

[00:00:01.155] - Melissa Corkum

This episode is sponsored by our new class, exploring grief, trauma and rejection with the Enneagram, this is an Enneagram group for foster and adoptive moms.

[00:00:11.655] - Lisa Qualls

Melissa and I have both found the Enneagram to be helpful in understanding ourselves and the people we love. In 2020, we decided to become certified Enneagram coaches so we can better serve the foster and adoption community.

[00:00:23.805] - Melissa Corkum

While adoption can be beautifully redemptive, it does start with loss. Birth family loses a child, a child loses a family, and for some families, adoption comes after a long journey of infertility and possibly pregnancy loss. Sometimes parents find it difficult if their child seems to be rejecting them. This is another loss. Not to mention feeling like we lose what we dreamt our families might have been.

[00:00:47.365] - Lisa Qualls

The Enneagram is a powerful tool that helps us not just understand how we experience loss and rejection, but gives us simple practices to become healthier versions of ourselves despite hardship. So join us during the month of February to do some deep reflection and healing. This group is open to adoptive and foster moms. You must be able to join us live at all four sessions. There are two time slots and space is limited. To find out more or to sign up, go to theadoptionconnection.com/enneagram. Welcome to The Adoption Connection Podcast where we share resources by and for adoptive and foster moms. I'm Lisa Qualls.

[00:01:28.375] - Melissa Corkum

And this is Melissa Corkum. Don't worry, we get it and we're here for you.

[00:01:33.865] - Lisa Qualls

Welcome to Episode 112 of The Adoption Connection Podcast. As you know, at The Adoption Connection, we place a lot of value on hearing from all sides of the triad, and we together, Melissa and I, represent all three parts of the adoption triad all by ourselves. So we think this is very, very important and one voice that we don't hear from very often is from the birth parent perspective. So we're really happy today to be bringing you an interview with a birth mom.

[00:02:02.965] - Melissa Corkum

So Hope Baker placed her newborn son for adoption in 2013 and struggled with depression, addiction and overcoming the stigma that she felt as a birth mother. She wrote a book about her story. It's called "Finding Hope: A Birth Mother's Journey into the Light." I really think you'll enjoy this open and vulnerable conversation with Hope Baker. Hi, Hope, welcome to The Adoption Connection Podcast.

[00:02:31.285] - Hope Baker

Hi, Melissa, thank you so much for having me. I'm so excited to be here.

[00:02:35.065] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. And you know, we had this scheduled a couple of months ago and then pandemic, so I'm just glad we were able to reconnect.

[00:02:42.055] - Hope Baker

Absolutely. I think that with the pandemic, schedules are so unpredictable. So I'm glad that even though we missed our first one, we can get on.

[00:02:50.065] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. I mean, I think you were literally in the air last time we were supposed to record.

[00:02:55.255] - Hope Baker

I was so, yeah. I had to come back to America very abruptly when, you know, travel advisories were launched. So yeah. That was a very "hey, I found out on a Thursday night and I got to get on a plane

on Friday and I haven't been back since." So yeah.

[00:03:11.635] - Melissa Corkum

So many big changes. Well, let's go all the way back to the beginning of your story. Can you just tell us a little bit about kind of who you were as a teenager, like even before you knew you were pregnant? Just, you know, what was your life like kind of coming into that season?

[00:03:28.615] - Hope Baker

Great question. So all of that is actually coming to surface right now because I am at my parents house right now in the town that I grew up in for quite some time. So it's really, it's a really timely question because so many memories are coming back. But I would say, honestly, I was a wild child, a wild child in a sense I just was like a freebird type person. Like I made my own rules. My parents would probably agree with that. And it's so funny because now I look back and I'm like, "gosh, I can't believe that I did some of those things" or...and my parents. I apologize to them all the time because I was a tough kid. I mean, I do. I'm like, I'm so sorry for talking back I'm so sorry. Like, I just see how good of a mom and dad you are and I am so sorry. And now they tell me, oh my gosh, like, that's normal. Like that's, you know, kids talk back at their parents, like kids rebel against their parents but it's so funny because like this stage of life I'm in now, I'm just constantly like, "I'm so sorry." And they're like, "you weren't that bad."

[00:04:31.285] - Melissa Corkum

Did they ever tell you, like, "we hope you get a kid just like you"?

[00:04:34.585] - Hope Baker

No, but it's so funny because I said that the other day I was in the car with my mom and we were driving to get out of the house driving around the town they live in and I was like, don't worry. Like, I'm going to get payback someday. I'm sure when I have another child, they'll be just like me. My mom was like, oh, that'll be good. Like in a good way. Not like a "ha ha" way.

[00:04:53.365] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, like, "that's what you deserve."

