

[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,

[00:00:10.410] - Melissa Corkum

and this is Melissa Corkum. Don't worry, we get it, and we're here for you. Welcome to this month's Mailbag episode where we answer your questions. Our first question comes from Tiffany. Does anyone have any suggestions on ways to help our eleven year old son handle sudden changes to his schedule or routine? We try and warn him in advance if something is going to be different in our daily schedule, but sometimes things come up that don't allow for this warning.

[00:00:40.230] - Lisa Qualls

Well, this is a tough one because it happens to all of us, us and our kids. And most of us don't really like changes in our routine. When we expect the day to go a certain way and then it doesn't, it really throws us off. But as essentially pretty healthy adults, we have skills and the ability to cope with it. We know how to calm ourselves down, we know how to change our thinking, but our kids don't have that. And so we have to do our best, I think, to support them, have empathy for the fact that it is hard when the routine changes. Remember that it's harder for them than it is for us. And their window of tolerance is just narrow for dealing with stresses and things that they don't expect. So there are a few things we can put in place that will help our kids anticipate transitions when we know what is actually going to happen. And I'm working with a mom who has a son who has a really hard time with this, and he's old enough that he can read. And so I suggested that she get a magnetic just one week calendar to put on her refrigerator where she could write down just the basic highlights of the day so that he could visually see what's coming. Because she had thought about telling him the night before what was going to be coming the next day. And I said, I don't think I would do that because sleep is already hard enough. Why don't you just have it up there where he can be seeing it throughout the week, and then each morning do a little review of what's coming. And then if things change and it doesn't go the way that you thought it would, try to bring him close, try to offer him connection and comfort. You can do simple regulating things like we talk about all the time, like if he's small enough, young enough, do some rocking, do things that are repetitive and rhythmic and relational, that help him then regulate his nervous system. You can take a walk, you can go for a bike ride, things that will help him calm. But that flexible thinking goes together with the window of tolerance and the nervous system. Melissa, do you want to talk about that?

[00:02:45.150] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, for sure. And before I do that, as you were talking, Lisa, you started with none of us like interruption and change the routine, or at least neither you nor I do.

[00:02:54.540] - Lisa Qualls

I don't.

[00:02:55.210] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, right. And so, as you're saying that, I'm thinking, because often I talk to parents about starting with us and just thinking about what's going on for us when our kids are having a behavior. And so I'm thinking if there's a change in the routine and my child's struggling, I'm probably also struggling. And so that's kind of this emotional soup of dysregulation where it probably feels harder for me to help co regulate my child in this particular situation out of all the other ones. Because I'm probably having to work hard to stay inside my frustration window or window of tolerance. And then I'm also having to co regulate. I think just acknowledging too, that a change, if you're sensitive to changes in routine like I am or like Lisa is, then this is hard for us and it's hard for our kid. Which is kind of a double whammy.

[00:03:47.810] - Lisa Qualls

Well, right. I was just going to add that I remember a therapist telling me, Lisa, you've become transition resistant. And what I realized was that almost any transition expected or unexpected, was so challenging with my kids that I would become anxious anticipating the challenging behavior that was going to come. And of course, then my nervous system was activated. And so even if I could act calm on the outside, I was not calm on the inside because I was worried about the change in the

routine and the behavior it was going to bring. So we have to also be able to truly regulate internally.

[00:04:24.270] - Melissa Corkum

We keep talking about this concept of window of tolerance or frustration window, and a lot of our kids, because of their past, do have a very tiny window of tolerance, which means any little thing sets them off. Because of that, I think to add to what Lisa is saying, I think I would give less details to a child with a low window of tolerance for change than a lot. Because then there's a little bit more wiggle room for something to change. Because if we just say kind of broad strokes and we're not giving all the little details. I also think we should over and over caveat whenever we answer a question around what's for dinner? When's dinner? What's happening tomorrow? What are we doing after taekwondo? What are we... you know, that we should say, well, the plan is to do this and this. But we're all going to try to stay flexible because we just never know. Especially if there is kind of a wildcard in the mix. Like that's contingent on, like Dad not getting caught in traffic on the way home from work. Or you're planning on going swimming at the end of the week. But like in Baltimore, we've pop up thunderstorms often, and so you would say the plan is for us to go swimming as long as the weather cooperates. And then maybe if you get a contingent. If not, we'll still do something fun. So I think those are some of the real practical things right in the moment. But I think ultimately what we want to do is also look at some of these things from the root and the foundation, which is that because this is rooted in a smaller window of tolerance, we want to think about ways that we can increase that window of tolerance. Lisa mentioned things that are rhythmic, repetitive, and relational, over time increase that window of tolerance. That's a slow process, but really effective. And that comes out of Bruce Perry's neuro sequential material. But there's also some things that we can do, like the safe and sound protocol, which we've talked a little bit about here on the podcast. We offer that to families through a 60 day intensive called the Regulation Rescue. And the whole point of that program is to increase both our window of tolerance as parents for what Lisa was talking about, like those big behaviors that sometimes tend to derail our day, and then also to increase our child's window of tolerance towards correction or transition or other, think about all those things, disappointment, all the things that kind of throw our kids off. So there are some things that you can start doing right away, and then there's some foundational things that we would recommend as well.

