

Adulthood on the Spectrum: Parenting, therapies and creating change

Andrew M. Komarow

Welcome to "Adulthood on the Spectrum," I'm Andrew, an autistic certified financial planner. I co-run "Adulthood on the Spectrum," with Eileen Lamb. Hey, Eileen.

Eileen Lamb

Hey, Andrew. Hey, everyone. In this podcast, we want to highlight real voices of autistic adults, not just inspirational stories, but people like us talking about their day to day life. Basically, we want to give a voice to a variety of autistic people. And our guest today is Amanda Alonso.

Amanda Alonso

Hi, thank you. Hi Eileen. Hi Andrew. Thank you for having me.

Eileen Lamb

Thank you for joining us today.

Andrew M. Komarow

Today, our guest is Amanda Alonso. Amanda is a 36 year old Latina woman with autism. She's raising her 14 year old son who also has autism. She's a psychotherapist who owns her own private practice Blu Alliance Counseling Center. She's been in the mental health field since she was 18. Starting as a mental health specialist in the military, and is now a licensed marriage and family therapist. She wants to spread awareness and advocate for autism awareness and hopes to lead to more acceptance for people like her and her son.

Eileen Lamb

Hey Amanda! Thanks for joining us today. We were talking before we started recording and you said you've listened to our podcast before. So you know that we always start by asking our guests, how they would like to identify? And you know, we're talking about pronouns. But also, I noticed in your bio that you say, has autism and you know, I think it's the first time we have someone who chooses this terminology. I don't know if I'm correct on that. Don't quote me on that. But I feel like more people use autistic in their bio. So anyway, do you have any preference? You know, in how you identify?

Amanda Alonso

Yeah, thank you for asking. So pronouns are she her. And my I do say that I have autism, I sometimes I prefer that. But I do, say I'm autistic too. It just depends on the situation. But I, since I got diagnosed, or when since my son has been diagnosed, we say he has autism. And he prefers that too. So we're kind of comfortable with that type of thing with saying it like that. But yeah, so thanks for asking.

Andrew M. Komarow

And so when were you diagnosed with autism? What was the process like?

Amanda Alonzo

Ah, great question. So I was diagnosed in my late 20s, I went to see a psychologist. And for several years, actually, because I was I'm a huge advocate for mental well, being in the mental health field. I'm a huge advocate for mental health. And one of the requirements for my master's program was seeing a therapist. And she was able to do the assessments like that's what she wanted her focuses in. But that's not why I went to go see her, but she noticed some things. And, you know, as a couple years went by, we kind of more diverted into that realm. And that's how the process got started. She noticed it, we did an assessment, but I kept it in my mental health record. So I don't know if people are aware, but you can have it in your mental health record and not put it on your medical record. And it wasn't until my mid 30s. Recently, actually, that actually put it in my medical record. So that's what the process has been like. And that's all my medical record and mental health record. But for quite some time, I just kept it on my mental health record.

Andrew M. Komarow

What's the difference? If you, I didn't even know there, there was one. So do you mind sharing that?

Amanda Alonzo

Yeah. So the difference, it varies from state to state. But here in the state of California, the differences in services that you can receive. So if you just have it on your mental health record, and I wanted to go to say, the Social Security office and receive some services or to receive some assistance, work even in the workplace, or just yeah, government, actually, it's just governmental assistance, Social Security. So that's governmental assistance. But if I wanted assistance, plain and simple, you want assistance like that from maybe the regional center, or anything like that, and it would have to be on your medical record. But if you just you know, you choose not to have assistance, because for whatever reason, at the time, I just didn't feel the need to put it on my medical record. You just keep it on your mental health record. And then that's it.

Eileen Lamb

And so that changed throughout the years for you because at first you don't have it there. And then you got it on there. And I'm also really, I mean, that must have been so surprising for you. Because you said you went into the assessment and what you were seeing your psychologist, but that wasn't why you were seeing her. So that was kind of a surprise, was it? I mean, how was it like was it weird to learn you have autism?