[00:04:55.825] - Hope Baker

Yeah. So I felt really good about that, but I just, my parents always tell this funny joke that as a kid, like when I was really young, I looked like the doll that you left outside and got in the rain muddy because I was always like digging in dirt, following my older brother around, like just always dirty, these bright blond curls like that were ratted up, you know, just running around and making my own my own rules and my own stories.

[00:05:22.855] - Melissa Corkum

What would you say to parents who might be parenting kids who kind of feel like you were like they're kind of making their own rules are kind of always getting into a little bit of trouble, kind of, you know, they're not just the rule followers.

[00:05:36.625] - Hope Baker

My biggest thing that I think that I struggled with as a kid is I I didn't always feel like I belonged, right. I was just so different and I always felt like I was breaking rules that were put in front of me. So when I think about how I want to raise my children, it's really to be more open. I, I had great, I have great parents and they always, you know, I never wanted for anything. They were able they worked really hard to provide me with a good life. But I always, sometimes I just felt like I didn't belong like nobody understood me. And I think I wish that I would have had a parent who asks more questions, right. Who really wanted to understand maybe why I was breaking the rules rather than just, you know, scold me for doing something wrong, but really figure out why when I was a teenager, why was I getting in trouble? Why was I really going crossing boundaries to a high degree? Because I did. I really did. And, you know, I look back now and I'm like, I was just a hurting person. I needed, you know, part of it was maybe for attention, part of it was just because I didn't, you know, I was rebelling. Like, try to understand their thinking. As kids, we don't know how to share emotions. Like, one of my, somebody

in my life, she has a daughter who has severe anxiety at a pretty young age. And it's like when she's having these moments, I just want to be able to jump through the screen when we're facetimeing and say, "why are you feeling this way?" Like, "walk me through, you know, what's going on inside your head." Rather than, you know, not trying to get to the bottom of it, to the root of it. I think that's the biggest thing, is figuring out the "why" in a compassionate way.

[00:07:18.475] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, it's so hard. We talk a lot about that here on The Adoption Connection, really understanding exactly like you're saying, why our kids do what they do. And our kids come from this place of kind of complex trauma, you know, relationships that have started and ended and possibly neglect and abuse, and so there's really good answers to those questions. But sometimes the behavior feels so personal. So I like your encouragement to us to just, you know, ask the questions with compassion, because there's definitely a way to ask them, you know, out of frustration.

[00:07:52.775] - Hope Baker

Totally. And I think the biggest thing is to not take a personal, right. Like kids don't know, gosh, I'm 28 and I still don't even know how to process my emotions half of the time. So how can we expect a 5, 10 year old, 15, even 18 year old. Like, we are still, I'm sure you as well and everybody listening, we're still trying to figure out how to process our emotions in a healthy way. So how could we expect a child to understand that? Especially if they're going through tough seasons for the first time? So we really, and I think that takes, it's a whole paradigm shift, as when I was growing up, it was like, and when my parents were growing up even more, it was you kind of keep your problems yourself, right? If you're crying and you're having a bad day or you're throwing a fit at the store, it's like, you're told to be quiet rather than we'll tell me what's wrong. Like, what's going on in your head that's making you react this way. It's not just because you want to make your parents miserable. There's a reason for it, right. So I think that's been really good with the the generations that are coming and the conversations that are happening. People want to understand now, rather than just silence, silence and punish their children.

[00:09:02.405] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, yeah. Thanks for that. So so you were a kid who kind of colored outside the lines, you weren't a rule follower. How'd you meet your son's birth father.

[00:09:15.175] - Hope Baker

So I actually met him, I worked with him, so we were both servers at a restaurant and there's really there's nothing really more than that. We work together. That's how we met.

[00:09:30.145] - Melissa Corkum

Walk us through kind of those moments when you realized that you might be pregnant and then found out that you were in fact expecting and kind of what were some of those emotions? What were you what was your experience?

[00:09:43.765] - Hope Baker

Oh, yeah, that takes me back. And honestly, I have flashbacks of those moments all the time. Like I would probably say once or twice a week I flashback to that moment in the clinic. I actually got really sick my junior year of college towards the end of the year. It was right before finals. And, you know, it went on for a couple of weeks to the point where I ended up driving back. I took a two hour drive to go from the Twin Cities in Minnesota, so St. Paul, to Alexandria where my parents are living at the time. And I came home and my mom was like, your skin is gray. And that drive usually takes two hours and I had to stop and rest a little bit because I didn't have the strength to drive through, which I used to cruise down the road on that drive and get there quicker than you probably should. So I went into the clinic and I had not thought I would, could be pregnant from things that had happened in the past. And an interesting enough, right in the beginning of my pregnancy, I had gone into the doctor twice and said something's wrong with my body. But my mother had just been diagnosed with breast cancer shortly before that. In fact, the morning after I had gotten pregnant, I my mom sat me down and told me that she had breast cancer. So when I went into the doctor, I said, my body feels funny. Something, like my my boobs feel funny, something's not right. They referred me to psych and said that this this is very common due to the trauma of my mom and all of these things. So I actually, I

