

[00:00:01.390] - 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.

[00:00:09.450] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:18.750] - Lisa Qualls

Hi, friends. Welcome to episode 157 of The Adoption Connection Podcast. Today we're bringing you a conversation that took place in the Dads group within our membership community, the Village. That group is led by our friend and colleague Greg, and he facilitated a conversation about how Dads can support their kids during the holiday season. And the conversation ranges from favorite traditions to how to help a child navigate visitation with their family. There are all kinds of things in this conversation that I think you're really going to enjoy hearing, so let's hear their conversation.

[00:01:01.810] - Greg Lombard Rea

It is great to be here with the Adoption Connection dad group. So what is your favorite holiday tradition? Yours personally?

[00:01:12.850] - Speaker 1

I would say mine's a little strange, but on Christmas Day, we don't want to spend time, we have a big family, and we want to spend time with them. The traditional let's make a big dinner, everybody is out in the kitchen, and then it gets eaten in 35 minutes or less, ten minutes or less, and you wonder why you put all that work in. So we started several years ago that with our family, we go to Costco, we buy lasagnas and we buy garlic bread, and that's what we have for Christmas dinner.

[00:01:49.450] - Greg Lombard Rea

And the reason for that is because of the connection.

[00:01:53.230] - Speaker 1

Because it gives us time to just be together.

[00:01:56.260] - Greg Lombard Rea

Cool. So why is that a favorite holiday tradition of yours? I know, but go ahead.

[00:02:02.600] - Speaker 1

I don't know. Everybody knows what we're going to have to eat, so there's no question. Nobody has to bring anything, nobody has to worry about what's going to happen. We know we're having lasagna, here it is, and we can spend the time visiting and connecting and not worried about food and clean up dishes.

[00:02:23.950] - Greg Lombard Rea

That does sound lovely. So how about one of the other dads, what's your favorite holiday tradition?

[00:02:31.030] - Speaker 2

So we have a tradition that's very, incredibly casual, and it depends on what the age of the children are in the house. But for us, we will go into our semi finished basement, and the tradition is that we'll run the Christmas story at least once, maybe twice, maybe three times per day after presents are open and the breakfast has happened, and maybe we went and had some Costco garlic bread. Whatever has happened, we'll retire to the basement, all sweatpants, all blankets and just watch the Christmas story because no matter what, it is so full of so many awkward moments and so many hilarious kind of stories that just kind of rub you in every direction. The Christmas stories are just full of them. So no matter who's with us, no matter what guests and we have a large family, but no matter who's visiting, or who's not visiting, no matter who's in the home that will go downstairs and we'll spend some time just being together and just laughing awkwardly, hilariously, and no matter how it happens at the Christmas story.

[00:03:52.010] - Greg Lombard Rea

So describe. Confirm for us which Christmas story you are watching.

[00:03:58.270] - Speaker 2

Nothing but the original Red Ryder BB Gun and Ralphie and everybody has a part of the Christmas story that they like, and it's just hilariously awkward from beginning to end, and you can't not laugh.

[00:04:21.350] - Greg Lombard Rea

Sounds like fun. I think that for me, in a way, the Thanksgiving large dinner at my mother in law's house is wonderful because pre-covid, it was all sorts of extended family. And after the dinner was over, sitting around and long conversations or our wonderful friend Debbie, she's a yard sale garage sale person, and so some years she shows up, and this is after Christmas dinner, too, with these tens of filled with playing cards. And she loves games, and one night we sat at the table not a number of nights, but we sat and played Mexican train, that Domino's game and the conversations and just the laughter, so that's a real tradition. That's a great one that we have always loved, but my mother in law still is able to do the big meal. There won't be 25 people there, they'll just be the ten of us, but she loves to do that big meal, and that's her thing. She cooks for days ahead and all that, and it's a lovely feast.

[00:05:49.370] - Speaker 3

Thanksgiving has been historically hosted at my mom and dad's over the centuries, if you will. And it's been just the place where everybody gathers. But I guess one of my more, and covid has kind of put a wrinkle in some of that for us anyway, but the favorite tradition, I think, is since my wife and I've been married, we make us a special attempt at Christmas Eve is ours, our immediate families. We get together with the other families during maybe the dinner, but then we do the candle light service or some Christmas Eve and Christmas morning are together, and since we've had our boys now, too, that's just a special time where we try to keep it as that tight nucleus. Not saying that we're not connecting with the other families, it's just a matter of that particular time is for us to be together as our family and our family will grow, of course. But we do spend time with the other families during the dinner or the Christmas Day dinner, one of those times we're spending time with the rest of the nucleus for those wonderful conversations and the connections, and it's all about connections and relationships, right?

