

[00:00:00.650] - Lisa Qualls

Welcome to the Adoption Connection podcast, where we offer resources to equip you and stories to inspire you on your adoption journey. I'm Lisa Qualls.

[00:00:10.390] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:18.720] - Lisa Qualls

Hi, friends. Welcome to episode 148 of The Adoption Connection Podcast. We're so glad you're here with us today. Just a couple weeks ago, in episode 146, we introduced you to Greg Lombard Rea, who has recently joined us at the Adoption Connection with a particular heart for serving dads, adopted and foster dads. And today we're super excited to introduced you to Sara Odicio, who is an adult adoptee, transracially adopted adoptee, who is going to be working with us serving adoptees and in particular teens and young adults right now. And Melissa had a great opportunity to sit down and talk with her.

[00:00:59.960] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I had a really great conversation with Sara. It's always fun for me to connect with other adoptees who have similarities and our stories. Sara has a graduate degree in social work and has been working in the post adoption field since about 2018 supporting adoptive families, and her passion for that population has grown as she has personally engaged in her own adoption story in a deeper way. She lives with her husband, Jared, and their Chinese dwarf hamster in Pennsylvania. And I think you're really going to enjoy this conversation with Sara.

[00:01:43.280] - Melissa Corkum

Hi, Sara. Welcome to the Adoption Connection Podcast.

[00:01:46.680] - Sara Odicio

Hi, Melissa. How are you?

[00:01:48.790] - Melissa Corkum

Good. Okay, I am so excited about this for so many reasons, one because I actually know you in real life, we've gotten to hang out. Two, we have a lot in common. You're an Asian adoptee and we both have a passion for really supporting families in their post adoption space. And sometimes I'm interviewing folks who I don't know as well, so it's really fun to interview someone that I know.

[00:02:16.930] - Sara Odicio

For sure.

[00:02:18.040] - Melissa Corkum

But I don't know all of your story and obviously listeners don't know as well. So can you just start by telling folks just like, a really brief intro of who you are and maybe when you first remember hearing or like, kind of processing the fact that you were adopted?

[00:02:37.680] - Sara Odicio

So I was adopted when I was a year old. I was in an orphanage setting in China, and I was born in 1996 and then adopted 1997. My parents, they were from Pennsylvania. They flew all, I guess, some adoption they're brought to the airport in my family's case, and they came to China to get me, which I always think is cool because they tried to immerse themselves in those couple of weeks while they were picking me up. So I guess and then I came back to Pennsylvania, and I think there is never a question of whether I came from my Mommy's belly. I guess, I know sometimes there's that phrase of tummy mommy versus mommy. So that was a question, and it must have been like a racial difference, like, it was very clear. Yeah. I think for me, though, the point where I knew I was different was as soon as I came back from China to the airport in America and met like, of course, the whole family was there. Extended family was waiting at the airport with sign, welcome home, baby girl, you know. And then my sister, who was already adopted before me, she's from China also. And I think my mom noticed me looking at everyone. And I was one, I was pretty expressive, even for a one year old.

And she remembers me just for the first, like, couple months, wherever we went, just looking at people like, I know people can't see my face right now, but I just had this blank, weird stare at people and my mom really thinks I was just trying to process, like, who are all these people with light hair and pointy noses? And I would only feel comfortable with my sister who had a small, flat nose, what we call it with Shawna, my sister. It sounds weird, but noses have always been a fascinating thing for me, even since I was little. So I noticed those physical differences, yeah.

[00:04:40.360] - Melissa Corkum
No, it totally makes sense.

[00:04:41.900] - Sara Odicio
Another way. When I was younger, I mean, very young, my sister and I watched Tarzan growing up. And I don't know if this was the right way for my mom to explain it or not, but we loved music, we love Disney and singing and so my mom would sing to us, You'll Be in My Heart, you know that song. And she would compare their situation to ours and be like, even though we don't look alike, you're in my heart always and I'm your mom. So essentially, she was calling herself the Ape, the Mama Gorilla, and then Tarzan, the little boy. Anyway, so she would use that song.

[00:05:23.220] - Melissa Corkum
Yeah, okay. So that brings up an interesting point because I think there's a lot of mixed feelings about this. Maybe among the adoptees maybe. And families are probably wondering what the heck to do. It seems like every time we turn around, there's a kids movie where there's some kind of adoption situation or a parent dies, you know, it's so prevalent. I don't think we really realize it until, you know, we're an adoptive family and we start noticing these things. And I don't remember being super sensitive to it one way or the other, but do you remember, like, or even now, as an adult, like, is it hard to watch media or movies that have an adoption theme in them or an abandonment situation?