knew something was wrong, but I didn't think that it was pregnancy. So when I eventually got so sick, as I was mentioning, I went to the clinic and they did an X-ray on me. I did a urine test and an X-ray and, you know, this is a lot of information, but my urine was very, very thick, which led them to believe maybe it could be a bladder, kidney infection, whatnot. But they did an X-ray on me before they tested the urine. And the X-ray technician who was leaving for the night because this was in the evening saw what he said he saw a "skeleton." I'm putting quotations around "skeleton" because it's still just a traumatizing thing. That's how it was relayed to me that he was walking out of the room and he saw a skeleton in the X-ray. So that is how I found out that I was 20 weeks pregnant, was sitting on a clinic, sitting at a clinic in a room with a nurse by myself and being told that there was a skeleton inside me, meaning I was pregnant. A little traumatic.

[00:12:13.615] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. Not what you're expecting, right?

[00:12:16.135] - Hope Baker

No, absolutely not. And I remember just saying, well, what are my options? You know, I'm a woman of freedom of choice and I just remember sitting there saying, what are my options? I want my mom. My mom wasn't with me. Where is my mom like? And of course, she came. But it was just a traumatic moment. If you could see me right now, I'm like, like my body, my my shoulders went up, my, I'm just like in a ball right now, because it is traumatic to think about and to talk about it, especially writing a book about it, because that's one of the number of questions I get.

[00:12:52.015] - Melissa Corkum

I can't imagine. Were you still with the dad at the time?

[00:12:56.425] - Hope Baker

No. I don't talk about it very often and I didn't even go into detail in my book, but it was just that time. Never again. It was a party situation where the memories are fuzzy, so I don't I don't even like to speak about it because I don't have all the details.

[00:13:14.975] - Melissa Corkum

Thanks for your vulnerability and just sharing your story, I know that's hard. And everyone listening just appreciates kind of this little window into your world that you're giving us. When was the first time that you thought adoption, making an adoption plan would be a good option for you? So I actually had gone to, you know, when I was in the clinic, I was asking my options, asking my options and the nurses had told me that there was a woman in the clinic who was looking to adopt a child and she was willing to talk to me, and that's really the first time adoption was brought into the conversation. Of course, me finding out I was pregnant 20 minutes before and then a woman wanting to knock on the door and meet me to take my child was it, and in that way it felt like taking my child. I'm like, this is, this is too much. It's too overwhelming. So that was the first time adoption came up. I actually had gone to an abortion clinic to get an abortion. And because the dates, I was so far along, I couldn't do it in Minnesota. So my sister, who, interestingly enough, was trying to conceive a child, trying to conceive her first child, and they were struggling a little bit. She dropped everything, came and picked me up and drove me down to Kansas City. Now, once we got there, it was a whole other story. Once again, I'm pro-choice and that is my belief, you know, I don't force it on anybody else. It's my belief. And sitting in that clinic, I couldn't do it. And in that moment, even though I, I believe in that choice, I, for myself, couldn't make that choice. So we left that clinic and obviously I left still pregnant and, you know, on that drive home, I just remember thinking, like, what do I what do I do from here? I remember calling my dad, calling one of my girlfriends who had just had a baby a couple of months before. You know, my sister and I were talking about what if my sister adopts the child? And then we were like, well, that would be weird because it would be so close, would I be the fun aunt? You know, what would I be? And so adoption kept coming up and I at one point I was going to keep my son. I said, hey, I think I, I think I can do this. I five bucks in my account, but you know what? I'm a woman who is determined and if I put my mind to something, I can do it. And eventually decisions were made and conversations were had and I decided to make an adoption plan and then my Google search began. How do you do adoption?

[00:15:40.885] - Melissa Corkum

What would you say to moms or what did you wish you had known then at that stage of your story?

