

Before we jump into this episode, we are putting together something special for December, and so we need you to call in to our listener hotline and tell us about the most memorable gift you've been given.

It's really easy to do this, and we promise that this line does not ring anywhere at all. It just gives you a chance to record your message to us. So just call the number 208-741-3880 and tell us about your most memorable gift.

We can't wait to hear your stories.

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

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

Today is a Mentor Moments episode where we answer a listener question. These episodes give you a chance to join the conversation and guarantee we're providing the most helpful tools and resources for exactly where you are. This week's question is, what do I do if my teen wants to move out? So I want to begin this whole episode by saying that this is a very complex question, and we have spent more time preparing for this mentor moment than any other because there are a lot of factors and because we want to answer carefully and we want to give you good advice. We're just going to give this our very best shot and hope that it is helpful to you as you're listening.

Well and here's the thing. This is a hard question and easy question all at the same time. It's hard because we have personal experience, and it's hard because we want to honor our kids and their stories and our experiences while still being helpful to you. And we are tackling it even though it's hard because this is the kind of stuff that often gets overlooked. We know that a lot of you have reached out to us and are parenting teens who are really struggling. We don't have all the answers, but we have a lot of lived experience. And so we have a lot to offer. That's the easy part is we have a lot to offer it's how to share it in a way that will be the most helpful, the most organized and the most respectful to both of our families.

Exactly. So we're going to talk about how we would handle this if our child is over 18 and how we would handle it if they're under 18 because they're all teens, but it's very different. But before we do that, we want to talk in general about what are the really hard things about having your teen want to move out as a parent? And I think one of the obvious ones is there's a lot of fear for us. We might be afraid that they're going to make really bad decisions. We might be afraid they could get hurt, we might be afraid that they'll get into a situation that ends up being bad, and they're going to want us to rescue them. There are just a lot of fears, I think, swirling in our minds. Parenting teens is complicated enough, and when you add this, I think it's easy to go to a lot of fear. So we have to, first of all, I think calm ourselves before we dive into conversations about this with our teen.

And I know for us, when we were really struggling with our teens, there was a lot of hurt pride on my part, feelings of rejection, feelings of, you know, we have poured so much of our life into helping you, and we've sacrificed a lot. And I know on one hand, we didn't get into adoption to be thanked, but I don't know, there's something that really kind of hits a really sore spot when you feel like you have sacrificed so much as a family to help someone acclimate and help them with their trauma and dealt with really big behaviors to have them just look and be like, yeah, family is not really what I wanted or I really don't, you're not a great parent. I don't like you, and I don't want to live here anymore. I want to be done with you. I want to move out. And that is really hard emotionally to kind of wrestle with apart from all the practical things.

Absolutely. I think it can be really painful like to have your child say, you're not the family I wanted. I would never have picked you or all kinds of different things. I think it can really strike out our hearts. I also think, for me, with my personality, this kind of thing takes me to shame, because if your teen moves out, likely, depending on how big of a community you live in, it's likely that people are going to know you may need to notify their school, if they're still in school. There may be people in your Church community who are aware of it, and we can't throw our kids under the bus. We cannot explain all the

details of why this has happened, which means that sometimes we're going to have to kind of sit in the reality that people may judge us and we have to be okay with it. And that is really hard for me. I will just be 100% honest, and we have experienced that. Yeah. It's just really hard. And I think you've got to get a lot of support around you with friends and family speaking truth to you so that you don't spiral down in that.

Yeah, because it's hard to defend yourself in certain situations. And I know we've been in situations as well where in self protection, our kids have told things that weren't fully the truth about their experience with us. And actually, it's happened a couple of times, and that's a lot of pride as well to not have to not be able to necessarily defend yourself. And again, I think what you're saying is surrounding yourself with a close group of people who get it, whether it's friends and family, other adoptive moms, we have a great group in the village, but places where you can kind of vent all of that anger and frustration and not have to throw your kid or your and your child's relationship under the bus, kind of in a more public form.

I think community with other adopted moms is just the key. It's so very important. So I think there's a lot of emotion to process in something like this. So having people you can process that with is really important. Okay, so let's talk more specifically about if your child, your teen wants to move out and they are 18 years or older. Let's talk about that first.