[00:06:06.240] - Sara Odicio
I wouldn't say for me it's been super hard, but I agree with you and the fact that it's all around us. I mean, I feel like almost all Disney movies, there's some sort of parent passing away or, yeah, abandonment. There's grief and loss in all of these child children films. I know I was always very sensitive and I still am very sensitive to people's emotions, and so movies were always hard for me to watch in general. I would take, I know we're going to talk about the Enneagram later, but I think it does have to do with my number. But anyway, I would take what someone was going through in a movie, even if it was like, not a true story and I would make it my own feelings. So even before puberty or emotions or hormones, I would cry a lot with movies in any situation. If someone was in pain hurting, I couldn't see it, I don't want to see this.

[00:07:07.320] - Melissa Corkum
Yeah, I think that's such an interesting point and you brought up the Enneagram and so I think that's really helpful because I think sometimes as adoptive families, especially if there's an adoption theme, it's easy to watch our kids be distressed about something and then automatically assume it must be triggering because of an adoption thing. And we were talking before we hit record about how important the Enneagram has been for both of us in terms of helping us better understand ourselves and our stories, especially as adoptees. And so I think it's important for parents to kind of know something about the way different types of personalities experience the world, process things because you identify as a two on the Enneagram and so twos, as a whole adoptee or not, kind of do feel everyone else's feelings. That's kind of like a Hallmark two thing. And so that very much right, like, you crying at movies, I'm not a two so you can clarify for this, but like, for twos I feel like, it's not, it's not necessarily like a bad thing. Like twos, threes, and fours on the Enneagram tend to be very emotionally driven, very emotive. And for people like me who aren't driven that way, I feel the need to fix people who are having big emotions like, oh, you're so sad to that movie, maybe we shouldn't watch that anymore, or maybe that was triggering, or maybe that was a bad thing. For twos, threes, and fours, well, twos and fours I think especially, that experience isn't it's not necessarily traumatic? It's just like an emotive experience.

[00:08:50.320] - Sara Odicio

That's exactly right because I wouldn't actually, I don't mind sitting in, like, sadness. I know that's more maybe characteristic of four. So I won't sit in it for long, like in those melancholy feelings, but I like, for instance, I won't feel exactly super close to someone unless maybe we can pour our hearts out or have a good cry. And then I'm like, okay, they're my friend. But I definitely agree with that with the emotions just being extra sensitive to them, but not if not being necessarily a bad thing. It's just kind of how I'm wired. And so again, with the whole what you are saying, is it because they're adopted a lot of times we'll just coin, oh, I do this because I'm adopted. Well, no, not quite. Because all of the adoptees have their own experiences and then on top of that, the layers of the Enneagram and their personality and their personality plus experience, yeah, that's different for everyone. So you can't compare all the stories. Definitely.

[00:10:00.960] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, for sure. So you mentioned having your sister and remembering even from an early age, how that was comforting having someone who looked like you. Was there a lot of diversity in your growing up? Did you feel like a sense of belonging, or did you kind of feel the sense that I look different to the majority of people I hang out with?

[00:10:20.340] - Sara Odicio

So to answer your question, no, we didn't really grow up with a lot of diversity. My dad was a pastor, and so our biggest social settings, like most kids, is like at Church, if they're in some sort of, like, faith based community, and then at school, they're two main social learning situations. And in both of those, yes, Shawna and I were always the only Asians. There is one other girl at Church that that was our good friend and she was adopted also, so we kind of tag team with her a lot. And then we went to a private Christian school growing up, so that again, was yeah, we were really the only Asians, but I never saw it as a bad thing. I liked looking different. I was very observant and intuitive, so I would notice it right away, but the first time it actually bugged me was in first grade. And I guess that was first grade I'm young, yeah, that's pretty early to experience something, but in first grade, there was a girl. She had blond hair, blue eyes, and she told me she was like, I'm Chinese too. And I'm like, no you're not. Like, I didn't know races really like, no, you're Caucasian. Like, I didn't know to say that. But I was like, no. I just knew she didn't have black hair like me or small, flat nose.

[00:11:51.520] - Melissa Corkum

You're like, you don't look like me, you can't possibly be Chinese.