[00:15:47.005] - Hope Baker

That's always a tough question to answer, because I genuinely think it depends on what day it is and what emotional state I'm in. If I'm, you know, because that answer varies, right. But I think the biggest takeaway that I have is to be educated, right. If you, if there are, if a mother wants to parent their child, we should do everything we can to make that happen, right. So I would say if a mother is, wants to parent their child, they they should try to research and find if there's resources available to help them. If a mother wants to look for an adoption plan, they should do the same thing, look for the resources, do their research. Because what I found is, and I actually didn't go through an agency, I didn't, I didn't use any of that. I actually found my son's mother on Google. I found her adoption book like just like an ad on Google. So I didn't use an agency or anything of the sort. But my biggest takeaway is do the research and know what the decision you're making, it's not a right now a decision. It's a forever decision. So if you decide that it's not the right time for you to parent, there are so many families looking for a child and that's wonderful, right? You're entitled to that choice. But do your research, figure out what your rights are, what kind of adoption you want. I think that's important and to me, because I have met so many birth mothers, since I put my book out, I have just met so many birth mothers messaged me and they talked to me about their adoption and what's going on since. And my biggest advice is for both sides is to get to get things in writing. I know that that seems very callous and we should have the the trust between it. But but we, to protect both sides. I mean, I just think that the adoption plan should be sealed in writing. So you make sure that the birth mother and the adoptive parents are protected and have the rights that they need to be able to, you know, function throughout their life. I know mothers who have no rights and they didn't, they were educated, they didn't do the research, they didn't know that they could ask for a visit or that they could ask for more when making their adoption plan.

[00:17:57.625] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, that's hard. Yeah, and we say here a lot that clear is kind. So I know contracts seem very formal, but it is helpful to have it all laid out to go over all the scenarios. It it's helpful because it's a very emotional time, that whole adoption plan situation. And so just having things in writing can be helpful because sometimes our memories are shady and we just look back and over a time that is very emotional. So that's, it's really wise.

[00:18:30.235] - Hope Baker

Absolutely. And I think it goes to both sides, right. Like, I know that some, some birth mothers may not like me. For example, when I went into the adoption planning, I didn't think I would want a lot of contact. I thought that it would be way too hard for me. What I found for me personally is that it's way too hard to not have contact, right. Even though it's, it's so painful to go there and know that I have to leave, and that's it. I found that since the, since placement and I have wanted more contact. But because the other side of it is some adoptive parents at points because of their own reasons, which are all valid, they want less contact. And that could be because they are struggling with identity as a parent. Or maybe the adoptive child is saying, "I want my birth mother" or or something that's causing them to do a pull back. And the birth mothers have to be protected there to make sure that they still have access to their child and adoptive parents as well, right?

[00:19:30.685] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, yeah. It's so tricky, so much to balance. You had a unique situation where you stayed with your son's adoptive mom while you were pregnant and you talk extensively about that in the book.

[00:19:51.375] - Lisa Qualls

We're interrupting this interview to ask you to do us a favor, really, it's not for us, but for adoptive and foster parents just like you.

[00:19:59.475] - Melissa Corkum

If you find our podcast helpful, pause this episode and revisit your podcast app where you can rate and review the show. Honestly, this isn't about making us feel good. This is about other parents

finding confidence, hope and friends who understand.

[00:20:14.505] - Lisa Qualls

Thanks so much for helping us get the word out. We really appreciate you.

[00:20:18.525] - Melissa Corkum

Now back to the conversation.

[00:20:25.485] - Melissa Corkum

You had a unique situation where you stayed with your son's adoptive mom while you were pregnant, and you talk extensively about that in the book, but do you want to just kind of give the 30 thousand foot view of kind of what that story was before I dove into some of the other stuff?

[00:20:44.835] - Hope Baker

This is one of the things when I say do your research. I have learned since that that's actually frowned upon with agencies for many reasons, right. But we, we did it how we wanted to. Remember in the beginning I said I'm a rule breaker? I broke the, I think I broke the rules of adoption too. When I found my son's mom, I instantly thought, "this is, you know, this is a woman who I hope to be someday." And there was just an instant connection. And we, I hid my pregnancy. The rest of the world did not know I was pregnant. My very, very tight knit friend group did and my immediate family. My, my grandma didn't know, uncles and aunts. They didn't know. So I wanted to go live somewhere else when I started to show and we just said, well, I can't even remember who said it. But it said, "well, why don't you just, you know, why don't we live together?" Why don't we get to know each other? This is a chance for her to go through pregnancy to, you know. I want her to be able to experience all the joys of pregnancy with me. So we, I move there and I lived there for the last two months of my pregnancy. We did prenatal yoga, we did, you know, drink green smoothies every day, we went on walks every day, we went shopping like, you know, we did all of these different things and we're able to get to know each other. We did the hospital tour together. So it was a really, I think, maybe abnormal situation in adoption, but it worked for us.

[00:22:07.425] - Melissa Corkum

Did that make it a lot harder to separate because you didn't keep that same level of openness once your son was born.