[00:06:53.330] - Lisa Qualls

Our next question is from Cammy. She asks, how do we hold our son responsible for destruction of property? He takes zero responsibility for his actions and blames everyone else. Is it unreasonable to expect some accountability or remorse?

[00:07:09.150] - Melissa Corkum

Well, this is hard. If you are parenting a child who is destructive when they're dysregulated, then that's disregulating to you as a parent, at least it was for me when we were living through that. And it's frustrating, and it makes us angry, and it costs us money. And I think also there was a narrative. I don't think it was super explicit necessarily, but I think I grew up with a certain image or like, there was a value assigned to those types of angry people. I think we bring with us something from our past of what people have told us around people who have anger issues and all these other things. I think that's particularly why maybe it just hit such a sore spot and why we feel the need for some kind of justice. And also, it's really tangible, right? Like if a TV gets broken or there are holes in your wall or, like, we still have doors in our house that don't quite work right. You know, there's like this constant physical reminder of, like, that happening. And so I think that makes this really tricky too. There's a lot of nuance in this. And so I think that sometimes in trust based parenting, there's a camp that's kind of like they were dysregulated when they did it. They didn't understand, you know, we need to understand kind of their trauma and their dysregulation and this kind of comes with the territory and there's kind of like this radical acceptance. Which I think we do need some radical acceptance around this if we have a child who struggles with this. Because some of that, all of that is true. And there's a high structure piece, right, so that's the high nurture all the understanding around why this might be happening and how it is really hard for our kids to stay regulated. And there's a high structure piece where there's everything in us, right, doesn't want them to, quote, unquote, get away with it. What's tricky is, as we were just talking about in the previous question, there's a window of tolerance, right? And so some of our kids are so fragile that there is not very much that we're going to be able to do in terms of, quote, unquote, holding our children accountable. We will have to handle them with kid

gloves in terms of whatever the next thing is after destruction of property.

[00:09:30.890] - Melissa Corkum

But some of our kids can, when they're regulated, if we can approach them also in a regulated way with words that are as best as we can get, non shaming, and just say, like, I know that you were really mad when you do that. I know you probably didn't mean to and you weren't really thinking about what you're doing. And there's this hole in the wall. So this Saturday we're going to head out to Home Depot and pick up a patch and I'm going to show you how we can fix this. Because if we break things, even if by accident, right, we still have a responsibility to fix it. And I think the key here is that we need to understand that it's about repairing the damage. It's not about convincing our kid that they're not going to do it again or making them feel anything. Like, we can't make our kids feel anything. They may never feel remorse. It doesn't mean that they can't help fix the damage.

[00:10:27.000] - Lisa Qualls

Right, and, you know, I was listening to you, Melissa, and just thinking, the thing is, this is like Dr. Purvis said, this is investment parenting. Because frankly, it would be a whole lot easier to just patch that thing up yourself or try to ignore it as long as you can, depending on where it is. It's going to take something from us to take the time to take our kids to the store and come home and repair it. And it probably won't look as good as if you just done it yourself, but this is really important. And when it can be a shame free, just a very practical, this is what happened, this is what we need to do, I think it can be instructive. Whether they'll remember it when they're feeling out of control and dysregulated in the future and never punch a wall again. You can't control that. You can't predict that. But it's still just a really practical thing and I think it's useful as much as we can handle doing that. If your life is completely crazy and so hard, there's no way you can spend 2 hours on a Saturday repairing this with your child, that's okay too. We understand. Just press on and do your best. Sometimes that's all we can do.