[00:11:55.180] - Sara Odicio

Yeah, you're not Chinese, because my parents are always like, you're Chinese, it's beautiful, it's wonderful. So I knew what I was, but anyway, so I just knew she wasn't Chinese. And she said, yes, I am. I'm like, no, you're not. And she said, and she said, yes, I am because in the middle of China is an America China, where all the Chinese people have blonde hair, blue eyes. It was the weirdest thing and I do remember going home to my parents and telling them, but that was probably one of the first instances where just the physical stuff maybe kind of bothered me a little bit. And then other than that, my parents, we would do Chinese New Year each year, so we did have a community of other adoptees. And that was always a lot of fun. We loved that, but again, it was just kind of mainly once a year. And then my mom, she would like, try to make my sister and I watch Chinese documentaries and things like that. So my sister and I, I think that was good, but in the moment when we're younger and we're not asking about it, it's hard to know as a parent. I feel for parents because it's hard to know, do I initiate this or do I wait till they ask? But my sister and I, we would make fun of it, but I think it really was good, and we appreciate that she did that. In the moment, we were like, why do we have to watch this? This is so dumb.

[00:13:13.600] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I get that. I look back and think about some of the things my parents did and I think we took a lot of it for granted. But I think it was important, it was the little things, like knowing what the traditional foods were and I initiated wanting to go to Korean culture school and wanting to learn more out of the three of us, I was the only one who did that, but I do, my best friend is also a Korean adoptee, and I don't think I. I know for sure I took that for granted. Like, I think that had such a huge piece of helping me feel like I belonged because you don't need a whole community necessary, I just

needed, like, one other person and if you were close to your sister, maybe she was that person for you or this friend from Church.

[00:13:59.940] - Sara Odicio

Yeah, it was my sister and our friend, Lindsey. It was like us three. Yeah, we rode the same bus, we went to the same school, the same small group, so yeah.

[00:14:09.260] - Melissa Corkum

It's just enough to normalize your experience, yeah. How did you guys celebrate adoption? Like, did you guys celebrate, like, a family day or an airplane day?

[00:14:20.280] - Sara Odicio

My mom didn't know that existed until this past year. So this past year, we like, this past year, and I'm 25. With this past summer, we celebrated Gotcha Day, and I know some people don't use that term, it depends how people feel about it. So that was the first year we celebrated any sort of Gotcha or Family Day. And it was great, but it's just so interesting because I'm adopted in 1996, there is such a difference of how people respond to their adoption. And I don't know, just with information coming out, those that were adopted in 2000, in the 2000 versus, like the late nineties, I don't know, I find that it's different from the certain adopt that I've talked to about it or more the parents, I guess, talking to the parents. For instance, somewhere in the late nineties, I think it was actually 1997, China started requiring you to post an ad when a baby was found. So like, you have your finding place, and it's posted in an ad. Do you know about this? Maybe I'm like giving false information.

[00:15:31.930] - Melissa Corkum

I don't know about the year or that exact policy, but I feel like in the late 90s, early 2000, there were a lot of practices changing, and the ad gives Chinese adoptees more information, but it also, I think, was about best practice, like making sure that there wasn't somebody else, somebody out there in China or who knew this child or who was an extended family member. Who could you, you know, do like a kinship adoption or I think it's this push to recognize that changing cultures as beautiful as it can be, because I think it has been beautiful, at least in our family, to really understand, you know, because we have Koreans and Ethiopians and Caucasians, like, understanding, you know, how beautiful it can be to learn about somebody else's culture in such close proximity. But there's also a lot of pain and hurt and grief, you know, to have to move an entirely different culture, especially for older kids.

[00:16:29.180] - Sara Odicio

So I think sometimes I have struggled knowing, like, oh, maybe if I was just born a year or two later and then adopted by my parents, then maybe I would have this finding place ad that's in the paper and I could go back to at least the finding place. So I think the way adoptions have been done, yeah, they have changed a lot. Anyway, bringing that all back to the family day, my mom, with raising my sister and I, they didn't they didn't know of, like, post adoption support services, they didn't know about just the little things you might do, like family days. They didn't know that was even a thing or existed. And I think if they would have known, they would they would have asked us if we wanted to do it. My mom has learned more from me, working, like in the past three years, working with adoptive families. That's how she learned a lot.

[00:17:29.900] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I feel the same way with my mom. Like, as we learned things like TBRI as a family and like, different types of parenting because of adoption. My mom, same thing. She's like, just no one was talking about it. She's like, now I wish I had handled the three of you so much differently, but they only had traditional parenting as an option, really, and so it is interesting being on this side. I always tell her like you did the best with what you knew.

[00:17:59.840] - Sara Odicio

Yeah, for sure.

[00:17:59.840] - Melissa Corkum

So is it just you and your sister, or are there any other siblings?

[00:18:05.860] - Sara Odicio

Just my sister and I. We were adopted from completely different parts of China. She was an adopted in a foster care setting and I was in the orphanage setting.

[00:18:15.840] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. Like you said, you don't know the place where you were abandoned. You were in an orphanage setting, so very little information, I'm assuming, about any kind of birth family or things like that. And same situation for me, I was abandoned as an infant on the steps of an orphanage, zero identifying information. Do you think that's affected, like, your identity or do you ever wonder or have you just not thought a whole lot about it?

