

[00:00:01.170] - Lisa Qualls

Welcome to the Adoption and Connection podcast where we share resources by and for adoptive and foster moms. I'm Lisa Qualls.

[00:00:09.060] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:14.340] - Melissa Corkum

Hey, Lisa, how are you doing?

[00:00:16.110] - Lisa Qualls

I'm doing great. How are you, Melissa?

[00:00:18.510] - Melissa Corkum

Good. So it's coming to the end of August. Is summer still in full swing at your house?

[00:00:25.170] - Lisa Qualls

It is, but my kids start school in about a week, so we're definitely gearing up for that and it's hot and, yeah, but summer's coming to an end pretty soon here.

[00:00:37.260] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, sports practices have started in our neck of the woods and so my one son who is in public school is kind of definitely gearing up for school to start, but we don't officially get back till after Labor Day, so we have a little bit more time.

[00:00:54.330] - Lisa Qualls

Well, I'm really excited about today's interview because I got to interview a friend of mine. I interviewed Jayne Schooler and we talked about how to tell your kids their story and and we spent some time talking about how to tell them their story, their history, even when it's really hard. And I found the interview to be really educational for me in general, but also very educational for me personally as I'm navigating some of these things with my own kids.

[00:01:23.940] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I loved it, too. When I was listening to it, I was literally taking notes because we have a child who comes from a hard story that he doesn't know or remember. So some of our kids came to us old enough that most of their stories they remember, but, you know, we haven't, it's been so crazy at our house. We just haven't even really thought through what that could even look like and so, I'm so glad to have this interview as a resource just to start thinking through some of those things, so Jayne just had a ton of wisdom. I love her personality, she didn't beat around the bush, she was just really direct. I just think that the content that she has to share, I mean, people are just going to be loving. It's going to be amazing.

[00:02:02.190] - Lisa Qualls

I agree. I, I just loved it. And I had to be really careful not to get too off on my own personal stuff because I just wanted to talk with her forever and get all of her advice, but what she has to offer us is incredible and she also has given us a wonderful free download to share with everybody that we can talk about in a little bit. Well, I first learned of Jayne when I was, it was recommended that I read her book, Wounded Children Healing Homes, and it was in our very, very early stages of adopting and it was a completely different book from anything else I'd read and I loved it. And I remember distinctly thinking that she was the only person who talked about the sibling experience. And the sibling experience is something of huge interest to me. It's you know, I'm working on a book on that, it's just something that I feel is very, underserved isn't it really the right word, but it's underrepresented, I guess, is what I mean. And so that book was really influential. Little fun fact about that book for anybody who watches This Is Us, they actually show one of the characters who's a foster dad reading that book in the, in the show and she told me she didn't know that was going to happen. It was just a total surprise to her until people started telling her, but I thought that was really great because This Is Us is probably my favorite TV show.

[00:03:19.110] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, we're huge fans over here as well. I know that that's her most, probably well-known book. I know it's very well-respected in the adoption community. We definitely read it too as one of the resources that we lean on. Has she written any other books?

[00:03:34.710] - Lisa Qualls

Well, she's actually written quite a few books, but a couple of her other ones that I want to mention, she's written The Whole Life Adoption book and then the book we're going to be referring more to today is Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child. And those are three of her books, there are more for anybody who wants to find more of her work because she's really remarkable.

[00:03:57.330] - Melissa Corkum

Awesome. So before we head into our interview with Jayne today, I just want to let moms know that she does talk about some sensitive topics that may not be appropriate for younger ears, so if you want to preview this without your kiddos in the room or stick your earbuds in whatever you need to do or go put them in front of a Netflix show, this probably isn't a great one to have with little ears around.

[00:04:21.480] - Lisa Qualls

Yes, I would agree with that. And one thing that I didn't get to talk to her about in her interview itself, but I want to share with you is how she and her husband David became foster parents way back in 1978. A young person in their church just flat out asked them, would you become my foster parents? And they answered, yes. And that changed the entire direction of their lives. David works in pastoral and counseling ministry, and most of his focus is actually on working with adults who have a lifetime impact of early childhood trauma. And both David and Jayne speak all over the country, they train people in trauma informed care and they work with back to back ministries, which we'll share the link to that website in our show notes so people can see what that is, but Back to Back Ministries provides holistic orphan care all around the world. And we've already mentioned that she's the author of actually eight books in the field of child welfare and on top of it, she is a grandmother of four children. So she is really a fantastic resource for all of us.

[00:05:28.020] - Melissa Corkum

Without further ado, let's welcome Jayne to the show.

[00:05:35.070] - Lisa Qualls

Well, Jayne, thank you so much for being here with me. I'm really happy to get a chance to talk with you more. I could talk with you for hours and hours, but today I am going to try to focus a little bit on the topic of how to tell our children their stories, their history, and how to tell the truth to them. I wanted to start just with the question, you know, you wrote a book called Telling the Truth, let me see, I want to get it right, Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child. Can you tell me how you became interested in that topic?