How we talk about this, when we go back to personality, Lisa, you talked about shame. That's like, your kind of first thing. My first thing is a little bit of fear, but then I'm so self protective about it, I very much cut it off. And then it's anger, and then it's like, "Fine. You want to do that? You do that. That's the way you want it? Good riddance." And I think we need some balance here, right? Because it could be that a little bit of separation from us and our child actually is really healthy for the relationship, even if it has to kind of go to a dark place first. Lisa, both you and me with various different combinations of our kids have experienced where sometimes absence makes the heart grow fonder, even if it takes years is a little bit true. And so I think once we swallow our pride and process all of our emotions, we can approach this in a win win situation, right?

We can actually help our child, our teen, make a good plan. Let's just think for a moment about the fact that some of our kids came to us at older ages. Maybe a child joined your family as a teen or tween, and they had not really been parented before. Their concept of what a parent should be like and how what life should look like might be vastly different from what you were expecting. So I think pausing to think about what were our expectations when we went into this, do those need to be adjusted? Do we need to make some major adjustments and say, okay, you are 18 years old. I want what's best for you, and I want to help you make a positive plan.

In our kids situations as well, they had expectations about how we were going to treat them at 18. I think there was a lot of unspoken fear and some spoken anxiety about us cutting them off at 18. I think in some cases, they were trying to beat us to the punch that they wanted to try to separate and kind of gain some independence so that we couldn't, at 18, cut them off. And they had a lot of doubts about how we were going to continue to treat them as family once they were adults. And so I think we have an opportunity to be supportive, even though we're hurt and to say, I see that you want X, Y and Z. Here's a way I think you could do that. Or I'm really excited to see how this works out for you, even if you have a lot of doubts that they're not ready. We have had that and let me tell you, there's something about a young adult given a little bit of support and knowing that they have a cheerleader and a safe place to land and a sense of purpose, and sometimes they surprise us and they rise to the occasion. And they might not do it the way we think they should or we would have, but they still land on their feet. It's kind of amazing.

I mean, we have a friend, a mutual friend, who has a daughter who decided to go to College, and they never anticipated that. But it came from her daughter. It was her dream.

Yeah, she applied without them even knowing.

Right, and then they were able to sort of come alongside her. And you know what? It's going well. So

our kids might even surprise us, they might. So, let's talk about some of the practical things. One option that some of our kids have both chosen is to go to Job Corps. Melissa, do you want to explain a little bit about what Job Corps is?

Job Corps is a publicly funded program. The government would call it a scholarship program, but it's an education program for kids who are either below the poverty line or have some kind of learning disability or some other kind of more minor mental health diagnoses like anxiety and things like that can qualify you to be a candidate to be able to use Job Corps services. And a lot of Job Corps are residential, I guess even in Covid. Some are just day programs, but we were able to find a residential program for our kids that was about 3 hours away. At the time that our kids went, you actually could go as early as 16. It's really a great option if you're really struggling with your child and they really just feel like they need a little bit of space from you, maybe you feel like you need a little bit of space and it's a safe place. If they go and they're under 18, they still need permission to go off campus and things like that, but they're living semi independently with a lot of structure, which is something our kids often really need, right, so there's a wake up time and there's morning chores and there are classes. And if your child still needs a diploma or GED, they'll help get that. They'll help them get their driver's license, and then they get to kind of major in a trade of some sort, so things like drywall or carpentry, there's hospitality depending on what age you are. There's even some kind of like med-tech, pre nursing type situations. And so your student gets to choose what they want to focus in. And so they'll come out with job skills in that area with a certificate and go on and job Corps will help find them placement for their job after they get out.

And because it is funded by the government, there is no cost to your child or to you. So it's a pretty phenomenal opportunity for a young person who maybe isn't College bound or at least isn't College bound yet. But who wants some job training and maybe isn't either financially or in other ways ready to have an apartment and just get into a training program by themselves? It's got a pretty big safety net, I think. And also, I do believe it varies. There are differences state to state, so if someone's interested in Job Corps, you want to look into it in your state and contact the office there if you want more information on that.

It is possible to go out of state. We both have kids who went to out of state Job Corps. I mean, it is a federal program, so there is some movement you don't have to go, like, if your state doesn't have a Job Corps campus that's maybe residential, you can opt to go to a campus across state lines for sure.