[00:18:47.620] - 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.

[00:18:55.700] - 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.

[00:19:10.840] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:19:15.170] - Melissa Corkum

Now back to the conversation.

[00:19:21.760] - Melissa Corkum

Do you think that's affected, like, your identity or do you ever wonder or have you just not thought a whole lot about it?

[00:19:29.960] - Sara Odicio

Oh, I think that's the part that affects me the most. Just, I told friends this growing up and it hasn't changed when they ask me, do you want to meet your your real parents? Of course, that's like an insensitive way of saying it, but they don't know. And I answer by saying, well, I want to see a picture of them or a video and hear their voice and then decide to meet them. But I do want to meet them. But there's just this piece of just the little question of do I look like them? If I could see a video, I could have that answered. Does my mom sing? If I could hear her singing voice, I could hear it sounds like my singing voice. Yeah. Do I look like mom or dad more? Like what? So it's more just the simple questions that I don't have the answers to that other kids will have when they're born by birth. I often wonder about which could easily be answered just by seeing a video of them or hearing their voice, but I do want to meet them. Which, again, is why when I tried to think about doing some sort of search at all, so hard, especially for my age, because of just how the policies changed. There wasn't anything really in the 90s.

[00:20:48.700] - Melissa Corkum

Fast forward as you're growing up, we have a lot of parents who listen to the podcast who are parenting adopted teens, whether they came to their families as younger kids and are now teens, or maybe they adopted older kids. What was your teenage hood like and how do you think it was impacted by being an adoptee? Or was it just like, would you identify it as just kind of standard, like, I was just figuring out who I was like, kind of standard teenage stuff? Or do you think your, you know, all of those questions and wonderings and identity things played into it?

[00:21:23.640] - Sara Odicio

I could go in so many different directions with this, but I think the, and when I worked with families, I've seen this true for myself, it's been like a bunch of "AHA!" moments, but that whole aspect of your

adoption will confront you differently at different developmental stages, I think is so true, especially for myself and how it confronted me as a teen, which again, the teenage years plus your adoption experience, plus, just whatever is happening in your life at that time, it all plays a role. So it's not just because of the adoption. It's not just because you're going through puberty. It's all of it combined. Anyway, so for my teen years, they were really hard and then looking back and talking and processing with my family, like, oh, that's why it was hard, not just the only reason, but during that time, 7th grade to 10th grade, my dad left the Church job, which was, when you leave a Church as a pastor's kid, I guess, that's like your life.

[00:22:22.000] - Melissa Corkum
It's like your family, yeah.

[00:22:23.020] - Sara Odicio
Yeah, it's your family, it's your home because we live in a Parsonage, it's your resource community, so we left that. I started high school, public high school from private Christian school, so like, a class of 15 kids to, like, public high school. My grandma, she was very close to her family, my mom's mom, she passed away from pancreatic cancer. Yeah, just all of that happened in those years. And that's when I started sneaking out. I don't know who's going to listen to this podcast, but people might not know this stuff about me, but I started acting out more and sneaking out or having secret relationships. And some of that got to the point where I almost got, where it was hurt, like, it was just a dangerous situation. And then I see families I work with have these behaviors with their kids, and they and they don't know what to do and I can just relate so much to the kid. I can't relate to the parent as much, but knowing how I felt at that time, I had this life, I would call it my life motto, it wasn't a good motto, but I constantly said it to my mom in those years of 7th to 10th grade, "You don't understand me. No one gets me." Those were my two things, you don't understand, no one gets me. And I think those two phrases, I was like, that was my cry for help because I didn't understand myself and I didn't get myself. It was like everything I would project to my parents was kind of was actually how I felt about myself. And then, of course, being my mom, my mom, and then my dad being seven, not knowing how to handle hard emotions, always try to put a positive spin on things and then my mom is one. They were like, how do we fix this, like, okay. So I would say, you don't understand me and they would say, help me understand. Like, that was always the exchange, like, I want to understand, help me understand. But the reason I was saying, "you don't understand me" is because I didn't understand myself. So we just went, that was the cycle.