[00:06:09.120] - Jayne Schooler

Absolutely. You know, Lisa, the initial book came out in 2000 and I was an adoption worker and also a trainer at that time. And I was at a conference and I was doing a workshop on talking to your kids about their history. Well, I had not really even delve much into the topic and a woman came up to me and said something really difficult. She said, "My seven year old adopted son was conceived as a result of incest. Do I ever have to tell him that?" And I said, "Yes, that's his story. You need to tell him." And she said, "Well, then how do you do it?" And I didn't have a clue. And so I came back from that workshop and prayerfully gave it consideration and jumped into researching how in the world. So over about a year, year and a half, we dug out this topic in two thousand and then revisit it again in 2014.

[00:07:08.910] - Lisa Qualls

I feel a little self-serving in this interview because there are so many things I want to know from you, and I know that a lot of us are afraid to tell our children the truth. We're afraid of how it's going to impact them, we're afraid of doing it wrong, we're afraid of doing it at the wrong time, you know, all these things. And so I thought we'd go through these ten points and you can teach us what you have

learned over really almost two decades.

[00:07:35.880] - Jayne Schooler

Absolutely. You know, I do a workshop on this particular topic and I start the workshop out with a little slide that says "children are afraid of the dark, but adults are afraid of the light." Why are we so afraid to talk to our kids about the past? And I've got a whole lot of different responses, big ones. I don't feel I have the skill.

[00:07:59.010] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah.

[00:07:59.910] - Jayne Schooler

I don't want to open a box that's closed in tight, but not realizing it's not really close and tight.

[00:08:06.150] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah.

[00:08:06.780] - Jayne Schooler

And someone said they have their own history that just knocks up against that and they can't go there. So there's lots of reasons that we are hesitant.

[00:08:15.720] - Lisa Qualls

Yes. Yes. Well why don't we jump in and then we'll see how our conversation takes us. So in ten principles of telling the truth, and by the way, a link to this document will be in the show notes. So number one is initiate conversation about the child's life story. So who's supposed to initiate the conversation?

[00:08:35.310] - Jayne Schooler

Well, I really believe it's the parent's job to tell, not necessarily the child's only job to ask, of course kids are going to ask questions, but I believe that children will only ask the questions that they feel they have the permission to ask. And it's been an environment where they've not created openly about adoption, haven't talked openly about adoption, children may wonder, do I even have permission to ask these questions? So I think the first job of the parents is to create an atmosphere where kids know they can freely bring up the topic and ask a question, and they do that by initiating the conversation. There's lots of different ways to initiate it. One of them is simply read books to your kids. Are you familiar with tapestrybooks.com?

[00:09:27.000] - Lisa Qualls

Yes, I am.

[00:09:28.650] - Jayne Schooler

It's an amazing warehouse of books that parents can use to read stories to their kids. The stories are age appropriate, but that just helps them to initiate conversations. Lots of other ways too, watching movies, taking walks, all sorts of things.

[00:09:45.630] - Lisa Qualls

OK, so number two is do not lie. Under no circumstances should a caregiver or parent lie to a child. OK, tell me what you mean by that.

[00:09:57.180] - Jayne Schooler

Well, you know, for decades and decades and decades, adoption has been shrouded in secrecy and lies, but something that is really wrong with adoption, so we have to make up stories that make it better. Many kids were told that their birth parents were killed in a car accident or on airplanes, they were told that their parents loved them so much that they gave them away, but that never answers any of the questions. One particular woman and that comes to mind is this story is an example of kind of lying by omission, I guess, but this one woman came up to me at a conference and said, "My 14 year old daughter is always asking me, has anybody ever told you my birth mother's name?" And

she would say, "No, no one's ever told me your birth mother's name." The problem is, this adoptive mom had read it on the hospital papers. She knew the name. And I said to this, mom, your daughter wasn't checking your hearing, she was checking your information and you have really lied by omission to her for many, many years. I mean, she's 14. You don't have much time to make that right. It's OK to tell the story little bits and pieces at a time, and we're going to talk about that little bit developmentally later, but to completely tell a lie about who your birth parents were or the circumstances, that's not OK, because kids always find out the truth.

[00:11:34.860] - Lisa Qualls
And then what happens?

[00:11:36.640] - Jayne Schooler
Oh, break in trust and relationships, and it can be devastating for the whole family, like, what else have you not told me?

[00:11:46.080] - Lisa Qualls
Yeah.

[00:11:46.950] - Jayne Schooler
I tell my grandkids, if you tell the truth, you don't have to remember what you said.

[00:11:52.530] - Lisa Qualls
That's true. That's really true. OK, well, and you just mentioned this, we can lead right into: tell the information in a developmentally appropriate way.