[00:22:17.105] - Hope Baker

We didn't. So, and that's interesting because it takes it back to what I said, right. I, in the beginning, thought I wouldn't want as much contact where she thought she'd want way more and we flip flopped. And that's evolving, right. I think that my son has, you know, transitions are hard for him. And there's things that are hard for him to process. So visits have been limited at times. And and that has been hard. I mean, when when we made our plan, I always thought I would be a part of the family. So when I, you know, now get visits that are declined because my son has events or anything like that, it's it's really gut wrenching. And I have just had to learn that it is not me, right? It is not me. This is nothing personal to me. This could very well be and most likely is because there's a conflict or because it's not the right time. So that has been hard because that's not, that's not the way we lived when we lived together. But I will say when I'm with her, it's like nothing's ever changed, right. And we've been friends and talking every day for this whole entire time. I mean, she's an active part of my life.

[00:23:27.995] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. That's such a neat story. How old is your son now?

[00:23:32.945] - Hope Baker

He will be seven. Yeah. And I think as more time goes, like some people are like, oh, it gets easier. But I think, you know, it's seasons, right. I mean, there are some times where I am so confident in the decision I made. And then there's other times like right now where I'm looking to buy a house where I'm like, "gosh, like I could be giving him such a wonderful life." But I have to put myself back in the shoes where I was seven years ago and say, "hey, you made the best decision you could with the information you had at the time." I was not a, you know, businesswoman making a very good income

with, you know, with the ability to buy a home and do these things. I didn't have that then. So I just had to, like, snap myself out of it whenever I start to feel those thoughts. And those have crept up because I've been looking at homes and like, "wow, this could be his room." But I have to quickly say, "Hope, you made the best decision that you could with the given information. Go forward. Don't look back. Go forward."

[00:24:34.275] - Melissa Corkum

I think it's important to, for people to understand though, right, that this is something that wasn't just a point in time, right? That the decision, the process, the story, like, it's just an ongoing journey with emotions and roller coasters and all types of things, you know, and it'll be a lifelong journey. And so I just appreciate, you know, I've already said, like your honesty and your willingness to take other people along for the ride, because I think it's through our stories that we are able to become more educated, learn, keep an open mind, have compassion for all people involved in the adoption story and primarily the adoptee and birth mom and adoptive parents. But there's so many other people that are impacted by that, right. Like your, your sister has a son who you're not parenting and your parents have a grandson, right. There's so many people in this adoption constellation thing and it's it's beautifully messy, I suppose.

[00:25:37.425] - Hope Baker

That's the best way to say it. It's beautifully messy and beautifully chaotic. There are people who are affected that we may not even think about. I know people, the adoptees, the adoptive parents, and the birth mothers. Those are, those are the parties that are always talked about. But I, I have learned that it's so much more than that. I mean, my mom still today struggles with it. My dad, my biological dad, I have a stepdad, and my dad, I mean, it broke our relationship for many years because he was angry, but he was also grieving. That was his first grandchild and he was grieving the loss of that. And we, you don't always think about that. So you're right. It goes far beyond just the three parties that we're talking about now. And I think one of the best things that's been for me is finally speaking up and say, "hey, I need help, I need to talk it." In having those conversations, I found that my mom needs to talk too. My dad, needs to talk too. My, my little brother needs to talk too and we need to be open to having those conversations and I think that also opens the door to healing.

[00:26:45.015] - Melissa Corkum

What would you want adoptive parents to know as a birth mom?

[00:26:49.995] - Hope Baker

My hope for adoptive parents is that when there's a holiday, be it Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, whatever you celebrate, Hanukkah, whatever you celebrate, think of those birth parents, right? Think of that birth mother. If you're having an exciting moment with your child on Christmas or whatever you celebrate, it is so easy to just send a picture. Now, I know that some parents say, "we don't, we don't want pictures sent to us," or maybe they just they can't for their emotional state and that's fine, but start a Google Drive. Right? Started a Google drive that you can easily drop a picture on Christmas and when they're ready, if they ever are, that is there for them. And for me, that is the I think, I hate using this word, but that's the least we can all do for each other, right. If they're, on Mother's Day, I would hope that every adoptive parent who is in communication with their birth parents would send a happy Mother's Day and birth Mother's Day on Saturday. I would hope that that's their first thought, is to send a message, right. And I know that my son's mom every year always sends me a, you know, we're in this together, a very sweet message. And I just want adoptive parents to know that those things matter. It may take five seconds out of your day just to send a picture you just snapped of your child to them or drop it in a Google sheet. But that picture will mean more to them than you could ever imagine. So that is one of my biggest tips for adoptive parents, is send a picture. If that's not part of your, if that's not part of your agreement, put it into Google Drive and make sure they have access to it. I just, I know that there are times where I crave pictures. And, and in the beginning, I wouldn't ask. I would just wait for the pictures that she would send, but now I know that it's OK to ask. And those days where I say I need to hear his voice or I need I need a picture I need, can you just send me one you sent? And she actually started to do something really cool when my request came up. She, she does these photo books and once they fill up, they go out and she has them going to her, her mom and dad and she has them going to me and she actually set it up to go to my mom and my grandma,

which is just such a cool touch. And I'm not saying everybody has to do that, but sending a picture on holidays is a big way to help your birth parents out.

