellenstumbo.com/episode35/. And also, we now have transcripts, so if you want the transcript that's where you can go to find it. And we would also love for you to become a Patron, you can go to ellenstumbo.com and click on the supporters tab. You get lots of extra perks by becoming a

patron, or you can go directly to patreon.com/ellenstumbo. I hope that you have a great week. Good luck with those resolutions and we'll see you next time.