

[00:00:01.440] - 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...

[00:00:10.100] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:18.620] - Lisa Qualls

Our first question is this: We have four kids and have been parenting for 17 years. All of our kids have experienced continuous, severe, and extensive abuse from their biological parents prior to coming home. We are a Christian family and teach that when someone says, I love you, that they are also demonstrating love through their actions. We want our kids to know what love is and to seek out healthy relationships. All of our kids have wanted to know if their bio parents love them? I've struggled with this question because if they understand what love is and what it is not, they will have an easier time understanding healthy versus unhealthy relationship behavior. So I'm curious how other adoptive parents have answered this question, particularly when the abuse on the child has been extensive, continuous, severe, and unapologetic.

[00:01:08.520] - Melissa Corkum

It's a big question. It's an important one. It's a hard one. It's one that we've been thinking about for a little bit. I think where I want to start is in a previous life, I was a homeschooling mom who also taught biblical Greek and Latin. One of the things that always comes up is that in these other languages, there's so much more specific. There's basically one English word for love, and there's four or five Greek words for love, because there's different ways to think about love. There's brotherly love and there's loving actions and there's loving feelings, and there's the love that only God can have for us because it's so pure and perfect and unconditional. I think that part of the struggle in this question is we don't have enough ways to talk about love and the kinds of love. There's a difference between loving feelings and loving actions. There's a like a a bagillion different ways I think I could go on this question, but I think I just start there. Perhaps we just don't have enough words. We need so many more words to talk about love than just love.

[00:02:36.920] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, absolutely. I think generally speaking, most of us can say to our children, you were precious from the very moment that you were born, well, even before, but when you were born. Everything in my heart tells me that your first parents loved you, but for whatever reason, they were not able to take care of you. And it wasn't because they didn't love you, but they weren't able to take care of you and be the parents that you needed to keep you safe and help you grow to be a healthy person. And depending on the situation, we could say, You know, there were some things about your first parent's brain that just made it really hard for her to take good care of you. Or we can allude to circumstances with mental illness or with addiction, but in a way that doesn't bring any shame upon the parent or the child because we have to remember that our children, their parents are part of them, deep within them. And so we never want to speak in a negative way about our children's first parents because they will absorb it into themselves. I think we always want to remember that part of what our kids are asking is not, Did my first mom and first dad love me, but was I lovable?

[00:03:59.360] - Lisa Qualls

That is easy to answer because we absolutely believe that every one of our children was created by God and in his image, and they are worthy of love. And that they are precious, absolutely precious. That's an easy one, I think, for us to answer. It's the circumstances of their first parents and their inability, or, yeah, I would say inability to parent their child. It could be because of their own unhealthy attachments that they develop because of their parents. Some of this is very generational.

[00:04:32.420] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. Well, I think to that point, helping our kids develop compassion to know that someone may not have loved *their* parents well, maybe their parents didn't understand that they are also lovable. I love this idea of just reinforcing, regardless of your circumstances and regardless of how people treat you, you are lovable and you're worthy of love. You're worthy of love and lovable actions. I think this is

where the question alluded to, I think, the struggle of if we say, yes, your parents loved you, and then there's a connection to this behavior, does that set them up to maybe be in an unhealthy, maybe romantic relationship later in life? There's a distinction here that we can love a person and still set boundaries around our relationship and our own safety. Just like the county sets boundaries around how parents may treat their children, regardless of whether or not they have loving feelings for them. I think, again, we can love people. We can even recognize the things that maybe in between those terrible things that happened were genuinely loving actions, even loving a child to bring them into the world, even if they weren't equipped, that they were wanted on even that level. But to just talk about the brain and behaviors and boundaries and maybe not so closely link behaviors and relationship to the ability to love, if that makes sense.

[00:06:25.900] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, I think a stronger predictor of whether our children will be able to recognize healthy and unhealthy romantic partners or even friendships is what we're demonstrating in our families right now with them as they are growing. What are they witnessing? If you are married, what are they witnessing in your relationship? What are they witnessing in your relationship? And what are they seeing in the way that we treat one another in our family? And so I think those are stronger predictors. And when they get old enough that they're starting to have some romantic, even if it's young relationships, we can be talking a lot about respect and about boundaries and kindness and how someone puts the person they love, their needs above their own. These are the things we're talking about as they grow. And I think I wouldn't worry as much about the connection with the love and lack of care from their first parents.