[00:24:34.330] - Melissa Corkum
Yeah. Oh my gosh, and I think that that brings so much insight to parents who are out there struggling is we want our kids to tell us to throw us a bone, tell us something that's going to help. And I'm the same way in the sense that when I work with families, like, I remember things about more like my younger childhood self, like, my trigger was chores. I remember throwing rages as like a seven and ten year old, like, about having to clean my room and just feeling lost and overwhelmed. And, of course, my parents same thing. Like, they didn't know how to come alongside me or help me understand why that was hard. They would just be like, this isn't hard, I don't understand why you're having such a big deal, like, it's a tiny room. You just need to clean it up, like, go to your room until you can figure it out, right. And so I was, like, kind of on my own to regulate myself into all of those things and they didn't know any better, so this is not to like, I have a great relationship with my parents now, but it's so interesting to think about that. And as an adoptive parent now, myself, I empathize in both situations. I'm like, I get it. Like, I want my kids to clean their room, too. But then I have this piece of myself that's, like, my inner child that's like, you hated that as a kid. How could you ever make your kid do that?

[00:25:54.290] - Sara Odicio
Yeah.

[00:25:57.450] - Melissa Corkum
So, what do you think would have been the most helpful response from your parents looking back? Like, was there anything that they could have done differently, I mean, do we just need to tell parents, like, ride it out, like, this is just the season of life? Like, what is that thing now that you're on the other

side?

[00:26:17.740] - Sara Odicio

Oh, I could go in so many directions of this, too. My dad being a seven, he would have this tendency of getting to the point where he just had to go for a walk and walk away and that would communicate to me, oh, he's leaving me. But I don't necessarily, so I would want to say, yeah, he should have stayed, he should have, like, sat through those hard moments and stayed with me like, my mom would and stay sitting next to me, even though I was just spewing out words, like, really nasty, mean, bratty stuff. I would say like, he should have stayed, but then I look at it from the perspective of what I was doing and what I think other teens might do is they push and sabotage so hard to affirm this belief that they have in their mind. So, and I saw myself doing this with my parents, I've seen myself do this in, like, romantic relationships I've been in where I push, push, push. So, like, take guys, for instance, I push, push, push. So I'm charming, whatever, they want to get to know me, we date, and then I will start sabotaging the relationship, and that could look like different things. But then I would never be the one to break up, officially. I would just push until they break up and then it communicates, and then it affirms my belief that I've had of myself, which is no one wants to be with me or they don't want me. But, like, I pushed it to that point. So anyway, so I've done that sabotaging through with my parents, too. It's always the closest people to me that I treat the worst. And then my now husband, he stayed in it. And of course, that with my current with Jared, my husband. Of course, I'm starting maturing, too, in my twenties. But I still did some sabotaging, and he stayed there, and he like, anyway, so he stayed. But with my parents and what we're talking about right now, my dad, it was his way of handling. And I know, like, he felt like in that moment, that was the best thing for him to do. Instead of staying there and saying something he would regret, or for me seeing him rage in some way. He really is not an angry guy, but when he gets pushed in so much emotion, he doesn't know how to, what to do, so he'd go on a walk. So part of me wants to say, maybe he could stay. But then I know he needs to take care of himself, too. So it's hard. So I don't know really, exactly what to tell parents, but maybe parents just to know that them saying and being present, even if they're not saying anything, is combating this negative internal self view.

[00:29:15.700] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I think that's so important. So parents are probably trying to, like, how did you go from an angry teenager who was sabotaging relationships to having so much insight about what that even was, right? You're talking about it and saying, like, in the moment, I think I needed him to stay, but also understanding why it was so important for him to take care of himself and that's so insightful, so mature. So what does that look like? How did your parents help you if it was partially what they kind of made you do, or was it just time and age? Like, how do you come to the other side of that?

[00:29:58.880] - Sara Odicio

Well, I think throughout the teen years, even if my parents didn't know, okay, this is because of her trauma or this might be trauma based or they didn't know. But the one time that I did sneak out and it became a really unsafe situation and I got hurt instead of and I got caught, I was like, like, the most the worst day of my life. I felt like I was going to get kicked on the street, they were going to like, I just felt so much shame, which is also really common for unhealthy twos. Anyway, but instead, through that situation, my parents took me in, took the guy in that hurt me, prayed for him and just told him never to talk to me again or else then they would like, press charges, you know? But then for me, they forgave me. And I guess, and so where I come from a Christian family, and so that was the first experience of grace that I felt in a real way. Anyway, and so through that, that so honestly, for me, I would say, God's grace. So that's just what I believe personally, that's been like a huge thing in my life, but as through moments of when I thought I was going to get in trouble by my parents or be or be shamed by them, they continually didn't shame me. And they just will figure this out together. So obviously my parents were like a huge role and how they just rode the wave or stuck it out, even though they probably felt so like, what do we do? And there was a point they didn't know what to do, so they did what they thought was best, which was just sent me to a a Christian counselor, which is fine, but they didn't know. But then this past, in 2019, was the first time I found a therapist that was very trauma based and someone that likes working with young adoptees and that was huge. So that was the first time therapy really dug at the core and helped me. So all that, to say, the last three years, four years has been really the time I've done the most hard work and within those last four years,

that's when Jared and I started getting serious, decided they get engaged. That's when I started an internship at adoption and foster care agency, Bethany Christian Services. That's where I was just everything about my life was being more immersed into the adoption and trauma informed world. And then, like I said, adoption confronts you differently as you get older. It was in the past four years it's been confronting me, like, now that I'm older and I'm married, I'm like, oh, I want to be a mom someday. It's confronting me differently in a way it didn't before. Trying to see things more, maybe through a parent perspective or as I'm like forcing myself to be in these other developmental life stage things adult life, I guess.