[00:11:34.230] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. And from a money perspective, I think obviously if your kids like five, they don't have the money to do this and I think there's a temptation for us to kind of have them work it off for the money. And that's tricky too, because we are able to make that connection in our upstairs brains. But honestly, that might not make sense to your kid and it's not going to actually get you the money. And I think sometimes if we're being really honest with ourselves, it's a little bit about us making ourselves feel better that we made them kind of like pay for it in some way, shape or form.

[00:12:12.930] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, I have a story about that where one of my children did punch a hole in the wall and we did not do what the advice that we're giving you here right now. Instead, he got a consequence and it was sort of there was some work that needed to be done, but in his mind it was completely punitive because he didn't have a strong sense of cause and effect or I did this and so now I need to do this. He still holds it kind of bitterly in his mind that we made him do this unreasonable yard work thing because he sees absolutely no connection. And to be honest, I forget the connection too. I just remember that he had to do this. And I will say it was not effective. There was no good, strong link between punching the hole in the wall and doing this yard project that needed to be done. So we just have to keep in mind our kids ability to even understand that cause and effect and I think it's just so much better. It's a very visual thing to repair something together versus giving a consequence that's just unrelated.

[00:13:17.370] - Melissa Corkum

Now, that being said, if you have an older child who maybe has a job and there's a way where they could contribute, like when you go to the store and you pick up the drywall patch or whatever materials and you can have them pay for that. Again, this depends on frustration tolerance. Like we have a child who could handle that. Like when he was regulated after the fact, we could say this is the way that we're going to handle this because we need this patch to fix this hole that you created. Again, we have a child too, where that would not have worked. So you have to kind of know where your child is in terms of their nervous system. And I would say, like we said before, if you have a child who is so dysregulated that they are really destructive, then there's like what we do again right here in the moment when the destructive things happen. But also we want to do everything we can from a

holistic perspective so that there's not so much dysregulation that you're dealing with these situations as often. And so we would encourage you to think both ways, kind of right in the moment, maybe the bandaid, but then also, like, the holistic thing.

[00:14:32.170] - Lisa Qualls

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[00:14:52.090] - Melissa Corkum

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[00:15:28.790] - Melissa Corkum

Our next question comes from Jenny. I'd love some ideas to help our kids with grief. Their grandpa, my dad, passed away in May. Things were rough, but okay until we had the celebration of life. It seems like the finalization of the celebration has really made it worse. They are 13, 14 and 16.

[00:15:45.890] - Lisa Qualls

Well, I think grief is a big thing. Unfortunately, it's part of life that we all have to deal with. For our kids often they have suffered many losses before they ever came to our families. They've lost their families, sometimes their cultures, sometimes their language, so many things. But all of our children have experienced loss in order to have joined our families. I think grief has a way of sort of linking together and our bodies remember what that grief feels like. And so the grieving that your kids are feeling and losing their grandfather is very real. And it may also be bringing up deeper grief from earlier years, from their childhood and other losses. So it's compounding. It's not just this grieving of your grandfather or their grandfather that they're experiencing. And you said that it seems worse now. And I know that a funeral while it's healing, it is a very final experience. And so I don't think it's super surprising. And worse is not necessarily bad. If their feelings are stronger right now of grief and sorrow, that is okay and not surprising. And I think it's important that we express to them that we understand that they're feeling these deep feelings, and that we are strong enough to handle their big feelings.

[00:17:17.000] - Lisa Qualls

Now, of course it's hard because we're also grieving at the same time sometimes, but we have to still be, as much as possible, they're safe haven that they can come to when they're experiencing grief. And they have to know that we're not afraid of their big feelings, their grief. That we're actually with them in it, that we are together in this loss and in this sorrow. As the parents, I think it's important for us to remember that people grieve differently. And I've talked about this before, but my husband and I, if you had asked us how we would grieve a significant loss, I would have predicted completely differently than how we actually did grieve when we went through the terrible loss of losing our daughter. In basic enneagram language, we know that some people are thinking dominant. They tend to be thinkers, some of us tend to be deep feelers and some of us are doers. And so that is going to be how we express and process grief is going to be impacted by our dominant, what we call center of intelligence. Some of us process grief through thinking. We might be journaling a lot, writing a lot. Some of us, we process grief through feeling. We might be the ones who are listening to music and letting those deep feelings wash over us. And some of us process things by doing. However your children need to process, we just want to support them in that. I know one of my daughters wanted to write messages on paper and tie them to balloons and release them. We had people who loved us who made paintings. So there are all these different ways that we grieve. And so there isn't a right way or a wrong way. It's just how we do it in the moment. And I don't think it's necessarily predictable. I think it's super important to keep talking about the person. Sometimes we think that our kids or we will not hurt as much if we don't talk about the person we've lost because we think we're digging up