[00:07:35.780] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. I think this is a totally tangential thing, but I do think it's all related because I do think because our kids have potential neglect, abuse, abandonment, for sure, they've been separated from a primary caregiver, they are at higher risk of lower self esteem, lack of felt safety, and they are at higher risk of being in unhealthy relationships in the future, I believe. I can't quote you on the stats, but experience would say. And so I think with that, I've been thinking a lot in our family around the way we did some things when our kids were younger, like, make sure you give grandma a hug before we say goodbye, and all of that stuff. Now that we're doing this again with a granddaughter, I've just been thinking a lot more about language and body autonomy. If you don't want someone to treat you that way, then it's okay to say that. That includes if you don't feel like you want to give everyone in the room a hug before we leave Christmas dinner or whatever the thing is. Secrets, right? Surprises versus secrets. I think all that language that we're using is helpful in setting our kids up for healthy relationships later. I think the language we use around people who are struggling, whether it's our kids' birth parents or other people we're encountering who have struggled with addiction or have ended up incarcerated, that we're using brain-based language for all of those situations, not just our kids' birth parents. I think we have a tendency, cultural tendency, to maybe subconsciously talk down about those people or if they had just done this, that or the other thing, or if they had just pulled themselves together.

[00:09:38.540] - Lisa Qualls

Drugs were more important to your mom than you were, those kinds of things.

[00:09:41.440] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. I think all of that. I think about our bonus family member who's incarcerated, and I see the systemic brokenness that contributed to his situation. It's brought me a lot of awareness and a lot more compassion to how we talk about why people act the way that they do. Even when it's horrific and we don't understand it and we think it's unthinkable. Some of that also comes from my own. I've been to such low places in this parenting journey, and I've acted in pretty horrific ways. I'm not the stereotypical, quote unquote, bad person. People don't look at me and think, man, I wonder why she doesn't pull herself together. I don't think so.

[00:10:36.900] - Lisa Qualls

I know, Melissa.

[00:10:39.080] - Melissa Corkum

I've said things to my kids that are terrible because I was dysregulated and it makes me realize it's like, if we don't have support and we don't have good care of our own nervous system, it does not take much for us to get to a really bad place. I have so much more compassion for parents that have been in terrible situations and made terrible decisions. But I a little bit get it.

[00:11:07.280] - Lisa Qualls

Right. I mean, you think of all the resources we have that other people don't have. And when you think about some of the things our kids, first parents faced that we will never, ever have to face, that we will never have to deal with, I think we need to have humility and compassion. And again, I just think we want to speak as positively about our kids' first parents as we possibly can. And yeah, we'll probably say the wrong things sometimes, but I just think we want to do our very best to communicate love to our kids. While at the same time, being honest and also in terms of their future modeling what a loving relationship looks like, and what is acceptable and what is not. And that they have the strength to say no, and that they can set boundaries in their relationships in the future.

[00:12:07.840] - Melissa Corkum

Many parents who deal with big behaviors are looking for practical solutions and may also be struggling with blocked care. Private coaching or group programs that require regular Zoom meetings place even more burden on your already busy lives.

[00:12:22.160] - Lisa Qualls

We've created a group coaching program that fits your busy schedule, goes where you go, and provides true transformation. Reclaim Compassion is like having experienced coaches and a support group in your back pocket accessible from a computer or mobile device when you need it and wherever you are. We provide a clear roadmap for transformation for families struggling with challenging behavior and possibly blocked care.

[00:12:48.460] - Melissa Corkum

In our program, you'll reclaim compassion for yourself, your child, and hope for your family. It's never too late to begin your family's transformation journey. For more information or to sign up, go to [ReclaimCompassion.com](http://ReclaimCompassion.com).

[00:13:08.440] - Melissa Corkum

Our next question is, has anyone dealt with psychosomatic pain or injury? This is the third year in a row that our 16 year old daughter has had a pain that requires a gamut of doctors and tests. In the end, we never find anything wrong, and then it goes away. I want to meet whatever need it is, but it's also costing us a fortune and she's missing out on other activities.

[00:13:31.880] - Lisa Qualls

Well, we have definitely dealt with this a lot with a couple of our kids who had a lot of somatic pain. Often they were things related to pain in the gut, in the stomach, in the intestines, headaches, things like that that we can't actually see with our eyes. It's really hard to know, is this real or is it not? I think one of the important things to remember is that for our child is real. We know so much about brain body connections now. We know that... Well, the body keeps the score, right? The book that so many of us have read that our bodies express a lot of what is going on in our nervous system, which we've spent so much time learning about the nervous system now. But I think one thing I see in this question that I really like is the mom says, I want to meet whatever need it is. That's a big part of it is being aware that there is a need that is longing to be met in some way. You're already on the right track, I think. But yeah, it is costing you a fortune. Not only is your daughter missing out on things, but I'm guessing you are and your family is. This is hard for the whole family.