Amanda Alonzo

It was it was and then it wasn't it was...so when my son got diagnosed, you know, my mother, she came with me through his process. And a lot of the questions that she asked she started thinking about when I was younger for me, the biggest thing that went through my mind is why I don't think what my son is doing is different because I resonate with that, like it just didn't seem different. That's

why I would have never picked up on it. So I was just like, no, but luckily my mom came and so was able to answer a lot of the questions that they had. And then when I started asking, like my mom about when I was younger, she started, you know, there's a lot of things that stand out now, like she thought I was deaf, up until like, I was four, she really didn't believe I was deaf, but I wasn't they tested me and everything like that. And I wasn't. I had a lot of difficulties with speech, I was in like speech support, language classes and things like that. So there was a lot of signs. But in my culture, whenever we have certain things that are just different, like I was known as the crier, I will have a lot of tantrums. We write it off to wives tales, old wives tales, so that in my culture, a lot of the stuff that was different about me at the time was written up as old wives tales, you know, like, my mom didn't eat the specific food that she craved when I was pregnant when she was pregnant to me. So that's why I was a crier. They really, do real like that. So I'm a first generation in this country from my father's side. So there really was like that, like it was a lot of old wives tales, writing it off, like, oh, it's because of this or that. But lo and behold, they would have met the criteria then to most likely.

Eileen Lamb

That's so crazy, I feel like it's similar in France, not to the same level. But you know, French people tend to write it up, oh, well, it's bad parenting, oh, he is being a brat or you know, it's more of a behavior thing in French people's mind, then, you know, a disorder. So you both are on the spectrum, you and your son, and I get asked this question a lot, and I'm never sure how to answer them. But you said that you were not really aware of your son's differences, just because you, you could relate to him. Right? So how does that help you in parenting him? Do you think you can you understand your son better than a neurotypical parent could?

Amanda Alonzo

Wow, another great question. Yeah, I, we have it like with my husband, he's not on the spectrum. And I am. And the way we see certain things that my son would express even a meltdown. We both express meltdowns like, I'm 36, I still have meltdowns. I mean, I still do, and I'm in the mental health field, I still do. It's never that part isn't going to change. How we express them is very similar to how my son expresses them were very aggressive, in form, you know, a lot of physical aggression to ourselves more so than to others. So it's just one of those things that I had to work my husband through, because it was really hard for him to grasp, like, you, I wish it didn't look like that. I wish it wasn't like that. ABA really assisted both my son and me, I know, that's a touchy subject. But for me and my son, both of us, it really did help us learn how to cope. So it wouldn't be as aggressive. But we I had me, I had to walk my husband through that, because he couldn't grasp his head around what that was. So in behaviors, when it comes to just repetitive behaviors, it's really hard for my husband to grasp, like, with my son, like, why is it like that, and until I can break it down, because I have more of the you know, language to utilize, break it down, like, oh, it's, you know, this is just, it feels good when we're doing stuff like that, or when I watch the same movie for a million times over and over, or eat the same food.

Andrew M. Komarow

I think it's interesting, because, you know, if you don't know that what you're doing is, you know, different than maybe it's not different to you like exactly what you said, you said there was just so much that was, you know, how you're, you know, how your son was, is on so many ways how you were so you didn't think there was anything different? I find that you know, really interesting. Just because we always, you know, if we're if we've never experienced differently than how do we know there's no baseline? So what is it like being an autism advocate on social media these days? What do you think we could do better? And how many times you just want to roll your eyes at like everyone yet being a like clinician or therapist in the space, I always find how some of it must be like watching a movie where like when you know a lot about a subject, they get it wrong. So like, you know, I'm big into computers and finance . So anytime somebody is like talking about that, I want to roll my eyes, but it's much different when you're an advocate. There's real lives and people at stake.

Amanda Alonzo

And that is, oh, I love these questions. By the way. It is so difficult because I feel like, at least for me, the online world is so much different than my offline world. My offline world until a couple of years ago in the online world, my offline world, the support the understanding, and it does not like a lot of aggressive behavior in regards to like what type of language you use, it's more forgiving in that sense, because people truly, genuinely just want to learn. They just want to know, okay, how can I support you, and people are going to make mistakes, people across the board are going to make mistakes. So when I ventured into the online world, as an adult, a couple of years ago, I felt, you know what I mean, I've been on the online world for a long time. But in the advocacy sense, I really wanted my, I really wanted to find other adults on the spectrum. I mean, I desperately wanted to find other adults on the spectrum, because I started becoming more comfortable with letting people know that I'm on the spectrum. So that was about three years ago now. Wow. Um, so when I did that, when I started doing that, there was I was just so like, blown away by how like, very polarizing the community can be for the adult community, in the adult world, with adults on the spectrum, like, if I would say that I'm on the spectrum, I was like, you can't say that. I can't say I have autism. And I was like, you have to say, autistic. And I was like, whoa, whoa, whoa, wait, what? Because in my world, even in the mental health world, identity is so important. And people should be allowed to identify how they choose. That is like, one of the things in therapy 101. So I was like, wait, we can't tell other people how to choose identify. And then language evolves over time, you know, and I can go based off the mental health world, because that's what my profession is in. So what mental health used to be psychologies, to be in the 70s is so much different than now, because language evolves, but it takes the regular everyday public to catch up to that. And so there's a lot of giving people grace periods and understanding of that. So offline, that was under you know, I'm, there was not a lot of jumping on certain language and things like that, and a lot forgiveness for if people got it wrong, such as now. It's like level one, level two, level three autism before it was like high functioning, and things like that, like that's still utilizing that everyday sense. And I'm not going to be very aggressive with somebody, if they utilize that. So the online space, I got a lot of pushback when I would say these things. I mean, so much so that I did not want to step into the advocacy world at all, I almost completely stepped out of it. And I did not I mean, it was just really bad. I was really shaken. I had an uptick in meltdowns, because I was just like, what am I doing wrong? Is this really how, I must be doing something wrong, I will get a lot of hate in my DMs so much, in my DMs, if I were to even say the term ABA you know, when I was just trying to