[00:29:21.935] - Melissa Corkum

And I think we forget sometimes, you know, we talk a lot about visitation and kind of direct or indirect contact, right, where the child's more involved. And so I think even this idea of you can feel like as a birth mom, you're more involved by just kind of observing from afar by getting this picture updates. And it's not necessarily a visit or something that's going to be kind of add a lot of extra stress. Like you said, it's hard to be in contact and have to say goodbye and all of that. And not that visits aren't important, but that this is another layer of contact that I think sometimes we forget about as an option that we have.

[00:30:02.225] - Hope Baker

Of course, and you're right, it is forgotten about because I don't think people, like, if you're not a birth parent, you don't understand the magnitude of it. And I think that's part of the big, one of the big things that we need to get better on is communicating. I was, I was nervous to ask for more pictures. Many birth mothers beside me in this, you know, in this life are nervous to ask, and I think we have to get better, birth parents need to get better about asking adoptive parents to get better at, you know, asking what the birth parents need as well. Or just sending the picture, right. I think, right, I do think it takes five seconds out of an adoptive parents time and that will light up the birth parents world, whether they're not ready to see it at the time and they want to be able to go to a place where they exist, but that matters and those little things matter. And for those times, and especially adoptions that you don't have visitations, we need that. Even if we're not telling you we need it, we need it.

[00:31:05.835] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. Yeah. What, you know, a lot of adoptees will start asking questions and sometimes there's enough contact for families to have answers and sometimes there's not, especially in closed adoptions or adoptions that kind of happened a while ago or even international adoptions tend to be a lot less open. When our kids are asking questions about their birth moms and questions like or they're wondering maybe even not out loud as much, but I wanted, you know, a lot of the why questions. What do you hope that adoptive parents are communicating to their kids?

[00:31:54.765] - Hope Baker

My first thought is, I'm going to give you a little two part. My first thought is when you're going through the adoption process, even if it, if it's a closed adoption, age, any type of sort. Try to get as much information as you can, which I'm sure is already being done. But on top of that, try to collect pictures. I know that my son, he likes pictures. He likes to see. He wants picture books. I'm in process of making them right now and that can help with that. Them being able to see their birth family on, is a big thing and then being able to identify, but I think we always have to, you know, the second part of that is I think we always just have to make sure that they know that they were, this was all because everybody loved them so much. And I, and I hate for an adoptive parent to make it seem like the adoptive parent loved the child more and that's why they're with them. And it, it's hard it's tricky language because I also think every child reacts different. But I think when, whenever that's asked to an adoptive parent, we just have to remember that they are, this is something that they don't know how to process yet because they're children. They don't know how to process their emotions, so how do you say it being thoughtful to both sides? How do you say it being thoughtful to the child and letting them know that your birth mother and birth father loved you so much that they wanted the best, you know, they wanted the best for you and they weren't ready. And it's, but it's tough because you say that, and what if they have children now? I mean, I don't I don't know the exact answer because I don't think there is one. I think the answer is to be compassionate and to make sure that the child is always aware that both sides did everything that they possibly could for that child to be happy, whether the child is with them or not. Every decision they made was because they love the child so much and this was, this was the best outcome for the child. Not for the birth mother, not for the adoptive parents, but this was the best for the child.

[00:34:02.305] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, thanks for, thanks for just allowing there to be grey there and saying sometimes we just don't

know all the answers. But I think your emphasis on compassion and intentionality just to even think through it. Like you said, it's going to, going to be different for every family. That's really a good place to start.

[00:34:22.185] - Hope Baker

Yeah, I mean, I remember a story that my son's mom told me about how, when she started talking about his birth story, he was mad. He was so mad that he didn't come from her tummy, like he just had this reaction where he was like, and he cried and he was so upset because he was like, "why didn't I come from your tummy?" I mean, how does one handle that conversation? That's a conversation that not every adoptive parents going to have, first off. There's no guidebook to that conversation. Like there is no rule book and I think every child is different, right. Like he may react one way to a certain answer. Another kid may react a different way. So I think, you know, knowing your child and knowing how to speak with them, like some kids may want a straight up answer, right. They don't want any gray. They want a straight up answer with compassion, of course. But some kids may, you know, want want a full story and some, you know, it's just different. So I think just knowing your child and being compassionate always first, if you can tell, that's always my number one thing with children is even when they're driving you crazy, like, how can we still find ways to figure out ways to be empathetic and understanding that their minds don't necessarily know how to process things. And just because you tell a kid no, does not mean they understand why that no is significant and why you're saying that no, like, we really have to be thoughtful when speaking with kids.