[00:33:02.640] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, adulting.

[00:33:02.640] - Sara Odicio

Adulting, ugh. It's kind of forcing me, though, to see my adoption in a different way. But I don't want parents to think I don't struggle anymore because I do. And I do want to share that real quick. Currently, I just told some family this at a workshop for an adoption camp a couple of weeks ago and I told them true, I think true vulnerability is when you can talk about something that you haven't figured out yet, because we can always talk about something that we went through. I'm, like, not ashamed to talk about me sneaking out in high school. Like, I could give you more details, if appropriate, if someone wanted to hear them, but because that's been dealt with and that's figured out. But with something that, I don't know, when you're talking about something and you don't really have answers. So I'll share this with you, maybe you could give me some insight, maybe the listeners could give insight, but what I struggle with now, so my husband and I moved in May, so it's been a few months now, and that's the first time I've moved out from under my parents home. So, like, if people believe in leaving clean, this is like the time that I've been needing to put all of my emotional needs, trusting my husband kind of with them and being my co-regulator, I guess, instead of my mom. And we love living apart from my parents, we're in this nice apartment, we love it, we feel so blessed. But then whenever I go back to my parents house and spend time with them, I get so disregulated and I don't know why. It's like, my new Sara, adult Sara, can't reconcile with high school Sara. Like, when I go back into my home with my parents, it is so weird and I get disregulated, and I call it high school Sara, but she starts coming out saying bratty things to my parents. But I get so excited to go see them, so we'll have dinner maybe, like, once every couple of weeks. And when I'm getting ready to go, I'm so excited, like, bring a dish or whatever. And then once I get there and the first 20 minutes is fine, but then I start getting disregulated and over sensory loaded, people chewing, eating. It is just the weirdest thing. And then it just makes me feel, like, have I really improved? Like, why am I feeling so irritable by this? And like, okay, we just need to leave, bye. Like, it's just really weird.

[00:35:38.790] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, yeah. That's so interesting. We have a daughter who hasn't lived with us for a long time, and she struggles to have, so she's been, like, a long term respite situation and she struggles to have all of us in the same room at the same time because you can't reconcile, like, like, both attachment relationships because they both become attachment relationships. And also there's been this anxiety, a little bit on both sides of the fence, I think more on hers, about even her coming to visit because she's been so stable there. And we have always gone and visited her in that space, but I think there's a lot, again, like, our body remembers, right. Like, this muscle memory and I think there's the fear about her coming back into the physical space of our house because there's so many years of really hard in that. So yeah, I think that's really interesting and really, again, insightful for you to notice that. I talk a lot here on the podcast about body work and it's interesting you talked about your adoption confronting you in different, like, seasons, different times and I can relate to that a ton. And I think there's things about my adoption that confronted me that didn't confront me until I was not just a parent, but an adoptive parent with kids with attachment issues, right. Like, there's all these layers and I think the other thing parents should hear is, you know, going to therapy or counseling for adoption and trauma related issues also wasn't a thing when I was a teenager, right, and I was adopted, even, like, you know, twelve years before you or even more, actually. And so, you know, that wasn't a thing. So it took me until my thirties to really start processing some of that and still processing it and finally getting, you know, have a relationship with a therapist. And I have done a lot of of body work and I think because as a seven, I don't want to talk about the hard. Like when I first realized I needed to, I

was like, I knew I needed to and I was like, but I don't want to. So find any other way to help me besides having to talk about it. So I turn to things like the safe and sound protocol and trauma release exercise, which we've talked about on the podcast. If you're listening to this and you will link to those in the show notes, and that I think has helped me, I've noticed, like, I'm more mentally, like, cognitively able and willing now to explore some of those things about my adoption. Like, I even reached out to my therapist recently was like, I've always been afraid to take the adult attachment interview because I've always been afraid about what it would tell me, but now I'm like, curious, like, I'm ready.

[00:38:43.030] - Sara Odicio
Oh, that's so cool..

