

[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.

[00:00:10.290] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:18.390] - Lisa Qualls

Welcome to this month's Mailbag episode where we answer your questions. Our first question today comes from Regina, and she asks, "How does time-in work when I need to separate two children? Choosing the child with adversity seems like an unfair reward to my bio son, but it's impossible to have time in with my bio son until the child with adversity is regulating again. What happens in your home?"

[00:00:40.710] - Melissa Corkum

I think this is certainly a really tricky question. I'm sure there's a lot of other families who are trying to navigate this. We've certainly navigated things like this in the past. I'm trying to think as outside the box as you can. So one thing might be, is there a playful way to kind of redirect what's happening so that both children can be involved? Kind of distract them, maybe with a snack or a car ride or a walk around the block or some kind of active activity that kind of helps give that energy a place to go, rather than trying to see how you can divide yourself into two different places, which obviously you can't do. So that's one different way you can think about this.

[00:01:26.830] - Lisa Qualls

Yes, and if you need to separate the kids, but you still are not wanting to just send them away, try putting them in two spaces that are near but separate. So let's say you have two bedrooms that are across the hall from each other or something. You could put one in each room and you sit in the middle in the hallway, and you read aloud to them or something that might be calming but connecting, but you're still getting them into two separate spaces. You're going to have to be really creative in the thinking about this because I don't know what your home is like, but something like that could work. Or everybody comes to the table and we get out Playdoh or we get out something, and each child sits at opposite ends of the table and the parents sits in the middle. So you're still with both kids and you're doing an activity that is hopefully calming. Give them both a piece of gum to chew on whatever it is that's going to help them calm. I really like the idea if you can get them to do it as taking a walk around the block, like Melissa mentioned, because we know that walking is a regulating activity, so we want to help them calm. In a circumstance where one child has hurt another child or physically harmed them, the strategy I learned and that I really embraced is initially I would want to deal with the child who had injured the other child first, like go to them, deal with them, deal with their behavior. And I learned that what I really needed to do was comfort the child who had been harmed first, because that sort of diffused some of maybe the power or control that might have been part of the hurting of the child to get my attention or whatever it might have been. So I learned to comfort the child who had been hurt first and then talk to the child who had done the harming. And if everybody was calm enough, we try to make repair right then. But sometimes that just couldn't happen. I can think of an instance specifically where we weren't at home. And so I just had to get everybody in there, buckled back in their booster seats, and drive home. And then I immediately went to empowering their bodies by giving them a snack and something to drink.

[00:03:37.830] - Melissa Corkum

The other thing that I find works like magic with a lot of kids is not letting them know kind of why you need them. So maybe you go into the kitchen and you call one of the kids and it's not like, stop fighting, get over here call, it's a hey, Bobby, could you come here for a second? Like kind of like something that would draw their curiosity or like you need them for something and maybe you give that child, like a snack or a Popsicle or a piece of gum to chew on and kind of get them settled and then go and comfort a child who maybe was caught in the middle of the crossfire progression or co regulate another child. But I found, like, especially with probably like, school age kids and younger, I use this a lot in my house if I can sense something is going on, like if I say so and so get over here right now, they're obviously not going to come, but I often will go to a different part of the house or

whatever and call a kid and be like, hey, so and so I have a quick question, or can you come look at this? And that kind of diverts their attention and allows everyone to have enough space so you can catch a breath and kind of think about what's next.

[00:04:57.090] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, great answers. Thank you, Melissa. Okay, this next question I really am going to direct to Melissa because it's specific to something she knows a lot about. This question is from Mary Lynn. She said, "Hi, I'm looking at a martial arts program for our adopted daughter who's nine. She can be aggressive, so my husband is concerned about her learning better skills to hurt us or others. I've heard it's the opposite that they actually learn control. Has anyone experienced this? And do you have thoughts on it?" Okay, Melissa, I know you have experience with martial arts.

[00:05:27.750] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I think this is a great question. This is not something we were thinking about when we got into martial arts. We started martial arts as a family before our oldest three kids came home, and then we kind of brought them in to Taekwondo. And we took lessons and practiced Taekwondo on an off for, I think like, a decade. Here's what I think we observed in terms of martial arts. I think one, if you, the parent, also can participate, I think that's a bonus. And I think that can curb a lot of the well, what if they learn something? Or what if they are just learning more things to be aggressive? And I know that martial arts gave me a confidence, especially physically, that I hadn't had before. And I didn't know I was going to need it for our adoption experience, but I think it certainly helped my reflex times, you know, my reaction times got really good. But we also know that Taekwondo or other martial arts really encourages crossing the midline, you know, having your right arm doing something different than your left leg is doing. And there's a lot of rhythm and repetition and proprioception in martial arts. So there's a lot that is very organizing and regulating for the nervous system. Also, I was so impressed by our Taekwondo instructors and our master and how they continued to talk to the kids about respect and honoring parents. And I think it's always great when we can have that message coming from as many different angles as possible for our kids. And there's something about a Taekwondo 6th degree black belt that does kind of demand a certain level of respect from the kids. And so when they're saying these lessons about respecting the parents and those types of things, I think it holds a little bit more water, obviously, than coming from us because our kids don't want to have anything to do with what we say. But even from other teachers and the kids actually learned some things that were helpful for us. I tell this a lot. In fact, we were just talking about this in a Q&A inside the village. They learned the concept of no contact sparring, which is where you're practicing your sparring techniques, but you're coming as close as you can without touching the other person. So that language in itself was worth its weight in gold in our family because I used to send the boys out back and they were wrestling in the house or whatever, and I'd say, go out back and no contact sparring. So they can kind of get out this aggression in playfulness but with this language and having already practiced in another situation where they don't actually hurt the other person.