And my child did that for a particular program, but it did involve an extra sort of loop or hoop to jump through with the application process, but that's right. So another thing we want to talk about is just how do we support our kids when they're making this kind of transition? And one of the best questions to ask is, what do you need? What do you need? How can I help you? I think it's easy to assume that we know what they want help with, and I think asking the question is a really good idea.

Yeah, and I would say for parents, the question we should ask ourselves is, what is success in this situation? Success might be, maybe there is maybe a safety thing, and you think them moving out is the best for everybody. And so if that's the case, then remember that we can't be too picky about, especially for our kids who are over 18, where they're headed after they move on from us. And if you need that space and that break for maybe all the drama, or if there's a safety concern, be as supportive as you can and hold your reservations for whatever reservations you have about whatever that next situation is. And there are lots of crazy decisions that some of our kids make, and we think, oh, gosh, I don't know about that, but just remember, you can be a safe place.

Well, let me comment on that really quickly. You can be a safe place, but that does not necessarily mean that your child can move back in your home. You can be a safe person emotionally, someone they can come to, but I think it's important to consider safety. Like you mentioned, Melissa, it's also really important to think about the other children in the home and how much they can handle a sibling moving in and out and are we going to rearrange bedrooms? Are we going to hold their bedroom for them? I just think it can be a lot. And some of us are parenting younger kids who also have their own trauma histories, their own losses. And so keeping them safe emotionally and physically has to be a

priority.

There also might be, you might think, I just want to continue to have a relationship with my child. And Lisa and I both want to encourage you that having your child move out, especially if it's not under great circumstances, does not mean it's the end of the story for you or your relationship with your child. So if you want to kind of preserve some of that relationship, then think about how you can feel like a cheerleader for your kids. And that doesn't mean you have to fund the whole thing. We would never recommend that you co-sign or all these different things, but I think again, some of us have personalities where we're going to want to play Devil's advocate or poke holes or try to protect them from a fall by asking lots of questions. And sometimes that can feel like we're not supportive. So think about what is your definition of success? Also, on the practical side of the moving in and out, check your state's laws. Some laws are super what we call tenant friendly, not super landlord friendly. And once your child is over 18, technically, they're a tenant, right? The law doesn't really see them as family. And so in some States, it's as few as just two nights to get residency in a situation. And so in order to, if it doesn't work out or if it gets unsafe, you'll need to go through the full eviction process with a judge's order to have your child leave again if it doesn't work out. So just be wise about the moving in and out. We have a pretty flexible moving in and out policy in our house right now. We have a state where that's okay. And we have relationships where we feel like we have some margin and some relationship capital where that's okay. But that might not be your situation. And so just go in with your eyes wide open.

Well, and let's remember that in terms of brain science, our children, even our kids who are over 18, their brains are not fully developed. Their brains are still developing. Not only that, I just think, like you said, Melissa, it's just not over. Their lives are in process, and I talk a lot about that love is patient and that doesn't mean for a day or a week. It might mean for a decade. Love is patient, and I think we can always have hope for our relationships with our kids.

Yeah, and I don't know if I shared a ton of this on the podcast, but because of my father being in Youth Ministry for a long time, and because my generation of cousins on our side of the family came to our family through adoption, and then because we adopted older kids who are now in their 20s, we have seen a lot of stories unfold, and we've had situations where we've had young adults or teens leave our house under not great circumstances, and in pretty much every situation at this point, we've seen amazing amount of redemption and reconnection. But I'll tell you in some of the stories, it took over a decade. And in some of the stories that teen or young adult was in their early 30s before they were able to make reconnection. But we've just seen such amazing things happen. I just have experience after experience after experience in our family to say that it's not over until it's over. And even when you think it's over, you know, years later, it might come back and something will surprise you.

Absolutely. All right, if your child is under 18 and they want to move out, we're talking some of the emotions are going to be the same, but there's a lot more complexity because you can't just let them just move out and do whatever they want. We are legally responsible for our kids, so that is another time to consider depending on your child to consider Job Corps, because again, they take kids under 16, and it should be a safe environment. So that's a possibility for a young person who's saying they want to move out and they don't want to be in your home anymore.