[00:12:02.980] - Jayne Schooler
Right, and we talk a lot about that, how to do that in our book. You would not tell, and I'm going to use some pretty rough language because life is rough and harsh.

[00:12:13.870] - Lisa Qualls
Go ahead.

[00:12:13.870] - Jayne Schooler
But you would not tell a five year old that their birth mother was a drug addict or a prostitute, but you would tell her that she could not keep her safe. Maybe when the little girl's, seven or eight or nine years old, you would begin telling more reasons why your mom couldn't keep you safe is that she made life choices to get involved in drugs and then the story would continue. Reality is that that little girl would have experienced some of that even as a baby and have some memories of being left alone in the apartment alone and, you know, when mom was working. So filling in those blanks. One of the things, Lisa, that many adult adoptees have told us, those that were adopted through the foster care system, that we felt like emotional timebombs because no one was filling in the words for the emotional time bomb inside of us. They may not have liked the truth, but it's better than walking on quicksand of fantasy we create, so I think it's really important.

[00:13:18.580] - Lisa Qualls
That's really interesting. You know, not to totally divert, but you know that I'm also a birth/first mom and that I have an adult son and the story he was told about me was completely false. And it was worse actually than the truth, you know, I'll never know how much of it was changed by his parents and how much maybe the agency actually told the parents.

[00:13:45.820] - Jayne Schooler
It's really interesting and we wrote a curriculum for Ohio State training on this topic. And I had to do some research and you got to laugh at this because you're an adoptive mom too. A social work manual written in the 1950s, said this is about adoption disclosure to parents, do not tell adoptive parents any information that would arouse anxiety.

[00:14:09.910] - Lisa Qualls

Oh, yeah.

[00:14:11.590] - Jayne Schooler

Because, now this is the hilarious part because adoptive parents tend to be neurotic, full of anxiety, and if they ask you too many questions, they're probably unconsciously sadistic.

[00:14:29.410] - Lisa Qualls

Oh, my goodness. Oh, my.

[00:14:31.540] - Jayne Schooler

That was in a manual, the social worker manual in the nineteen fifties. So that's what set the stage about not telling adoptive parents the truth, therefore, they couldn't tell their kids the truth. But so when we look at this whole topic of developmentally appropriate ways, we need to quit the family, and we mentioned, too, that by the age of 12, and some people say I am not going to tell by the age of 12, but I think it's really critical. Now we're talking developmentally 12, not necessarily chronologically 12.

[00:15:02.800] - Lisa Qualls

Right.

[00:15:04.390] - Jayne Schooler

I think the longer you wait, and I know this to be true, the longer you wait to tell the truth, you risk accidental disclosure.

[00:15:12.100] - Lisa Qualls

I think that's really true. And we're, you know, at a point with our own kids that there are some things we need to share that we haven't done and I'm realizing just reading this document in preparation, like, oh, I need to really, I need to pay attention, we need to make some moves on this.

[00:15:30.580] - Jayne Schooler

And it's hard. And, you know, I think we keep secrets for two reasons. And one of them is I make a decision that you're not competent to handle the secret and the other reason, I'm sure there are a lot more, but the other reason is I think I'm not competent to handle your response to the secret.

[00:15:50.350] - Lisa Qualls

Because I'm afraid so. So a mom might say, "I want to tell my child this, I think I should, but I don't think she's going to respond well and I'm afraid of what might happen, so I'm just not going to tell."

[00:16:03.710] - Jayne Schooler

Right, I don't think I can handle her reaction and so I'm not going to go there.

[00:16:08.080] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, yeah. That's really, well, let's lead right into the next question then. Number four is, well, it's not a question but, allow a child to express anger about the past or birth family without joining in. That was really interesting and so important.

[00:16:25.720] - Jayne Schooler

Let's place you in the shoes of an adopted person and I'm your adoptive mom. And you start expressing some degree of anger about your birthparent.

[00:16:36.700] - Lisa Qualls

I'll pretend, I'll pretend because I do this. Like, my birth mom, she's a terrible person. She chose drugs over me.

[00:16:44.500] - Jayne Schooler

I really agree with you, Lisa. I think she was a horrible, horrible mom. So, where's your heart going to go to defend, me or your birth mom?

[00:16:55.960] - Lisa Qualls
Birth mom.

[00:16:57.340] - Jayne Schooler
Absolutely.

[00:16:58.480] - Lisa Qualls
And I think it's going to make me feel horrible about myself. Like, if my birth mom's horrible, what does that mean about me, you know?

[00:17:07.060] - Jayne Schooler
I think one of the things that we understand that we just need to listen and ask questions is so much better because we don't want to set up what we call competing attachments in the child's heart. If I let you feel what you do and allow you also to have expressed love to at the same time for your birth family, and I'm going to help you. And then it's not going to be, I'm not going to ask for your love over your birth mother, not competing attachments.