Speak with other parents, not from the parents, from a subgroup of people online. And I was so thrown by that I got told so many horrible things about my parenting skills. And then, like, my support group, offline, really saw that it took a build between me mental health wise, like, I can't even I'm trying to put it into words, but it really was very intense.

Andrew M. Komarow

And you mentioned, you know, your parenting, you know, style or how you were being a parent, does that have anything to do with certain therapies you might be using and or advocate, an advocate for?

Amanda Alonzo

Yes, I did. Actually only one and it was a ABA. So, you know, when my son was younger, I would say about four years old. So when he first got diagnosed, he got speech therapy, occupational therapy. Those are the first two that they gave us. And then when he turned about four years old, he got really extremely aggressive behaviors. He was harming himself. He was really scratching and harming others. It was really bad. Now looking back, I always call those years like the dark years because they were really he was, I can tell he was really struggling. And I was struggling to how can I best support him? It was so painful to see him go through that like it was so painful. So then his pediatrician and the regional center that's what we call the support group around here offered us ABA. And I was like yes, and I was in it. I was in the thick of it. And it was difficult in the beginning. Because one of the things he wanted to do was harm himself. And the meltdowns were intense. But we got some really great ABA therapists. There was a couple of not-so-great ones, but I advocated like, you know, I didn't feel comfortable, so can we switch, but for the most part, we got some really great ABA therapist therapists one was even at my wedding, like that's how great they were. Like at my wedding when my son was six to help him with like the overload and everything like that. And she, it was just great, great ABA therapists like good solid four or five years. And through that I learned techniques, techniques I didn't have before, to help with my own meltdowns. It was the best decision we ever made. Best decision ever made for my son. He manages his meltdowns like a pro, he manages, he found the language to utilize to inform me that you know, hey, can we go home or I'm not comfortable with this, or even when he expresses joy. So my son's also level one, he's very verbal. But he just didn't have the skill set or language at the time to tell me what, what was going on. But ABA I feel like helped us the way I explained it is like unlocking that door to this whole other world, for him. And for me, it gave me tools that in any other setting, I don't think I would wow, I was an adult and I did not get those tools.

Eileen Lamb

It's so nice to hear some nice things about ABA. Well, we know each other a little bit from the online world. And there's so much hate about ABA, and same for us. It's helped in so many ways, you know, people say that it's trying to make an autistic person normal. And all I see are people who are teaching Charlie how to communicate, you know, with sign language with his iPad, that's another thing that people say about ABA, and that they only teach verbal communication. No, if anything like it's the opposite for us. Like they're trying everything that is non-verbal, because Charlie has apraxia, on top of autism. So it's really hard to, you know, for him to get the words out. So we're trying sign language

now, that his fine motor skills are getting there. But anyway, you said something that I feel like is so important, and that people really need to understand is that you said you had some therapists, one or a few I forget what you said, but that you didn't like and you just you voiced your concern, and you got a new therapist, right? And that's it. If there's something that you don't like that the therapists are doing, then you say something, you know, they don't have only one therapist, if you don't vibe with one, you say something, and, and that's it, you know, It's same as a teacher or a babysitter, like people treat ABA as such, like, an evil thing, when it's the same as everything else in life, you know, you can, you can speak up, and the profession itself is not abusive at all, of course, you're gonna have some bad therapists, but that's the same in all the fields. And to me, it blows my mind that people don't, don't get that, you know, they make it about the field about the therapy itself. And that's not right.