[00:08:24.850] - Lisa Qualls

That is so good. And I can add one thing not specific to martial arts, but specific to the value of a good coach in your child's life. We have invested quite a bit into athletics for our two youngest boys, and it's been well worth every penny we spent. And just yesterday, I got a text from one of my boy's coaches, and he said, hey, I just want to let you know I took your son aside today. And I just told him that as an African American coach, that I want to be here for him and be a mentor for him. And if he ever experiences anything that makes him uncomfortable in terms of race or anything else that I'm here for him to talk to. And he said, and I just want to keep you in the loop. And I almost could have cried, I mean, what a gift. And really, for me, like such an answer to prayer to have this man in my son's life. So it's definitely worth exploring other trustworthy adults who can add things to your kids lives. Okay, our last question today comes from Ashley, who asked, "How do you all respond to people who make outside judgments toward you and or your parenting? My neighbor wants to take my seven year old adopted daughter to the movies and told me she looks sad and doesn't think she gets enough attention. She has attachment concerns and was sad with some friend issues at school at the time. We've since started homeschooling." Oh, Melissa, I know we both have plenty to say about this. Go ahead.

[00:09:51.560] - Melissa Corkum

Oh, man. Well, I think a lot of this, how we deal with this is going to depend a little bit on our personalities. We talk a lot about the Enneagram here. We're all going to experience that judgment completely differently. Like, there are some of us who are going to be like, yeah, I don't care what you think, and we're just going to march on. And there's other people where that breaking relationship or thinking that someone in your neighborhood might be thinking bad about you could really just eat you up inside. So I think what's on our side of the fence to do our own personal awareness has a ton to do with this, and we hear this a lot. It is hard to be parenting in a countercultural way that looks different than what everyone else is doing. Our kids do need something different than the majority of kids out there who are potentially more neurotypical than our kids who have early adversity. So this is a thing. Ashley, you're not alone.

[00:10:54.050] - Lisa Qualls

Absolutely. We've experienced this a lot. And personally, I am wired very differently from Melissa. If you've listened to any of our anniversary stuff, you know, I'm very sensitive. I'm really sensitive to criticism. For better and worse, it matters a lot to me whether people think I'm a good parent. And so this has been really a painful experience for me to feel observed and criticized. What we want is people who are going to say, hey, I noticed your daughter seems to be struggling a little bit. How can I help? We don't want people to say, your daughter looks sad. Let me take her to the movies. Now, if this person is teachable and has the potential to be an actual friend, you could say, "Wow, thank you for being concerned for my daughter. I'd love to sit down and talk with you. Maybe there are some ways that you could help me. Taking her to the movies probably wouldn't be helpful right now, but can we get together and talk?" But we have to be able to put down all that defensiveness in order to do that. If this person wants to be your child's hero, no, they're not going to be helpful to you. But if they actually are genuinely concerned and want to be helpful, they could become an asset. So I'd explored a little further and wow, I really do understand this is very hard. And you have to just remain true to what you know is best for your child and your family. And know that, like we always say, that you are a good parent doing good work and your neighbor is not really the best judge of that, so we like to say it to you every week.

[00:12:24.590] - Melissa Corkum

You know, I would say the other thing that eases, I think, this tension between what we're doing and what the rest of the world is doing is surrounding yourself with people who do get you and are maybe not making your exact parenting decisions, but understand what it feels like to be parenting outside of the norm. And so if you're listening and you're like, I don't have anybody like that in my corner. We would love to have you join us in the Village where you get to gather with other adoptive kinship foster parents and who will get this where you can measure some of your thoughts and responses against other stories that are more similar. So you can say, am I just being overly sensitive that my neighbor wants to take my daughter to the movies? Or is this really a place where I should tread lightly because this person might, like Lisa, you mentioned have some kind of savior complex or disrupt the attachment that we're working so hard to build with our kids. So it's important to surround yourselves with a supportive community who can help guide you and who for sure won't judge you.

[00:13:38.730] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, we're a judgment free zone. And I think we have a coupon code for our listeners. Is that right, Melissa?

[00:13:44.630] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, so if you go to theadoptionconnection.com/village, and then on the sign up page, you want to use just the code PODCAST. Well, if you have a question that you'd like us to chat about here in a mailbag episode, we invite you to head to the show notes for this episode, you'll find links there. It goes to our Facebook group, which is a place where you can type a question in or to our speak pipe widget, which allows you with just the touch of a button to just talk to us and tell us your question, because sometimes it's easier than typing it out. So we invite you to participate in that way. Thank you so much, as always, for all of your questions.

[00:14:20.070] - Melissa Corkum

Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. Our new Instagram handle is @postadoptionrecources. Or better yet, join our free Facebook community at theadoptionconnection.com/facebook.

[00:14:35.070] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:14:43.350] - Melissa Corkum

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