[00:17:35.140] - Lisa Qualls
That's really good. I get a lot of people when they find out I'm a birth mom and I'm maybe in an online group who say, Well, but my kid's birth parents were really terrible, are really terrible. They're you know, they've done this or that or this or that and I think, I just try to encourage them to have some compassion and to remember that their children came from these parents, you know, and their children are beautiful, made in the image of God, they're a miracle in and of themselves. And if we start tearing down their parents and, you know, it's like we have to bridge over it, we have to help our kids, even if I mean, they have the right to be angry for sure, but we also want to honor the place that their parents have in their lives and their hearts.

[00:18:25.540] - Jayne Schooler
One of my favorite authors, have you ever heard of James Gritter?

[00:18:29.840] - Lisa Qualls
I'm not sure.

[00:18:31.300] - Jayne Schooler
He is one of my favorite authors and he's written a book called Hospitious Adoption. Hospitious Adoption means hospitality in Adoption, extending grace and mercy to the birth parents.

[00:18:46.400] - Lisa Qualls
I love it.

[00:18:47.440] - Jayne Schooler
Isn't that beautiful? Because when you extend grace and mercy, you can never lose, ever.

[00:18:54.340] - Lisa Qualls
That's true. Yeah, I'm really learning that a lot as I navigate foster care, foster care is so different. You know, it's really fascinating, but I, you know, I look at all these stories and, you know, as a birth mom myself, I've certainly experienced a lot of judgment or the reverse the, Oh, you did such a beautiful thing. It doesn't feel beautiful to me because it's devastating to me. I think when we can remember that all of these parents, including me, we all had our own wounds and our own stories that led us to the place where we ended up, you know, and we all do. And we have to look upon people with compassion and love. I'm always praying that the Lord will help me see people the way he sees them and he looks upon us with love. So let's talk about number five, this is a great point. Consider asking instead of telling.

[00:19:52.000] - Jayne Schooler
Oh, that is so important. We think we have to do all the talking. Simply getting our kids to to answer questions that think about it, asking questions, asking good questions. My husband does a lot of

counseling with teenage, adopted teenagers particularly, and he asked a question that opened a huge door for a youngster. And this fifteen year old boy had been adopted into amazing family. Fifteen years old, got in a little bit of trouble. And he asked this young man, "Do you ever worry that your parents will send you back to Guatemala?" And he said, "All the time."

[00:20:31.060] - Lisa Qualls
Really?

[00:20:32.050] - Jayne Schooler
And that opened up a whole thing of, no one had ever asked that question. He asked permission of this young man, "can I tell your parents what you said." He said, "Of course." And so they had a huge family discussion around why he felt like that. And he was so shrouded in shame from being adopted, he felt he never was enough and one day they would act on that. And just so, learning to ask our kids good questions, do you remember what life was like in the orphanage before you came here or what life was like in foster care? What are some of your best memories? What are some of your hardest memories? And that's going to bring things up the service for our kids to heal.

[00:21:16.430] - Lisa Qualls
Yeah, yeah. That's a really good point. And I think sometimes, especially when parents are anxious about this conversation, we might be tempted to kind of script it. This is what I'm going to say, and this time I'm going to say it, and it's all going to come out perfectly, the end. But we can actually let our kids lead us in some of this.

[00:21:33.980] - Jayne Schooler
Absolutely, like you would with any other conversation, but just learning to ask questions and listen well to the answers.

[00:21:42.110] - Lisa Qualls
The listening part, I think we're all, none of us are inclined to do more talking than listening and it has to be very intentional with our kids.

[00:21:50.360] - Jayne Schooler
You have to be super, super intentional.

[00:21:53.570] - Lisa Qualls
All right. Number six, repeat, repeat, repeat.

[00:21:57.590] - Jayne Schooler
Our children understand adoption developmentally. Especially if you adopt an infant, they're going to learn in the early stages that they gave to family and they're going to be able to tell their story. I have a little friend, Whitney, who was adopted from Korea. She would talk about all the hundreds of people that are at the airport to meet her when she flew in at nine months, maybe ten, but she could tell her story. Well, as Whitney got a little bit older as with many adopted children, I gained a family and I lost a family. So you're going to have to tell the story again with a little bit more detail, a little bit more truth. Re-tell it as kids go through all these developmental stages. By the time that some of our kids who get to 10, 11, 12, they've gone through, gained a family, lost a family, I must have been given away. Do you give away your goods, your valuables?

[00:22:52.400] - Lisa Qualls
No.

[00:22:54.410] - Lisa Qualls
Most of us don't give away our valuables. So kids that know you don't give away your valuables, are going to come to the conclusion they're not valuable and many of our kids, if they've not known the truth, age appropriately, by the time they're 13 or 14, have bought the lie that they were totally rejected as a human being. So it's important that we repeat, repeat, and ask more questions. Keep the door open.