Amanda Alonzo

Yeah, I agree. 1,000%. You know, what I said earlier about the so the mental health field psychotherapy psychology, where we were about when it first came out with Freud, in the beginning of my profession, this is the profession like I'm in that I've been in since I was 18. It was not where it is now, where was when it began, again, evolves over time, it was very rude to women, it was not the best in the beginning. But they did the best they could with what they had, right. But now it's evolved. It's more inclusive. It's, we have different modalities to choose from. The same thing with any therapeutic field, where how it started, and the reasons for starting it and where it is now. It's evolved evolution over time. So in my field, if you don't, you're not going to mesh like gel with every therapist. It's impossible. And nor will I gel with every client, it's impossible to expect that. Realistic expectations. So in those cases, you just find another therapist second opinions, etc. Same thing with doctors, every field, we would do the same thing in. So I never understood why would ABA be any different. My son was never supposed to be able to like fit with every single therapist that came across our you know, doorstep. There was a couple that, that for the majority of time, it worked out really well. And then there was two specific ones where it just didn't one, I just didn't feel comfortable. Like me as the parent, I was just like, I don't know, like, it's just that wasn't the best comfort level. And then the second one was because there was a technique that was implemented. And again, because I had such a good BCBA before, I just didn't care for this BCBA so I was like, uou know what, I think it'd be best, or for his benefit if it was with somebody else. And then that's it. And then we move on. And he continued on with therapy. So just like with any other field that's the point that when I get stopped up like I get stopped up whenever I hear that is I'm like every field is similar in that instance, where one evolved from when it first came out, as it should. The more info you know, the more peer reviewed science that backs it up. You want to evolve change techniques improve upon techniques. I do it all the time in my field, every year. So why wouldn't be the same for ABA.

Andrew M. Komarow

Now, but for parents who may not have as much background as you not just as a mental health clinician therapist, but also as an autistic person yourself, sorry, a person with autism yourself, then, you know, what tips would you give parents on what to look for in a good ABA therapist and what to not look for? Because I think that's really important.

Amanda Alonzo

I'll start with the what to not look, well, at least for me, what didn't gel so well. One thing was when you would say that, okay, if you reach this milestone, then you know, we get to do a preferred pass. And then to keep moving the goalposts, like, oh, no now you got to do this before. And it was, just frustrating. It was frustrating for me too, and I was like, wait, don't do that. So if they keep moving the goalposts and the goals aren't actually set down, you know, like, this is what we're working on today, this is what it's going to look like, if they can't explain what it is that they're doing. And, you know, again, create that rapport with you and with the child, and it'll take time, but if they can't explain it, then it might not be the best fit, maybe they need more training or something like that. Or again, it's just, if the way they're explaining it, just you, you just don't feel comfortable at the end of the day, then it may not be the best fit.

Andrew M. Komarow

So the issue from what I'm gathering is not so much of a reward itself, but just a reward, like, like a carrot in front of a horse, and the horse keeps running after it and never gets the carrot. But like I but you know, getting a reward for doing something, you know, is the reason that pretty much everyone does anything, right? So what you're saying is, you know, actually give the reward and don't just, you know, keep, you know, keep holding that in front of them without giving it to them have attainable goals with a clear plan in mind.

Amanda Alonzo

And I love that word, that you used, attainable goals, realistic goals. You know, because the goal is not and should never be to set off a meltdown. That is not the overall goal right there. So yeah, attainable and realistic goals. Also, I do believe that, you know, something that's very interesting, um, I am going to do a little sidebar of what you just said, is that, yes, human behavior, we work towards things because then we get it, we do it all the time. We have 40-hour job weeks. I mean, mine is quite different because I get to structure my world the way I want. But even me, yeah, no, even me, we have a set and that and then we look forward to the weekend. So we have a certain amount of hours we work, then we look forward to like a certain day, we look forward to the weekend. It's human behavior, typical children go through all the time in school. What I think is the unique part about ABA, and also why it's so effective is because it's specially fine-tuned for those on the spectrum or those that are struggling with certain behaviors due to a diagnosis. That's why it's, I have a stepdaughter with Down syndrome. And she also received ABA. And it helped her immensely with her behaviors and have been able to communicate. So it's it fine tunes for those who are different because they're not going to be able to do the behavioral or fine tune the behaviors in a typical setting. So I think that's, like, that's great if you can get it more applied to people who are different and not typical. That's a good start, at least again, in my opinion.