[00:38:43.880] - Melissa Corkum

So I think for parents listening to know, like, Sara is in her 20s, I'm in my 30s, almost 40s, you know, and we're still working through these things and figuring these things out. And I know as a mom, like, I'm looking at my 14 year old, my 18 year old, my 20 year, and I'm like, really like, I want to force them to go to therapy, I want them to figure these things out. But sometimes we're just not ready until a different season of life or until we have more prefrontal cortex development, like all these things. It might take our kids until they're in their adulthood to figure these things out and so what is our role is parents to just keep, you know, be the safe place, be the people that don't leave not necessarily be the fixers and let time play out. Which is tricky, right? Because if your kids thinking out of doing something dangerous, like there's obviously a role there, like you want them to live, to be able to be in their twenties and thirties and process all of these things. But, you know, I think we feel this urgency to have our kids figure things out sooner, and I just don't think it can be rushed.

[00:39:53.150] - Sara Odicio

Yeah. And I think parents had, depending on their situation of why they adopted, they have to go through their own grief and loss in a sense of what they expected life to be like when they were going to be a parent or have a kid. If they originally thought we're going to have kids by birth, which is what my parents did. They thought my mom want to be a mom since she was a kid. And I guess, she probably always assumed, you don't assume you're going to have struggles to have a child, you know? And so she probably had to go through her own little recent loss for re-aligning her expectations of how my sister and I would develop, and maybe what direction we would choose to go in in life things like that.

[00:40:34.500] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. So you have come, like, fully full circle. You already alluded to it a little bit. You're a social work major, you did an internship with Bethany, and now you're doing all kinds of things. But one of the things you're doing is here at The Adoption Connection is helping head up a small group of teens, so when this podcast airs, we'll either be in the middle of that session or it'll be just wrapping up and it's something we're hoping to be able to continue with. And then you also work with teens individually, just as a mentor and coach. And so do you want to talk just a little bit about why that's so important to you?

[00:41:14.080] - Sara Odicio

Yeah, so I can just explain it a little bit and then I want to share the heart behind it, too. But basically it's called CORE of Adoption. I had done in my past work with adopted family, I had started doing one on one mentoring as part of their case management service. I had started doing that with teen girls. We found that to be just really helpful for them. It was in a non traditional type of therapy setting. It would be me going to their house, taking a walk with them, talking to them, sharing my story because that helps them open up, too. But it was just forming this ongoing relationship and safe space for them to talk about their adoption and to have a, I guess the parents thought I was a positive influence, no, I'm just kidding. Have someone that has kind of gone through similar things, but maybe in a couple life stages ahead of them, which is what I think is helpful with mentoring. So I kind of took that idea and ran with it to do this coaching service and make this coaching program. I call it CORE of Adoption. It's capital C-O-R-E, and each it's like a six month program, theoretically, but it can be like, tailored to each person depending on their needs, but each step of the process is one of the letters of CORE. So C would be connecting, me connecting, building that rapport with them. O would be

opening, we're going to do, like, self exploration, maybe some Enneagram stuff. Oh, no, I'm sorry. Opening would be them sharing their story, their way. And however, they want to share it through art, through verbal, written. And then R would be recognizing which is that self awareness piece. And then E would be engaging and that's really the practical tools of how are your relationships right now with your parents, with your friends, what do you want them to look like, how can we get them to that point? Because relationships are hard, but the heart behind CORE is the fact that relationships are so important and we were created to be in relationship. And I think as a believer, I was really excited to make CORE this faith based platform. I'll serve anyone, but my heart behind it is really that we were created to be in relationship. And our broken relationship with God, that's a severed attachment. The only way to heal that relationship was for Jesus to come in and for us to have a relationship with him because I think the only way to heal a relationship is through another relationship. And so knowing that, I just think that's huge for adopted parents, not to say they're Jesus, but in that kind of gospel centered perspective, knowing that they can be the key to heal that broken relationship between the birth parent and the child, I think that's huge. And so that's kind of my heart behind it. It's not, I'll take the teen where they're at, it's not a behavior modification thing either. And I wouldn't consider it therapy, but this program is really to dive into how they want to tell their story their way, build this relationship and hear perspective from me as an older adoptee, and then also growing their own self awareness, which will hopefully impact their behavior and also their relationships with others.

[00:44:48.220] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I think that's amazing. And it's so fun for me when, like, brain science backs up what you know, what you and I believe to be true about how God made us.

[00:44:59.000] - Sara Odicio

Yes, I love it.

[00:45:00.380] - Melissa Corkum

I know. And Bruce Perry and Oprah's new book, What Happened To You talks about that. Like, they talk about how connection helps people overcome adversity and just their experience they've had. And so I just think that's brilliant and the parallel of just, you know, a safe, healthy relationship can help repair the hurt of another broken relationship is huge. So thank you so much for being so honorable, for sharing your story, for being here. We love to hear all the different voices of experience in the adoption triad, and I just think this is going to be a super helpful conversation to parents who are out there no matter what stage of parenting they're in and so just thank you for being here.