[00:23:21.050] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, yeah.

[00:23:23.060] - Jayne Schooler

And one of the questions, Lisa, I was asked by an adoptive mom one time at a workshop, "Can I talk about adoption too much or not enough?" And if you can't think of a time in recent history that you've talked about adoption or birth parents, it's probably time to bring it up.

[00:23:37.730] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, that's a good a good measuring stick for all of us. OK, number seven, don't try to fix the pain of loss. Now, for those of us moms who want to maybe especially the high nurture moms, we don't want our kids to hurt, right. So what do we do with that?

[00:23:57.590] - Jayne Schooler

Many adults, and I learned so much just by asking adopted adults their story, I asked them, do you like the chosen baby story? Oh, no, we don't like the chosen baby story because number one, if we were chosen, can only be unchosen. And number two, it simply doesn't answer any of our questions. It invalidates our loss. And so we can't fix it, but we can listen to it, we can walk alongside of it, just not shove it aside or try to minimize the loss and the pain.

[00:24:30.710] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, yeah. So what if the pain seems to be overwhelming for our child? What, and I mean, I guess I'm not thinkin overwhelming right in the moment, but overwhelming, like, it maybe leads into some really tough emotional time, depression, whatever. What do you recommend parents do if the feelings are too big, the pain is too much?

[00:24:51.890] - Jayne Schooler

I think you're going to have to be very, very intentional. Don't miss cues of depression, don't miss cues when kids are spending more time away and withdrawing the things that are going on. In some ways, it's kind of fortunate if you have an angry child that's dealing with this. Although that may not be most fun, at least you know the emotions are out there. When you've got a child that has withdrawn and cannot express themselves and have gone so deep into their own pain, that's when it's hard for parents. But just absolutely pay attention to signs of physical, emotional changes, academic changes, relationship changes. What is going on here? I think we just have to stay tuned to our kids, be present with our kids.

[00:25:41.390] - Lisa Qualls

Some kids are going to need some professional support.

[00:25:44.300] - Jayne Schooler

No question about that and sometimes we wait too long.

[00:25:48.020] - Lisa Qualls

Yes.

[00:25:49.850] - Jayne Schooler

When I work with adoptive families doing home studies, I always hook them up with a therapist even before they thought they would even need it. Families that are just beginning this process, get on board with a therapist that you see once every six months, whether you need it or not so you're acquainted with them when you do need it.

[00:26:08.360] - Lisa Qualls

So you would recommend, if the child doesn't necessarily, isn't exhibiting a need now, but go ahead and have someone you're checking in with every six months so that when they hit that rocky patch, maybe early adolescence or whatever or later adolescence, you know, that they already know this person.

[00:26:25.350] - Jayne Schooler

Actually have a relationship. We had one family that had a young lady that had severe stuff going on and that she moved into their home and was perfect in her behavior. And they said, we don't need this. I said, yes, you do. And so we insisted. And so for a year, about every quarter, as we strongly advise, they met with a counselor. Well, about a year in the home, the bottom fell out. This little girl crashed and they had already had a relationship with this therapist.

[00:26:54.640] - Lisa Qualls

That's really great. It's kind of like keeping a therapist on retainer or something, you know, like, just especially some of these therapists are so hard to get into.

[00:27:02.650] - Jayne Schooler

Your adoption trainer, you got a trainer that you go see everyone, but someone can be really in tune with where you are. And I know they're hard to find, but trauma informed therapists that really get it.

[00:27:13.810] - Lisa Qualls

That's wonderful, that's a great idea. Number eight, remember, the child knows more about his history than you think.

[00:27:20.650] - Jayne Schooler

I was at another conference. I've had fun at different conferences. And I actually, it was a breakout session and the room held about 50, but there were one hundred people in it. Yes, and this poor couple had to sit up front, almost right in front of me because the room was so packed, but I could tell they were angry and they didn't want to be there and they folded their hands. And I, I said, I introduced myself and I said, good to meet you and what brought you in here to this particular workshop? He said, "Our workers said that we had to come even if we didn't want to or not." The mom said, "We're not going to do anything you say." I said, OK, this makes for a great, in my mind, a great training experience. So I said, you don't have to do a thing I say. Tell me your story. And she said, "Well, we have two boys, seven and nine, and we're never going to tell them that they were severely physically abused the first three years of their life." But I said, "No, you don't have to tell them. That's fine." Well, I got to the point of the workshop where I put this up on the screen and I asked the group, why do you think the child knows more than you think? Because he was there. He was the one that was in this case, these two boys that were severely beaten, they were there. They know more than the parents know. I had one case of a little girl, 18 months old, that witnessed her birth father stabbing her birth mother 18 times in front of her, then kidnaping her. Two days later, they find her still in the bloodstained pajamas, the police do. And I worked with the family about telling the truth eventually because she has these memories inside of her. The reality is, even if our kids are very, very young and they've witnessed things, something, it's in there and our kids need words. And sometimes it's hard to find the words because we weren't there, but they're there.