Eileen Lamb

No, I'm with you there. There are so many things about ABA that are used in our everyday life, whether we're autistic or not, that's the thing that people don't understand that even like the most neurotypical person in the world, like is still using like ABA techniques, whether they realize it or not, you know,

that's how life works. And I don't understand why people are so against rewards, we use them just you know, like smiling at someone like in itself is a reward. You know, when they say something like it's every little behavior is like ABA in a way, you know, I could go on and on about ABA for a long time. (all laugh)

Andrew M. Komarow

Really? Are you sure Eileen? I didn't think you could. (all laugh)

Eileen Lamb

But it's nice to have someone who actually agrees with me for once, like last time it didn't go so well. How do you how do you deal with the the hate online? I know you mentioned earlier that at some point you don't even think you could go through is like being an autism advocate because of it. So what changed?

Amanda Alonzo

Yeah, Well, as I put my friends and family was, you know, I got great support from them. And I set very firm boundaries, very firm boundaries. And that was a gave me the ability to find my voice again. It really was a hard time. When I first started getting that influx of hate, I was shocked. And the reason how it started was, so every year I did the autism walk here in my county, in California, Southern California, huge, half a million people. At one point, were going this session before the pandemic, so makes me sad that last year we couldn't do it, well I did it online.

Eileen Lamb

Half a million?

Amanda Alonzo

Yeah, and so it's with Autism Speaks. And so what happened was, is I was doing, they changed it online because of the pandemic. And that was the first time I ever got hate, because they use this hashtag Autism Speaks. And I got a few DMS of saying really horrible things. And I just couldn't believe it. And then that's when all trickled down from there. And so I was just like, so shocked. But then, as you asked, you know, I set really firm boundaries, you don't get to talk to me like that online or offline. Nobody would ever do that offline. No one has ever in my life, talk to me like that offline. And you don't get to do it online, either. Point blank, period, you don't get to that you don't get to on an anonymity, saying crappy things like that someone because of the online spectrum, and expecting people not to, you know, like I now I post, if someone sends me that, I will post on my stories like, just as a reminder to others, like this hate exists, and it shouldn't. It shouldn't exist. Because I set those boundaries, you feel shame for sending somebody something like that, like, you should feel shame, you should not do that. So that's how I found my voice. Again, as I said, from really firm boundaries, sometimes I'll get tagged in certain people's posts, and I have a copy paste message. And then sometimes I'll put like, you know, depending on what they tagged me in, and I'll just say stright it out, I don't know you, I don't know this person that you tagged me in the post, I, we can agree to disagree, you have a great day, please don't ever tag me in another post again. And that's it. And then they'll try

to do a back and forth. And I'm like I said what I had to say, I don't agree with you, and you don't have agree with me. But you don't get to do that to me, no one gets to have asked me just free will nope.

Eileen Lamb

Right? Well, that's the thing, like we can disagree with each other what's not okay, it's like the in fighting. It's then that, okay, this person doesn't agree with me. So I'm going to tell all of my friends to go dislike this person, you know, like, that's not advocacy. And it's become such a big issue in the issue in the community that so many people are at the place where you where they like, they don't want to be an autism advocate, like, I cannot tell you how many messages I get from parents and autistic people who are like, I want to do this, but I am so scared of the hate, like, even like tiny little accounts with like, 100 followers get attacked if they use the wrong hashtag. This is terrible. You know, I have a friend who's an adult in ABA. And she actually wrote a post for Autism Speaks, but she was scared. So she did it anonymously. You know, that's where people are at. You have to say you're in favor of ABA, like hiding your name, you can't even use your name. So if you are in favor of ABA, like I don't blame them because their hate is so bad. But I don't know. I feel like that should be a waking wake up call for a lot of people, like people are being silenced, or being bullied into silence. But it basically is what's going on right now. And if we want to, you know, like we're not saying ABA is perfect, like listen to us, like we just talked about, you know, things that are not good in ABA, like there is a middle ground to be found. And I know like autistic people, there is a lot of black and white thinking. But we can find a middle ground, you know, ABA is not going anywhere. So let's reform ABA instead of like just trying to make it disappear because it's not going to disappear. So we might as well work together. But a lot of people who don't want to do that, I feel like they get pleasure out of just, you know that. I don't know if it's a social justice thing, but it's almost like it's their own online personality.