[00:45:42.400] - Sara Odicio

Yeah. You're welcome. Thanks so much, Melissa.

[00:45:49.380] - Lisa Qualls

I listened really intently to Sara's interview, because for me, it was just kind of fascinating to get a glimpse into a young adults mind about her own experience of being an adoptee and growing up in a white family and all those kinds of things. I mean, you and I talk about it all the time, Melissa, but I just, I don't know, I just loved hearing her story. And I think a couple things really stood out to me. One was, I appreciated her willingness to be honest about her struggles as a teen, that she struggled. I mean, she was not easy for her parents to parent, and she didn't really feel awesome inside herself either and, like, when she talked about how she would say to her parents, you didn't understand me, but the truth was, they probably didn't, but also that deep within herself, she didn't understand herself either. Did you find that kind of a powerful reflection?

[00:46:42.660] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I did. I thought, what a gift to have someone who has done so much work on her story that she can tell about the hard and give insights and that type of insight that I think is helpful to adoptive families listening. I think that's so true when I look at my story and I look at my siblings and I look at families that we work with here at the adoption connection. It's so easy to get caught up in those words to say what her parents like, help us understand, like, tell us what to do. And I think sometimes, we just need to be present to big emotion. That's really, really hard. I mean, I'm such a thinking, fix it person. So I'm really learning a lot about this raising young adults because, you know, they kind of

need to learn how to figure some of these things out for themselves. They just need support, they don't always need someone to fix it. So that's my note to myself.

[00:47:44.850] - Lisa Qualls

Well, and I find it really hard to let my kids experience really difficult things. Like, I'm the same. I want to fix it, I don't want them to be in pain. One of my young adult kids just a couple days ago called and was processing something really, really hard, and it took everything in me to just be present, be empathetic, listen, give encouraging words because I had a whole bunch of ideas how to fix this problem, but I knew that was not what was needed, so yes, I appreciated that. Another thing she said or just talked about in general that I found, thought that was really helpful was that adoption kind of has confronted her over and over in her life at different stages of development. And I think different life moments will bring these big things up, especially things that are entwined with grief and loss. So, like, in my own experience, I definitely have had to process losing my son to adoption, which is a whole other story when I was a young teen, but that loss has come up many times throughout my life, and I've had to reprocess that grief. I don't think these losses ever just disappear. It's not like we can never do enough work, they're just erased, you know. How we cope with them change and how we reflect on our losses change, but it doesn't ever disappear, it continues to resurface. And so our kids who are adopted are going to process it one way when they're little children and again when they're teens and then when they get married and then when they have their own children, you know, this, if they have health problems, it's going to resurface and they're going to have to work through it again.

[00:49:27.600] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah and you know what's interesting about that, you and I just got finished reading Dr. Bruce Perry's new book that he wrote with Oprah Winfrey called What Happened To You, and he talks about a concept that I've heard him talk about on a couple other podcasts, which is dosing, like, this idea of our nervous system can do hard things, but kind of inappropriate doses. And so I feel like there's a theme here, too, like, I think sometimes we send our kids to, you know, therapy and we're thinking, like heal them, fix them, get them to a stage where, you know, it's not so chaotic, it's not so hard. And I mean, I think there are places where we can get to more stability in our families, but this idea that intense work sometimes needs to happen in little bits over time. And sometimes we want to just, you know, if a little bit of therapy is good, that a lot of therapy must be even better. And I'm not sure that that's always the case, so I think this idea of our adoption stories confronting us at different stages is really helpful to know that we have a lifetime to kind of work through these things. Yeah and, you know, lastly, I just want to say I'm just so really, really happy that she's on our team and she's going to be serving adoptees. We so value every member of the triad, we value the birth families and adoptive families and parents and kids and just rounding out our team with Greg and Sara is just, brings me a lot of joy.

[00:51:04.320] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. We're really excited about the work both of them are helping us do. So if you would like to connect with Sara and find out more about how she's supporting teen adoptees, you can find her on Instagram @core.ofadoption and all the other things that we talked about throughout the episode will be linked in the show notes, and you can get to those at theadoptionconnection.com/148. Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. You can find us on Instagram as @theadoptionconnection or better yet, join our free Facebook community at theadoptionconnection.com/facebook.

[00:51:45.110] - Lisa Qualls

Thanks so much for listening. We love having you and remember, you're a good parent, doing good work.

[00:51:53.290] - Melissa Corkum

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