[00:07:21.650] - Speaker 2

Another tradition that we have at our home that has been just a delight over the years is that no matter who is with us at any given time, the immediate family on Christmas morning will, it's not a rule, but it's something where we rally together and it's really an opportunity for us to love one another and just connect is that we all go, we just happen to have the bedrooms or upstairs, and traditionally, the presents are downstairs and we will only go down together no matter what time it is five, six, seven as the kids have come and gone and they've grown in the home that no matter what time it would be that we all work together to go down together and we will culminate in one of the rooms. It doesn't matter which bedroom we all end up in, but it has to be that we go down as a group and that particularly when we're doing our connection with kids and fostering an adoption to that inclusiveness that we go together has been a tradition that was there before and is there now, and it has been super special that whoever is in our home, we consider that assigned and we go down together, and it's been really fun. And it's never been stressful no matter what time the first person that gets up and is excited that we just gently and we encourage to gently work together that we go down as a group and we'll slowly assemble upstairs and then move downstairs together.

[00:09:09.770] - Greg Lombard Rea

That's very cool. Any other favorite holiday traditions?

[00:09:17.310] - Speaker 1

One that I have is kind of mine because all the kids say it's Dad's. Going back to the movie The Christmas Story, we watch, I kick off the Christmas season, the evening of Thanksgiving, when everything's done and everything is quiet and make a big batch of caramel corn and who's ever around, you can either join me or you can leave me alone. But I'm starting off the Christmas season

with a Christmas story Thanksgiving night.

[00:09:47.710] - Greg Lombard Rea
Oh, how fun.

[00:09:49.990] - Speaker 1
And at school, I have a leg lamp that I put outside my room.

[00:09:55.780] - Greg Lombard Rea
Well, our Christmas there was a year when Kim, we were celebrating in our old town and wanted to have Christmas, the kids were old enough, and it was "Grandparents, we're staying home, we're not coming to your house on Christmas Day" because it's disruptive. The kids don't want to open their presents and then pack everything in the car and leave. We would do that, and somehow, however it was and Greg's cooking Christmas dinner. And so what we decided to do is that we would go to a farm. It was probably about 60 miles away where they took really good care of their beef, grass fed and just all of that sustainable stuff, and we would get a brisket. I found a seasoning for brisket and would slow cook that brisket and everybody loved it. I don't know how many years it is, but I'm doing it again this year because that's exactly what everybody wants. So that's a tradition, and I'm not a cook, but I've had to become a cook and everybody loves the food, so that's very satisfying. And I don't have the anxiety about fixing it anymore because I know how to do this, and I know it turns out. So I got this and other people bring the green beans and the mashed potatoes and do all that stuff, so I only have to take care of the beef. So that's a great tradition that we enjoy. It's a delicious tradition too, actually.

[00:11:46.170] - Speaker 3
I love a good brisket. When are we coming over?

[00:11:54.190] - Greg Lombard Rea
Not on Christmas, but if you're in Kansas, let me know. If you're anywhere near Kansas, you're driving on I 70, you better let me know because I would love to see you face to face. And if I have enough time, hey, I'd buy a brisket and stop by the house. I believe the pandemic is going to end and we can socialize.

[00:12:20.070] - Speaker 3
Excellent, sounds good.

[00:12:23.470] - Greg Lombard Rea
A second question, with our children, we are here because our kids have challenging behaviors because of their early traumatic experience in abuse and neglect and abandonment and sometimes fetal alcohol and just spectrum disorder and all that stuff. So it is the case that kids from trauma can get quite dysregulated and disconnected and have challenging behaviors during the holiday. I do know of families that they don't do anything different on Christmas because they've paid the price and it isn't worth it trying to have the extra food and the change of schedule and the different foods and the presence, boy, it just throws them off. So one of our goals, it doesn't sound like we have that too much in this group, but how do you stay connected to your kids during the holidays? So between now, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, how do you stay connected to your kids during the holidays, even if they are struggling with challenging behaviors?