Amanda Alonzo

Yeah, I would for me when I see it's more of like creating this discourse, you know, just for discourses sake, and not really like purposeful and intentional. I've been in a lot of social justice circles. I mean, I feel very passionate about a lot of different like human rights violations that like I've never and I've seen hate for a lot like I've seen people spew hate or have really large disagreements. But the hate that I received as autism advocacy is on another level, to a person who is also, you know, identified. Oh, yeah, who is autistic, who is diagnosed autistic or what, however, people want to be in the round. But that is so incredibly, you know, it's just, I got taken aback. And I really had to do a lot of inner thinking. And, you know, a lot of sort of true soul searching, you know, sounds cheesy, but I really did. Because there's so many other areas of my life where I don't mind being on the forefront. I really don't. And this one, it was so intense that I was just like, I wanted that anonymity. And then I realized, because I saw so many other people like you did Eileen, you know, just not want to, they were so worried about saying the wrong thing. I was like, you know, I'm in such a privileged position. I'm in the mental health field. I, like my first from here on out for the rest of my life, I'm going to do research on autism, on whatever I get to choose. Like, that's what I'm doing right now. I'm doing research, my dissertation is on women, on the spectrum women with autism in relational settings. So that's what I'm working on right now. But I will be doing that for the rest of my life. So if I have this privilege, why would I silence, why would I allow others to silence me? And then why would I silence myself? So that

is one of the main like, where I did like, a, just, nope, I can't like, let someone who has no idea who I am. There's nothing about me, silence me, because they're already silencing so many people that need support that truly want and need support. And so yeah, I just couldn't do that.

Eileen Lamb

I'm glad you didn't.

Andrew M. Komarow

And something that I always think about is that we're, you know, the people who are not arguing back are the nice ones, the ones who have jobs. I mean, I actually don't know the statistics. But you know, how many, you know, BCBAs there are, you know, in the country and how big a business ABA is. And, you know, the, you know, I always find it interesting how, you know, they're not attacking the BCBA providers, they're not boycotting ABA, they're not trying to change ABA laws, they're trying to get the the one parent to, you know, do something else for their child, right, or really, you know, call sometimes get out trying to call the person's job and threaten them or boycott the product or cancel it. One thing that I fear is that there won't be enough good people like you, who, you know, who truly care. And if somebody was looking to get into this field, and they would say, well, it seems like the online community doesn't really want this. So, you know, basically, I feel like we're probably creating like a self fulfilling prophecy, right? Where, where I think there will be less good ABA therapists, because we're like, you know, there's still gonna be ABA therapists, so then there will be people who don't actually care. And I'm just concerned about the long term harm of that. I don't know if that made any sense whatsoever. If it did, please tell me your thoughts. And if it didn't, then, you know, sorry.

Amanda Alonzo

No, it made sense. And, you know, in the online space, I've been able to find a few ABA therapists who they themselves are also autistic. And they are doing the work from the inside out, you know, you want to change a system. Then you have it takes work. It does, it takes people inside the system, outside the system, etc. And again, I stress this in any field. This is not like ABA is just not like this special like its own little world as what it's made out to be no, this isn't any field. And any system that's created, people change it from the inside, people change it from the outside, you know, there's multiple roles. So just like attacking parents who already worried scared, they were just looking for a safe haven. You know, I was there at one point. I wasn't diagnosed until my late 20s. And when my son was diagnosed, I was about 26. And all I wanted was support. I was just looking, what do I do? So I would ask anybody, just like finding information, gobbling up information, what's the next step now to help best support my child and other parents are looking for the same thing more often than not, that's all they're looking for. And so someone to like, attack them and scream at them and tell them they're doing something wrong. That's, that's not very productive.

Andrew M. Komarow

I think as you as a therapist would not change many people's behavior if that was your strategy. I mean, it might work for like, you know, Dave, now it might work for, its not Dave Ramsey? Oh my

god. We're gonna have to cut this because I'm an idiot. Who's the kitchen guy who screams at people Hell's Kitchen?

Eileen Lamb

Gordon Ramsay.

Andrew M. Komarow

Why am I having such a brain fart right now, oh my god.

Eileen Lamb

Gordon Ramsay, I just told you.

Andrew M. Komarow

So we're gonna cut this. Okay. But yeah, I mean, you know, as a therapist, that doesn't work. You know, Gordon Ramsay does not, you know, work in therapy, right screaming at people get out that the Beef Wellington, still no idea what Beef Wellington is, although they make

Eileen Lamb

Ah its so good. Scallops too, oh my god.

Andrew M. Komarow

Scallops are great. Well, in Connecticut, we have lots of scallop boats. We're like, the scallops are yeah.

Eileen Lamb

Yeah. Ocean.

Amanda Alonzo

Yeah. Yeah. It would not work in my profession at all. In fact, we have a whole ethical board that you probably, you know, get a lot of strikes on your license. If you ever were screaming at your clients.