[00:29:14.520] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah. So can you comment just a tiny bit about the difference between preverbal memories and verbal, like after a child is verbal? Can you give us a really simple explanation of that?

[00:29:29.940] - Jayne Schooler

For example, in this little girl's case that I'll call her Laura. Laura saw this horrific event in her, in the kitchen of her apartment. The birth father broke into the apartment, there was blood everywhere. This little girl had blood all over her, so she has these horrific screaming events, seeing her mom laying on the floor, but no words to tell. So what happened? That gets in there as an emotional, traumatic memory that no one has processed with her. So pre-verbally, they see things and experience things, but they don't have words to tell you what they saw. We know that if children, anybody who doesn't process a traumatic memory within a traumatic event within 72 hours, it goes in their emotional circuitry. That includes witnessing something.

[00:30:17.760] - Lisa Qualls

OK, repeat that. It goes into what?

[00:30:20.040] - Jayne Schooler

Their emotional circuitry. Goes in the emotional system and just rots there till it's triggered by something.

[00:30:28.050] - Lisa Qualls

OK, number nine, don't impose value judgments. Don't impose them on who?

[00:30:33.420] - Jayne Schooler

On the child or on the decision whether to tell them or not. You may think it's the worst information in the whole world. It may be the reason that helps them understand why they were adopted. For example, I can give you a story. There was a young man that was conceived as a result of rape. My coauthor was his caseworker, told the adoptive mom, you're going to have to tell him. Adopted mom said no way on earth would she ever tell him. When he was 12, she called Betsy and said, could you please tell him because his older brothers know and one of these days they're going to be so angry at him and they're going to. She darts at it. Anyway, she brought him in for about a three hour conversation. But in that conversation, over a long period of time, which I will not take the time to go near, told him the circumstances that your birth parents did not love each other, they did not know each other, didn't go into heavy detail, said you were conceived as a result of a sexual assault. She used the word rape and he goes, yes. Why the yes? He said, you know, as long as I've been old enough to understand things, I thought my mom and again, pretty heavy word, I thought my mom, birth mom, was a slut and slept around and just dumped me. He was a victim. Now, he had to deal with the rest of the story, but he understood why his birth mother made that decision.

[00:32:02.700] - Lisa Qualls

Wow. So he had the capacity to actually have some empathy for his first mom because it's sort of, and that empathy would have probably flowed into so much understanding in himself. What a gift that those parents had someone who could help them, because I think so many parents are afraid to do it on their own.

[00:32:26.070] - Jayne Schooler

It is huge. Sometimes they just need, I tell social workers, you may need to be that third party who, parents are sitting there, but you were doing the telling and they are there having their children's back so to speak. They're there in support.

[00:32:43.010] - Lisa Qualls

That's an interesting thought, I hadn't really thought about that. That if the parents might be able, instead of being maybe the deliverers of the information, they could play the role of "We're here to support you as you receive this hard information."

[00:32:57.050] - Jayne Schooler

And I don't think, I think parents might need some help in developing the skill of how to tell it developmentally as you go, not waiting for that big conversation. But when you get to that part where it is a heavy conversation, you might need a third party.

[00:33:11.730] - Lisa Qualls

OK, number 10, the child should be in control of his story. It is a child's story to tell.

[00:33:20.900] - Jayne Schooler

I was at my dental hygienist a number of years ago and my dental hygienist was telling me the story of one of the kids on my caseload. Way too many details. And I said, how in the world do you know all this? And she said, well, the adoptive mom was here the other day. And so I think parents need to learn how to answer some of the effect that when people ask questions about the child's story, just say, no, that's Johnny's story to tell when he wants or we don't talk about that at home, that we don't give our child's story away. And I don't know what your listeners will think about this or what you think about it, but I don't think we need to tell our child's school teachers our child's in-depth history.

[00:34:05.210] - Lisa Qualls
I agree.

[00:34:06.380] - Jayne Schooler
I think we only need to tell our school teachers what our children need in the classroom. Like, for example, if you've got a child with a history of sexual abuse, my child needs to be supervised with going to the bathroom with someone else or supervised, well, supervised out on recess. They might get a little bit, but once you tell a teacher something, some of the teachers may take issue with this. And I agree there is a there's a fine line. But I was a teacher for 10 years. I know what the teachers lounge can be like. And they talk and then you get a child that's the label that follows them all the way through. And so I think you just have to be, there's a lot of wisdom about what story you're going to tell and equipping the child with the cover story to tell for himself.