[00:13:37.450] - Speaker 2
Well, it's certainly a time to reflect on the question, for sure, but one of the things I've learned as an adoptive parent, as someone who had biological children as we entered into this, it's not a blended family, but a combined, a new group is that the emptying out of and emptying out in a positive way, a clean way of looking at the set up of the holiday time because the holiday time will come with a tradition depending on when you've entered into the foster and the adoption journey that has a previous way that you had that tradition or the way that you interacted with your perhaps your own biological children if you didn't have any just whatever that was, and as you're dealing with those challenging behaviors that you drop that expectation. The expectation is there's no expectation, and if you start with that baseline assumption that this is wonderful and everything is new and that it'll be a

new foundation that is set without the children being directly told that, that you open yourself to whatever could be, the success will have a great emergence in itself without having to try to direct or try to plan or try to adapt something that you had before to be able to just start fresh. I had some children that were in our home from the fostering system, so different than an adoption scenario, but all these things are all what we should be interacting with or whatever. So in a fostering situation that they did have an opportunity to see their family over that holiday time, it causes intense feelings of loyalty to their own family and then to the family that they've connected with through us. And the most important thing we can do, exit ourselves and enter where they are. Totally empty yourself and think about what they're experiencing to then gather what should you do as a setting and tradition through the holiday period. So being able to, as best we can, experience what they're experiencing, so that particularly those that have situations where you are going to make a connection with the biological family, that you make sure that they understand that they have that family and that they have the family that they're in, and there's not a selection between the two. It's similar to when you enter into a marriage. One family turns into two. So you have that situation where you have your family has grown. It is not divided, it's actually grown. The situations we've had to deal with are visitation where there's a visitation over the holiday period. It's so incredibly important to make sure that that reconnection to you and your family has maximum capacity to be flexible, to not set a tradition, to be able to welcome them back, because that's the hardest part during the holiday season is to have they'll suffer intense loss, but they won't be able to verbalize it or they'll act out. But they're actually acting in, they're reacting to a situation. It's incredibly dramatic, and it's so important for us as the adoptive and foster parents to make every accommodation in that scenario where they're in a situation where they're torn between these worlds.

[00:18:32.610] - Greg Lombard Rea

I hear what you're saying in terms of putting yourself, emptying yourself and putting yourself in that child situation and doing whatever it takes to help them get what they need and to stay connected with birth family.

[00:18:47.850] - Speaker 2

Yeah, we had a child where there was a situation where it was completely appropriate to have some level of visitation through the holiday, and one of the things that just kind of happened was they could not go back into their bedroom. It was impossible. They literally could not do it. You could tell that there was literally almost a shaking tension in the child because there was this massive traumatic loyalty disloyalty situation. And what's critical for us to understand is that this is not something where you say, "But now you're safe. Go to your room." It's a, "We're so glad you're back. How did it go?" And even if it didn't, that you're receptive to what has happened and that everything else goes away. If they sleep underneath the Christmas tree, okay. That when they come back, that they know that no matter what happens, it's okay. And that really can help through the holiday period. So you don't set the tradition and say, oh, well, we're going to all get together upstairs before we get out for present, but you have to let those traditions go to make sure that what's most important is to be there for that child. The tradition is to be there for the children.

[00:20:18.030] - Speaker 1

Yeah, that's kind of along the same lines of what I'm thinking, because like with us, when Christmas and the holiday seasons hit, Thanksgiving, Christmas, there's all these get togethers, and it's choosing wisely, which ones are good for the kids. It's that whole thought process of, this one is going to be too chaotic. We don't have to do them all just because we've done them before or we don't all have to go to this one, maybe just some of us. Another one I think about staying with that connection is and you said expectations, that expectation in our family that was there for years that everybody sits down and watches everybody open their present and you go around and everybody take a turn and you see it and you keep going until they're done. It's okay for that kid to open a present and to be so excited about that present that the best thing you can do for them is let them head back to their room, let them slide out into the kitchen or whatever, go around the corner. Maybe you'll see them in a couple of hours and they'll be ready to open another present. Everybody else can be done, but it's okay to be opening presents after dinner and right before everybody else is going to bed, you finish your last one because that's the pace they needed to take.

[00:21:46.890] - Speaker 2

And again, it's not a tradition, but one of the things that I would also just encourage parents that are in these situations, if you have situations where you have large family gatherings, make it an absolute point. Be close to your child. If it's in a family setting, show your love and your care and your protection by keeping your child close to you. If you sit in a family gathering setting and you're all on couches or something like that, keep that child close to you, show them that they are with you. And then also just allow that time for all the emotions that the children are dealing with, to be able to have a place to get away and nothing's wrong, nothing's wrong. They're overstimulated in that situation, and there's nothing wrong. They need to be able to move safely and with compassion, that they just need to go sit and look at their phone in another room. Obviously, I'm sharing with teen issues.