Eileen Lamb

I'm sure it's tempting someone sometimes.

Amanda Alonzo

Yeah, you know? Yeah, it's just one of those things where we, if you want to create change it like I said, it takes work and empathy for others who are in a certain plight for whatever advocacy you want to do. And if you're lacking that, or slash attacking on a constant basis, those that are either looking for help or trying to help, what improvements are ever going to be made from that, none. You're going to, in fact, at least in the online space, sticking with online space, one of the most polarizing things that I ever saw is a bubble gets created, where you're going to hear loud voices that agree with you. Because everybody, and that boggles my mind. Because I know, again, so many people in the offline

space, who don't do anything on the online space, you know, as much as we think everybody's online, they're not. They're not looking at the same content that you may be doing. So if you have 20,000 people who all saying yes to something, that doesn't mean it's everyone in the autistic community. No, doesn't mean, everyone agrees with this, because I had 200 people say yes, on my poll or something like that. And that's the most frustrating, like, mind boggling thing. I'm like, No, or the majority, what I always heard was at least told me like the majority say they want to say they're autistic. And I was like, well, I don't, I don't know. That's great. If you do, but no one ever gets taught me how to identify. No one ever gets to tell my son how to identify or the, you know, again, offline space, I go to support groups for adults with autism. No one should ever tell any of them how to identify. Yep, so I don't think it is the majority then.

Eileen Lamb

Because often what they mean is that they did a survey in their groups, their groups that ban anybody that disagree with, and within this group, their echo-chamber. Yeah, they're the majority. But if anyone doesn't like ABA, they're gonna be banned from the groups of course, no one's gonna insert that they're like in favor of ABA. If people are identify as person with autism, they're going to be banned from the group. So of course, you should do a survey. Everyone's gonna answer autistic. I mean, it's like the most, but it's so biased. What's the word?

Andrew M. Komarow

Batshit crazy? (all laugh) comes to mind. I thought that's what you're going for, by I guess biased works too. So

Eileen Lamb

It's insane.

Amanda Alonzo

Yeah. So one of the best things that was told to me and this was another thing that just really helped me like, bring balance to this online world. And my real world. I like to call it the offline world was when I got asked about like, going to the walks, I do it every year, me my whole family, we make a whole thing about it. We go to the and it's sponsored by Autism Speaks, they actually created the walk, huge, it's out here in Pasadena. And then we made it a big thing. And they asked me and they go, Yeah, cuz I was like, Oh, my gosh, you know, like, my shirt has a puzzle piece. Again, symbolism. It's so polarizing. And I didn't know that three years ago. But then they told me, Okay, how many people are at that walk? And I said, it gets to hundreds of 1000s, hundreds of 1000. At one point it was 500,000 people were at that walk, we have 10s of 1000s of people yearly, that go. They said, all those people, those are the people they they still like they're there. There's you guys all in this together. They're supporting whether it be the same organization, or utilizing the same thing, XYZ, whatever it is, I was like, That's so true. And that's when I took a step back and I looked around me and I said, you know what, this is my community offline. And it's not like online. And that's what matters. If I can scream online, all I want but if I'm not creating the change in my community, if I'm not doing the actual work in my community, what good is it going to do? What good is it going to do if I have hundreds of

1000s of followers, but I don't ever step outside and actually do as a mental health specialist, but you know, as a psychotherapist in my community, that the daily change that needs to be done the daily support. So it's about balance. That's how you balance myself, and all of this.

Andrew M. Komarow

And so you're a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. So in your practice, do you have a specialty? Do you work as a marriage counselor? Or are there, what is your day job look like?

Amanda Alonzo

So we as therapists, some of us have focuses and some don't, and my focus is trauma. So I have a few focuses, but my main focus that I've always worked on in my field, by at least in my practice is trauma, veterans support for veterans support for those who are no diverse, and their families. And those are the top three, that is my focus, my specialty skill set, we call it our focus as opposed to like, my specialty, but yeah, that's my focus. So trauma, since in the military, like that's been my focus, and I'm very comfortable. in that realm, and that many people are, it's it's a very difficult field, to focus in a very difficult specialty to focus in, in in my field.

Andrew M. Komarow

But what, why is it, hat makes it difficult?