[00:34:51.060] - Lisa Qualls
Yeah, we actually gave a couple of our kids almost like scripts we practiced. You know, like if someone asks you this, you know, how would you want to answer them? And then we kind of went through and came up with a couple of simple options to explain something really hard. But I think sometimes that's where we can help give them some words sometimes to empower them, but also give them a way of explaining things that maybe they don't want to talk about. We also had the experience where we did some extensive neuropsych testing with one of our kids. Lesson learned on this, they sent the test results directly to the school without redacting anything, including medical history. So we contacted, it was a children's hospital that had done this, I was able to contact them and because it was summertime, the mail had not been opened. And they knew they had made a very, very big mistake because our daughter had some unique medical issues and they were able to retrieve that letter from the school district. But if it happened during the school year, that information would have been in the hands and in writing in the hands of the school, and that would not have been appropriate. So with another child of mine, I got the report and I blacked out everything I didn't want to share with them just so they could see, like, the learning diagnosis, kind of stuff.

[00:36:17.910] - Jayne Schooler
That's all they need to know.

[00:36:20.460] - Lisa Qualls
What about for those of us, this is tricky for all of us adoptive mommy bloggers, and I know that I've probably made some mistakes. I've become increasingly cautious and increasingly protective. I think that I've done pretty well, but I'm sure I could have done even better with guarding our children's toys. And I think there's this balance we all feel between sort of being honest and vulnerable and protecting our kids stories. How do you find that balance and I see some bloggers and speakers who I'm like, you've just told a thousand people this about your child and it just hurts my heart, you know?

[00:37:05.950] - Jayne Schooler
I think the number one rule, whether you're a trainer or a writer or any of that, is that anything you write or say, would your child, when they are a young adult, how would they feel about what they read or heard? And if you think this in any way, shape, or form would impact them emotionally, make them feel less and make them feel vulnerable and exposed, then we don't do it. We have a our son is now fifty one, which blows my mind, I have a 51 year old son adopted at 16. So we've been doing this a while. The stories that I tell, which are very few, I've gotten his permission to tell and I think any blogging and story ought to be about our journey and what we're learning. I think we just have to be super careful about that, because if they would read it in the future, how would they feel about that? Because it's too late after they've read it and it's out in the public.

[00:38:05.830] - Lisa Qualls
Well, Jayne, thank you so much for sharing this information. I'm excited, I'm going to get to see you, I'm going to do a training with you hopefully.

[00:38:14.020] - Jayne Schooler
We are so looking forward to that.

[00:38:15.520] - Lisa Qualls

So, Jayne, thank you. I appreciate you and I love your books.

[00:38:19.630] - Jayne Schooler

I appreciate it, Lisa, thank you very much.

[00:38:24.450] - Melissa Corkum

Wow, that was an amazing interview.

[00:38:26.760] - Lisa Qualls

It really was, I loved it. Was there anything that kind of stuck out to you that you either knew or a reminder to you of something?

[00:38:34.200] - Melissa Corkum

I love when she talked about the fact that our kids know their histories, even if they were preverbal, they were there. And that's really important because the piece of our son's story that we haven't quite just navigated how we're going to share it with him is from a time that he doesn't extrinsically remember, he doesn't have words for it, but it's important to know that, you know, he was there, he experienced it, his body may still have these memories. I just thought that was such a good reminder.

[00:39:00.960] - Lisa Qualls

It really is a good reminder and I, as I was thinking about it, I was thinking about the point that she made that if anybody else knows your child's story and they don't know it, your child needs to know it because the chances of it coming out in a way that you don't want it to come out, you know, it's highly possible that that could happen and it's so important that the child know their own story.

[00:39:23.130] - Melissa Corkum

Definitely, for sure. So you'll definitely want to check out the show notes page for this episode. Just head to theadoptionconnection.com/4. There you will be able to find 10 principles of telling the truth. So it's a free download that Jayne put together based on this conversation. There will also be links to the ministry. Her and David are part of Back to Back Ministries, as well as a link to the book that she mentioned in the interview by James Gritter. OK, so we've come to the part in the podcast that we call Mentor Moments where we answer a listener question. So this week's question is "We've always homeschooled and assumed it would be best for building attachment with our newly adopted children, but it doesn't seem to be working out. What should we do?"