[00:22:56.770] - Speaker 1

Yeah, when we go into a big gathering to somebody's home, we talk to them ahead of time and just say, we just need a safe place and the first thing we do is when we go there is to take the kid and say, if you need a break here's where you can take it. And you have something for them that you've taken with them, whether it's with one of our kids, it's her drawing stuff or her rocks. This is where you can go and just be with your drawing stuff and your rocks, and if you want one of us to be with you, just let us know. And giving them that safe place that they can go so that they know when they start getting overstimulated or when it gets too much for them, it's okay. I have a place.

[00:23:45.850] - Greg Lombard Rea

Good stuff. Staying connected with your kids during the holidays. Everything's been so different. It's different this year from last year. I guess what I'm going to do is, and I've done this before, is to pay attention to the needs of the kids. What is it that they need for their own felt safety and for that? I was hoping that when I started that I would come up with an example, but I can't necessarily do that.

[00:24:24.050] - Speaker 2

The holidays are so intense and so intense, and sometimes the guidance is just be sold out for the kids because it's a very intense emotional time for them more than every other day of the year, which they're already always in that escalated state where they're so vulnerable and they can't produce it. They can't produce that in a way that may be something that we can openly dialogue with in many situations. They just won't be there. So the most important thing we can do is make sure they know that we are protecting them without saying we're protecting you, that they can be safe. The simple arm around their shoulders in a holiday gathering can give them tremendous security in a very scary situation and make them feel loved and accepted because they are. And it's a very simple gesture in the holiday times to be able to protect those children and do what we know we're to do and helping the children through the trauma, making them feel because it's true that they are.

[00:25:58.850] - Speaker 1

And it's okay to leave something early.

[00:26:01.550] - Speaker 2

Yes, definitely. And clear expectations with your other family members and not in a way that it would be creating attention, but actually allowing them to participate by not participating. And that sounds so awkward. It's like, okay, so we're going to participate by not participating. It's like, yes, there's when these children that have all of these things they have to work through. Elongating an engagement, contribute. It's not beneficial. It actually can have a negative effect and to be a short, positive, loving connection and then allow processing, it's really important at any age, particularly for teens, but at that point at any age, definitely.

[00:27:04.630] - Greg Lombard Rea

What I realized is since we're in the holiday season in terms of November, starting Halloween. One of the ways that I stayed connected to my kids and I try to do this year round, but it's much more important in the stress of the holidays is I repair the relationship when I mess up. So if I'm getting stressed because guests are coming over, I've got to step up and be courageous and cook something or the house and that whole shame voice starts of, boy, you're really not up for this and you're not good enough and my any grand type four stuff comes in. I consistently, I'm likely to mess it up and be

short with the kid or be overwhelmed and kind of overwhelm them with my stress or something like that. So what I do is I continually repair the relationship when I realize that I have messed that up and I've overreacted or stressed out or hurt their feelings. And it's happened twice today for my kid that I said, I'm really sorry about that. I overreacted and I apologize. So repairing the relationship is one of the ways I stay connected with my kiddos during these stressful, what can be stressful holidays. Well, just in case, does anybody have one other one liner or 30 second-something to say about our adopted kids and our families, our adopted families, and the holidays, anything that wasn't included?

[00:28:59.600] - Speaker 1

Don't be so worried about what's going to happen that you missed the joy with them.

[00:29:06.410] - Greg Lombard Rea

I'm so glad that you all have been here and I've enjoyed this conversation. It's been great for me.

[00:29:18.030] - Melissa Corkum

Well, dads, if you were listening to this or moms, if you're listening to this thinking man, I wish my husband could be a part of this or dads, if you were listening along and as often happens with podcasts, you kind of feel like you want to be in on it or you're talking back to your radio, we would love to have you inside the village. You can find out more information at the adoptionconnection.com/village. Spouses do get a discount, so if your spouse is already in the village, make sure you check with them to get your discount code. And if both of you are listening this week and you're thinking you both want in because we do have a mom's only group and a dad's only group, then one of you should join grab the spouse discount code and then you can get a discount on the second membership. So again, you can find all those details at the adoptionconnection.com/village. This is our final episode for 2021. Lisa and I are praying that you find some moments of peace and joy this holiday season and we will see you back here on January 4, 2022. Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. Our new Instagram handle is [@postadoptionresources](https://www.instagram.com/postadoptionresources) or better yet, join our free Facebook community at the [adoptionconnection.com/facebook](https://www.facebook.com/adoptionconnection.com/facebook).

[00:30:44.250] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:30:52.530] - Melissa Corkum

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