these feelings. But the truth is we're feeling the sadness and the loss whether we're talking about it or not. So having opportunities to talk about the person we lost is important. Like from the very beginning, talking about maybe inside family jokes that this person used to do, or something that they loved to eat that was that was funny or different, or like our daughter just loved the hottest spiciest food ever. So whenever we have spicy food we'll mention how much Kalkidan loved the spiciest hot sauces and things. So by just kind of normalizing the fact that while this person physically is gone, their presence in our life is still there and it's still good and it's still beautiful. There are a couple of books that were really useful for our kids. One is *The Invisible String*. That's a really lovely book about being connected even when we're apart. And I think that's a good book for more than just grief, but for literally when we have to be away from a child, just knowing that our hearts are still connected. And then we were given the book *Tear Soup*, and that was very helpful for my daughter, who I think was about maybe twelve at the time. And she actually shared that book, she's now 19 and she just shared it with a close, close friend just recently. So I think that had a big impact on her. There are lots of ways to support our kids in their grief. And I think just knowing that grief is a very long journey, it comes and goes in waves and it's going to feel more acute for a while and then it does begin to heal slowly.

[00:20:58.520] - Lisa Qualls

And I think helping our kids know that we will not always feel as badly as we do right now. That time will help some of the worst feelings of grief. I had to say goodbye to one of my kids, and this is not at all like what we're talking about, a big loss, but one of my kids who is leaving the country for a year. And I was feeling so sad yesterday morning and I just was reminding myself what Dan Siegel says to tell our kids, feelings come and go. And the sadness I was feeling yesterday morning, that felt really pretty bad, that I knew in a couple of hours those intense feelings would not feel the same. So if we can remind our kids that there are going to be moments when they feel really deeply sad and then it might ease and then it might come back, but the feelings are going to come and go.

[00:21:47.600] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, this is a pretty personal question in our season because I also lost my dad at the end of April of this year and he was such a huge part of our family because my parents lived with us. And so a couple of my kids, actually, I think all of my kids, don't remember a time where they haven't lived with him. And so it was a profound loss for all of us. And I think three years ago I would have been looking to, in my words, solve the grief by making people happy if they were sad, or kind of getting through it quicker, or showing a strong front if they were sad, like showing that I was okay. And I have done so much work and I'm so thankful that I did all that work before he passed. I have tried to be more transparent with my own feelings of grief so that they feel open to feeling their own feelings. And I have stopped apologizing to people if I get teary talking about him because I feel like as a culture, people always apologize when they cry. And I'm like, Why do we do that? It's just an emotion. And we're not adept at, I think, holding space or not feeling super uncomfortable when someone else is having really big feelings. So I think just recognizing that. I think like Lisa, you were saying, grief comes in so many different forms and so kind of pausing when someone is struggling in our house to recognize maybe this is related to grief. That maybe they don't even know or they're not connecting to, because we know that sometimes grief is such a bodily experience. And I also think it's so important to remember that Dr. Purvis said sometimes sad kids look mad. And so we might be looking for a certain type of grief and our kids might be self protectively, emoting a feeling that doesn't seem to quite match with what we would call grief and sadness, and it might be exactly how they're processing that. And so I think having a ton of space to allow for that and I think even the language we talk to ourselves about it being worse, I think makes us want to try to make it be quicker or go away and not to minimize. Like, this is hard and it's hard because you're grieving and they're grieving, but kind of maybe even welcoming the fact that you all are having a grief experience. Because I think without that, grief does tend to come back and haunt us if it doesn't have a chance to be expressed and walked through rather than stuffed or ignored or passed by, because it does feel so incredibly hard. I think the other thing that I've been so intentional about for myself that then has helped my kids is making a lot of room for myself, caring for my nervous system a lot, recognizing the impact of grief on my own body. I have felt the grief very much in my body and so I have had to take care of that. Because otherwise I can't hold the space that's hard for my kids if I'm feeling like I have no margin in my own life. And so I think there are some things like Lisa mentioned, like books and things that we can directly do, and then we have to take care of ourselves in order to be able to walk them through

this season. That's really tricky.

[00:25:28.850] - Lisa Qualls

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[00:25:51.830] - Melissa Corkum

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[00:26:06.830] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:26:15.110] - Melissa Corkum

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