[00:40:12.260] - Lisa Qualls

I have been asked that question a lot because we were a very, you know, a homeschooling family by the time our kids came home, I've been homeschooling about 16 years, I think. And so it was really part of our whole family life and culture and how we did life in addition to how we educated our kids. I assumed that homeschooling would be the very best thing for my newly adopted children because I wanted to keep them close. I wanted to build attachment, I wanted to build connection. And I didn't want them to have academic pressure, I wanted it to be kind of a warm, sweet time. So our boys were little, but our daughter Kalkidan came home at five and a half and our older daughter came home at ten. So when Kalkidan came home, I just started homeschooling her together with our youngest daughter by birth, Claire, and I homeschooled them together. Academically, we did fine. But Kalkidan was a very, very traumatized child and her behaviors were extreme. And so we were really struggling getting through every single day. We were struggling to do school. One of my older daughters actually was homeschooled by a friend during that time period because our days were just full of tumult. When we started working with a very, very good therapist, she told me, she said, you know, Lisa, I know you want to homeschool her, but this is the thing, it is so much work for her to learn how to have a mom that when she's with you, all of her energy is going into trying to figure out how to have a mom, which is extremely hard for her and how to be in a family, which is extremely hard for her. And she said, by putting her in school, you'll actually be giving her a break from the hardest work of her life. And she will be in a higher structure, I mean, I was a fairly structured homeschooler, but she'll be in a high structure environment that will feel more familiar, like the orphanage, because they'll be all the

children together in a group, they move from one activity to the next all together. And so she will actually be able to rest in that environment and get a break. I think, first of all, it was better for her. Secondly, it was so much better for our other children because they had been living in a very chaotic environment with a lot of raging, screaming, aggression, all kinds of stuff. I remember the first day she went to school and actually by the time that Kalkidan went to school, our older daughter had come home. When she found out we homeschooled, she was stunned. She was like, no, mom, I go school. I go school, mom. Because, you know, going to school is a privilege in Ethiopia. And so we ended up deciding to have both girls go to school together, too. We started out with a private Christian school and I just remember them leaving that morning and just the silence in the house and the calm. I looked in my family room and my three youngest children were on the floor playing together, building a train. And I had not seen them play really at all in a very, very long time. And so they got the break that they needed as well. And that was just the beginning of our school journey. Since then, we've done all kinds of different things. But, Melissa, why don't you talk about your journey with that?

[00:43:31.370] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, so our story starts almost identically to yours. We had not been homeschooling as long as you had, but we had been homeschooling and same thing. Assumed that it would be the best environment for our kids when they came home. Our kids were 11, 13 and 14. And so part, one of my concerns was that our school system just was not built to handle kids so far outside the bell curve. And it wasn't that they had specific learning disabilities necessarily, but they had not had super consistent education in Ethiopia and they weren't fluent English speakers. And so we do have, you know, ESL programs. They were only going to be, you know, working with an ESL teacher maybe like a half an hour a week. I just felt like we could catch them up better at home. We had six kids at home by the time all of our older kids came home and we had our youngest who came home from Korea and was still very, very energetic. He was a young boy. I had three or four nonreaders, you know, three of them didn't speak English. And a daughter who is a lot like Kalkidan, who was just very fragile and spent a lot of time needing me. And she had a lot of the same things, aggression and rages. And so I think at one point I was spending fifteen hours a week calming her down, sometimes just locked in a room with her for hours. And it just wasn't sustainable, and but I worried so much because we were so committed to connected parenting that sending her to school would be devastating to our attachment and to her feelings of abandonment. But we had a very wise therapist who said similar similar things to what Deborah said to you guys in terms of, you know, how much of a break it would be for both sides for her to go to school. You know, my worries about how she would feel by being sent to school, quote, unquote, you know, that she had so many negative feelings about our relationship anyway, that we were kind of already at rock bottom and so that we just needed to do the thing that was going to be best for the whole family and that, you know, we couldn't constantly cater to, you know, her sense of reality and her sense of belonging just wasn't solid. And so it didn't really matter what we did, she kind of always felt like we weren't doing enough. So with our older daughter, we also had a situation where she was a lot like Basa where she felt like being homeschooled was really holding her back. So she was using that as an excuse not to learn from me. And so our therapist said, you just need to let her try out school and then make her own decision. And it kind of took the power struggle out of that, out of our relationship. And so she tried school for like a quarter, maybe at the end of a school year. You know, it wasn't everything that she had dreamt it to be and so she eventually did make a decision to come back home.

[00:46:14.890] - Lisa Qualls

So since we made the decision to have our two girls go to a private Christian school, we have since then done private school, public school, a charter school, homeschool, some online school, we've kind of done it all. And, you know, I'm thankful there have been good things in every single one of those. So currently, my kids are all in public school, the four who are still at home. So it's a different, different way of educating for sure, but it's been good. And so I think there is a lot of freedom and we just need to make the best decision for each child in our family that we can for that given period of time. If you'd like to submit a question for a future episode, send an email to email@theadoptionconnection.com or leave us a message on our voicemail box. I promise nobody will answer. Leave a message at 208-741-3880. And if you need more personalized help, we offer private coaching. For more information about that, head to our website at www.theadoptionconnection.com

.coms/sercives. Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. You can find us on Facebook or Instagram as @theadoptionconnection.

[00:47:32.560] - 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.

[00:47:42.730] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:47:49.860] - Melissa Corkum

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