Amanda Alonzo

The burnout rate, if you work with, you know, you hear a lot of traumatic stories. And as clinicians we carry that we help carry the load, share the load with our clients. And so the burnout rate is very high. You're privy to a lot of quite unfortunate stories. And but I just, you know, gosh, it's been 10 years now. I can't believe it almost 10 years. Oh, no. 20 Oh, my goodness, because I joined the military when I was 17. So I'm like, wow, I'm just being in the thick of when it comes to trauma, trauma focused care. And it's just something then found. I found out that I'm really good at and I love it. I love the work. I do. I truly do. I love the work I do.

Eileen Lamb

That's the most important thing. What do they say? If you love your job, you won't ever have to work a day in your life.

Amanda Alonzo

And I really do love my job.

Eileen Lamb

And you're helping people. I mean, it's really perfect. Alright, you know, the podcast, so you know what quickfire questions are?

Amanda Alonzo

I do.

Eileen Lamb

Yes. Okay. What is the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

Amanda Alonzo

That if others have done it before, then that means you can do it too.

Eileen Lamb

What do you like to do to relax?

Amanda Alonzo

Listen to music.

Eileen Lamb

What's your favorite artists or bands? Okay, you can say three. I know. It's hard.

Amanda Alonzo

Okay. My favorite artist or band? Right now. I love the Beatles.

Eileen Lamb

Oh me too.

Amanda Alonzo

I really do. Oh, I love Vicente Fernandez. He's huge. In my culture. I love him so much his music. And oh my gosh, it's just like so hard right now. Oh, Nicki Minaj I adore Nicki Minaj. Very random people, but I love them all.

Eileen Lamb

What's your favorite food?

Amanda Alonzo

Pizza, ah lasagna? Lasagna? Hands down lasagna and then pizza.

Eileen Lamb

What's your favorite movie or TV show?

Amanda Alonzo

Oh, my goodness. Oh, the movie that comes to mind is Sabrina. The one with Harrison Ford.

Eileen Lamb

Okay, best branch of the military.

Amanda Alonzo

Army, that okay, cuz I was in it. But Air Force is the best branch. If anybody ever asks me, oh, I'm wondering about the military. I always tell them go to the Air force.

Andrew M. Komarow

Why? What's the reason?

Amanda Alonzo

They treat their soldiers so well, and they have all the top-quality stuff. And then anything, everything else trickles down to the rest of us.

Andrew M. Komarow

Why do you think that is? I never knew that. That's so interesting.

Amanda Alonzo

You know, I don't know people that score really high on I think it's like as ASBAD test. I believe that's what it's called. It's been a while now. But um, as they get scooped up into there, this if I could do it over again. I probably would have joined the Air Force. I wanted to join the Marines. I really did. But then they told me how to cut my hair. And I always had long hair and I was like, because you have to cut it short here as a female marine. And I was like, No, that's the only reason I didn't join the Marines. So then I went to the Army. If I would have known I would have been there

Eileen Lamb

That's awesome. I yeah, I'm not familiar at all with that world. And it's it's nice to hear from you, especially as a as a female as a woman. Yeah. Well, thank you so much for joining us today. It was great speaking with you. And I hope people listen and hear you know, another perspective from an autistic adult in favor of ABA and all the important things we talked about. Yeah, thank you.

Amanda Alonzo

Thank you for having me. I hope so too. You know, I know. Hopefully, a couple of people are listening out there. But you know, it's

Eileen Lamb

Just a couple.

Amanda Alonzo

Yeah, few people, hopefully more than a couple.

Eileen Lamb

Where can they find you online? By the way, do you want to social media if you want?

Amanda Alonzo

That's fine. So my Instagram is Army Brat Chick, hopefully by next year when I graduate, it'll be different. But and then Blu Alliance is @BluAlliance is my company's Instagram on my businesses, private practice Instagram. But I'm mostly on Instagram. That's why I keep talking about Instagram. Facebook, very rarely.

Eileen Lamb

Too much. Yeah. I think you're in our group, "Adulting on the Spectrum, " right?

Amanda Alonzo

Yes. Yes, I am.

Eileen Lamb

Nice.

Amanda Alonzo

Yeah. I love to see, you know, the boundaries that the group put on from the get go. And I was like, okay, and I realized there are safe spaces out there. They would need it. And I'm glad they would create it. But there are good inclusive groups out there for parents and for those on the spectrum. You know, and I think that's just a step in the right direction.

Eileen Lamb

Well, thank you so much for joining us today. Again, it was so, so great to speaking with you. Right, Andrew? You enjoyed it,

Andrew M. Komarow

No, I enjoyed it. It was great. So thank you.

Amanda Alonzo

Thank you for having me, you guys. I appreciate it.

Eileen Lamb

Of course. Okay, bye bye.