[00:35:53.105] - Melissa Corkum

So, I don't know if you know this, but my co-host, Lisa and I, between the two of us, make up all three parts of the Triad. So I'm an adoptee, she's a birth mom, and we're both adoptive moms. And I often say when I'm sharing my story as an adoptee, that that that is true, that we all process our stories differently. And I echo a lot of what you say, you know, we try to follow our kids leads because I have two siblings who are also adopted and we all have different views on adoption and our stories. And so, you know, there are, there are some kind of universals, but there are a lot of things that are really, really gray.

[00:36:32.295] - Hope Baker

Absolutely, and I think just acknowledging that for any parent, an adoptive parent or not, acknowledging that is the most important thing you can do.

[00:36:42.205] - Melissa Corkum

Tell us about the process of deciding to write a book about your story.

[00:36:47.795] - Hope Baker

From the moment that I met my son's mom and we decided to live together, we knew something was different. We knew that this was not normal. And we actually had talked about it when I was living with her and my mom, my mom and I had talked about it and and it was just kind of like, "oh, we should write a book together." Like, we should share our story because it's different and it matters, like, the world needs to hear these stories. And of course, as you know, I wrote it by myself that didn't, that didn't materialize. I think, I think as the adoption went on, big things changed. As we talked about in the beginning, you know, things change, emotions changed, openness to be in contact more changed, time changed. Like you're raising a toddler, you know, you don't have time to write a book.

[00:37:32.645] - Hope Baker

Yeah.

[00:37:34.865]

Being a full time mom and raising a toddler, a full time working mom, right. So I think at one point I just sat, I sat up and I said, "I can't find the help that I need. I can't find the resources I need, I can't find a story like mine. I can't find these resources." And I know that if I'm feeling that way, many birth mothers are feeling that way. Many adoptive parents are trying to get into the head of birth mothers to better understand adoptees may be trying to understand their stories. And I just I had a calling to help and I remember contemplating. Back and forth, pacing in the apartment I was living in London, pacing

back and forth on the deck, we had like a wraparound deck on the that wrapped around our whole corner apartment. I remember pacing on that deck, "Should I do this, do I do this, how do I do this? What what's the impact going to be for me? What is it going to be like if my son reads this someday? Is he going to be proud, angry? What's it going to be like for his mom to read it someday? Is she going to be angry about my views of how things happen?" Because remember, all of our perspectives are different. His story is going to be completely different from mine and, or his mom's. And his mom's story is going to be, we're all, they're all different, even though it's the same. You know, we went through it all together, but it's all going to be different. And I remember thinking, like, do I want to open myself up for ridicule? Because I, you know, for the first couple of years after my son was born, I hate that I was a birth mother. I mean, still, my immediate family knew, my grandparents didn't know, uncles and aunts, my extended friends didn't know. And I used to write an anonymous blog. And I remember the day that I came out on that blog. I was like, I'm a birth mother. Here's my story. Here is three years of blogs that I've written. And there was mixed signals, right? I got people who were angry. I had people, family members who were angry that I didn't tell them, people who were angry I made that choice, people telling me I was selfish, but then on the other side, I had people giving support. So when I was deciding to write the book, all of that came to the surface. Am I emotionally strong enough to handle if there's negative feedback? And I think I just decided that the, the message and the journey was more important than the possible emotional struggle with negativity, and I had decided that my story is important and it's valid and it's it needs to be told. Birthmother voices need to be heard. Adoptees, it can help them better understand their past because all stories are different, but I think a birth mother's, a birth mother's love and, you know, there's, there's cords that tie throughout. So that's really where I was coming from and then I did it. I just jumped. And I remember it's so funny because there's a, you know, in the book, I don't, I don't sugar, I don't sugarcoat it. I don't hide anything. And that meant that there are stories out there that I, you know, the world is reading. My boss could read them and there's a couple in there where I talk about very raw moments of my life where I struggled with addiction and where I struggled with men and all of these different things. And I remember calling the editor the week before saying, you know, I know my book is finalized and everything's done, but can I take a couple lines out? Like, are we too far in the process? And we're like a day away from printing, right. And I'm like, can I take a couple of lines out? I'm feeling very anxious. I'm having like a mini panic attack, thinking about people reading a couple of these stories. And of course, I couldn't otherwise it would have delayed everything. But I had just to decide that if I don't tell the whole story, then it's not the real story. And I'm glad that I did, I'm glad that I did. I think that the feedback from the book has been wonderful. There has been, you know, a couple trying times with family members who read it and who were upset about some of the content. But at the end of the day, I feel good about it. And I had messages of birth mother's, adoptive parents saying how much it helped them and wow they're not alone. Like some of these things we think about, like the depression and the addiction, a lot of the birth mothers I meet are recovering addicts from after placement or they're still in the thick of it. A lot of birth mothers. Not that they were before placement, but after. And I think part of that problem is we are not communicating enough and birth mothers don't have a space to feel safe always. And that, when when you talk about being a birth mother, sometimes it's push with shame and, and negative feedback, so providing a safe space where birth mothers can speak up and say, hey, I'm not alone, wow, somebody went through this as well. Here's what I need to do. I know that I have a support system in place. I think having that in place is really going to help birth mothers process their feelings and not feel so alone and worthless.