Yeah, I think the other thing is again, how can we create a win win or how can we make it feel like we are on their team? So rather than just saying you can't move out, you're not 18. How can we say? Well, it sounds like you're really wanting some more independence. How can we help you get that? What are some things that you might need to know or you might need? Are you going to need a job? Are you going to need to start gathering material possessions? You can help them, and maybe once the reality starts to set in, maybe that's really not what they want. I also think going back to the definition of success, think about what that is and then filter which battles you pick with teens through that. Again, it's different for every family. But I know in our story I picked all the wrong battles and too many, and that was creating a lot of the tension around, I just can't wait to get out of here because I have this crazy mom who is in my business all the time. And so especially with older teens 16, 17 as they're heading to 18, we need to start thinking about do we want to sacrifice our relationship over

music choice or clothing choice or friend choice, gaming choice, academics, all of these things? Or can we start giving them an opportunity to make their own decisions while still being in a safe environment, in a connected environment? And that's a scary place to be as a parent, but I'll tell you on our second tribe of kids that are going through our house right now, that's more the posture that we're taking, and it seems counterintuitive and it's certainly scary, but the relationship that we have with our kids is much different than with our first set of kids. And we've been able to use these principles with our second set of kids kind of on a second try and the level of respect and communication that we've been able to get by letting go of some of those battles has been worth all the relationship and all the risk.

Well, and I think like you're talking about putting the relationship first, we want to always keep as much as possible at the center of our interactions with our kids. Now, I'm not talking here about issues that are unsafe, but we want to keep that relationship as open as we can, and it may not feel very good for a while, but again, it does not mean it won't heal and mature and change. So I think also with a younger teen, we want to be sure that we are helping to put a support team together for them. So if you have a teen who's wanting to move out and you're part of a Church community, maybe there's someone in your Church who would be willing to let your teen live with them for a period of time, like decide on an amount of time and say, we just want to let him try this. Talk with a school counselor. They need to know if your child is not living at home, they will, well, it depends on how big the school is, I guess. But in our community, it's better to bring people into the loop and keep them out of the loop, I think. But we want our kids to know that we are not the end all be all as the parents. There are other adults who can be part of their lives and be helpful supports. Now, I would say in contrast, we've talked about this a fair bit, it is not helpful if someone invites your child to move in with them without being on your team. If they are not talking to you and saying, hey, can we help out? Is there something we can do? Would you like us to invite him to live with us for a month or two or for the summer or whatever? I think I know a number of people who have experienced having someone who's pretty sure like, they're okay, they're well meaning, but they're pretty sure they can do it better. And I'm guessing some of you out there listening are being like, oh, yeah, that's happened to us. And those people who think they can do it better, who may be taken in by things your child has told them or their impressions of things, those people are not helpful. I would be really cautious in that kind of situation to give permission. But again, you just have to navigate it as best you can. And again, it is very complicated.

Yeah, it's super tricky. I think all of this is tricky, and every situation has nuances, so if this is something that maybe you're really struggling with and you want to get it out with a group of moms who has kind of walked in your shoes or is walking it out now, we do have a group called The Village, and we talk about all kinds of things in the Village, but we do once a month gather as a group of moms who are parenting just teens or parenting teens and adults where all the moms in that group are doing that. We have breakouts and breakouts based on age. And so that's a safe place to kind of explore and hear what other people have done and know that you're not alone get emotional support, because like we said, it is a tricky thing to navigate emotionally to have a child who is struggling that much, where your relationship is really struggling that much. So we have been there, we get it, we want to support you, and so if that's you, and you feel like, oh my gosh, I need to talk to some other moms who get it, I didn't know that I wasn't the only one. We would love for you to have a month in The Village for free and have a chance to chat with some other moms about all the things that are unique about parenting teens who come to your family through adoption. So you can do that at theadoptionconnection.com/villagetrial.

If you have a question you'd like us to tackle in a mentor moment, we would love to hear from you. You can call our line, and I promise nobody answers it. It's just a way for you to leave a recording. The number for that is 208-741-3880, or you can email your question to us at email@theadoptionconnection.com. We'd love to hear your questions. Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. You can find us on Facebook or Instagram as [@theadoptionconnection](https://www.facebook.com/theadoptionconnection).

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.

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

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