[00:42:46.545] - Melissa Corkum

Gosh, what, it feels like when you put your work out into the world, right, like you're at the top of that roller coaster and you're about to take the deep diving and you're thinking, "did I really want to do this? Is it too late to get off?"

[00:43:01.215] - Hope Baker

Exactly. That's exactly what I felt.

[00:43:04.995] - Melissa Corkum

Well, I appreciate your story, your vulnerability. I think your book is a beautiful window into your experience. And you were raw and you shared a lot. And I know that a lot of people will appreciate that. And like you said, it's already been helpful. We believe here, for sure, that story breaks down a lot

of the shame that we feel whatever part of the triad or the adoption constellation, if you will, you're in, and I think more people need to be speaking up because I think there's a lot more "me too" moments that we can share no matter what our situations are. And so just on behalf of the adoption community, I appreciate you taking the plunge and being able to share with us for coming on today for all the things and, and continuing to just take it one day at a time.

[00:44:05.415] - Hope Baker

And thank you, Melissa, so much for having me on. I really appreciate it. I think you hit it right in the nail, right on the head, right the nail on the head that stories help people get through the hardest and darkest times of our life. So I'm happy to be a person that can help, even just one person through something was worth it to write the book, so thank you for having me on.

[00:44:26.895] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, absolutely. And I know you've helped more, way more than one person.

[00:44:31.425] - Hope Baker

I appreciate that.

[00:44:37.295] - Lisa Qualls

I really appreciate her sharing her story, and I'm so reminded. We talk about this with adoptees especially, that not every adoption story is the same. Adoptees experience adoption very differently, and that is also true for birth parents. So Hope's story is her unique story. And I appreciate knowing that she is putting her story out into the world, I think is a really good thing.

[00:45:02.855] - Melissa Corkum

Would you say it's like the forgotten part of the triad? The part of the triad we get to hear from the least? I don't know if it's the shame surrounding it, what do you think?

[00:45:12.535] - Lisa Qualls

Well, absolutely. As a birth mom, I can say that there is a lot of shame, there's a lot of stigma, even now there's stigma, or there are the opposite, where birth moms are kind of like the heroes. And that's weird, too. And so it's a hard story to tell. And we're also dealing with decades of progressive change in adoptions, more and more openness and different things and so the birth mother role and how the birth mother is viewed is changing. And so it's, I think it's kind of a complicated place to be.

[00:45:47.665] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, well, if you would like to hear more about Hope's story, like I mentioned at the beginning of the show, she did write a book called "Finding Hope." Full disclaimer, it's a very raw, vulnerable book. And she uses some language that's probably more like PG 13. So I just want to throw that out there before anyone's blindsided by it. But I still think it's worth the read because I think every person's story is important. And the more diverse stories we can hear around the adoption triad will make us better parts of the triad, better foster adoptive parents, and more compassionate people. So, but I just wanted to throw that out there in case anyone was concerned. So if you would like to connect with Hope, her website is Hopeobaker.com. You can also find her on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter as Hope O Baker. There are also, we'll link to another, our other two birth mother stories, Lisa's and Adrian Collin's in the show notes you can find those at theadoptionconnection.com/112.

[00:47:01.495] - Lisa Qualls

Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. You can find us on Facebook or Instagram as [@theadoptionconnection](https://www.instagram.com/theadoptionconnection).

[00:47:09.115] - Melissa Corkum

Thanks so much for listening. We love having you. If you enjoyed this episode, please leave a quick review over on iTunes. It will help us reach more moms who may be feeling alone.

[00:47:19.285] - Lisa Qualls

And remember, until next week, you're a good mom, doing good work and we're here for you.

[00:47:26.455] - Melissa Corkum

The music for the podcast is called New Day and was created by Lee Rosevere.