[00:14:51.060] - Melissa Corkum

The short answer is yes. I think a lot of our families have kids that have what we might call psychosomatic pain or injury. One thing I noticed in the question, it says this is the third year in a row. And so I'm wondering if it happens around the same time every year. And traumaversaries are a thing. Like Lisa, you just mentioned, the body keeps the score. Something really big and stressful may have happened that her body is remembering at this season, and it may be kicking up a somatic experience

in her body that is creating pain or illness or whatever the symptoms are. In our new book, we talk about how emotional and physical pain register in the same part of the brain. It makes me curious about that. Is there something emotionally painful that is also lighting up that part in her brain that is also making her feel like she's in actual physical pain when maybe it is more psychosomatic? That just validates that there's a thing and we can stay curious about it. Then there's this bigger question of, but practically, how do we deal with it?

[00:16:08.360] - Melissa Corkum

And Lisa, you talked about the need behind the behavior. Felt safety or a lack of felt safety is the need behind all, quote unquote, maladaptive behaviors. And there's lots of reasons for why we could be getting cues in our nervous system that trigger that stress response and so throw us out of felt safety. But I think regulating from a felt safety perspective and thinking about our polyvagal nerve and how that nerve, in response to how we're feeling emotionally, impacts so much of our physical body, everything from digestion to sleep, to heart rate to our ears and our sensory input. And so I think the practical piece is, one, has your daughter done any body work that therapy that's intention is to help calm the stress response, release tension and trauma. So those would be things like trauma release exercise or TRE, the safe and sound protocol or SSP, somatic experiencing, reflex integration type things, all things that none of them require words or us having to remember the traumatic experience or even know what it is, but all things that are completely somatic that help release this from our bodies. We have podcasts on a lot of those things that I just mentioned.

[00:17:47.980] - Melissa Corkum

Then the other thing is when our daughter was really struggling with this, we simultaneously got connected to essential oils. I know there's a lot of mixed feelings about that, and people fall... It's pretty like... What's the word? You either love them or you hate them. But they were so helpful to us because I've seen enough of the science to believe that they really do work and they're safe. And so that gave us a starting place because I know that our teenage daughter felt like if I wasn't doing something for her, that I wasn't taking her seriously and I didn't love her. And so it gave us a starting place to say, Hey, do you have a headache or do you have a stomach ache? Here's an oil for that. So I believe you and I'm caring for you with something that I would use myself and that I believe in. And so let's start there. And then if it requires further medical attention, which we've done, we've sat in the ER for psychosomatic stuff before, but it gives us a starting place. We also have an episode on that. We'll link to all of those in the show notes. But those are some practical things, I think, to help mitigate some of that.

[00:18:50.720] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah. And for our part as parents, I think it is an opportunity to really increase the nurture for our kids. And I know sometimes it's easy to feel manipulated. Like, Oh, she's just saying she has a stomach ache because she wants my attention. Well, maybe she is. Maybe she's not, but maybe she is. And so the answer then is, Well, why is she needing this attention right now? And how is she wanting me to give it to her? And again, we're looking, what is that deep need? That need for felt safety. Is it felt safety in her relationships, relationship with me, maybe, or felt safety in her environment? What is it that she's yearning for? And there is a school of thought, not connected parenting, that would say, Fine, call her bluff. Tell her she can't get off the sofa for the next 24 hours or whatever. And they look at it as the child trying to manipulate. I don't think that's the way to look at it. I know how frustrating it is sometimes. I really do. But look for that need, see how you can meet it. It doesn't feel like an opportunity, but in a way, your daughter is asking, she's inviting you into meeting a need, and hopefully you can do it in a connected way to the very best of your ability. I'm sorry about all the money you're spending that probably feels super frustrating, and I do appreciate that.

[00:20:28.140] - Lisa Qualls

Our last question today is, Is your new book *Reclaim Compassion* helpful for other caregivers who interact with my child?

[00:20:36.880] - Melissa Corkum

I mean, the short answer is yes.

[00:20:38.730] - Lisa Qualls  
Yes, it's great.

[00:20:41.020] - Melissa Corkum  
It's good for everyone. It's good for everyone who's... Everybody should read it. Yeah, it's good for everyone, especially if they're feeling burnt out or have a bit of compassion fatigue. We do get questions around the difference between compassion fatigue and blocked care and blocked care in other relationships. Can the siblings have blocked care towards a child? Can a teacher have blocked care towards a child? And we didn't coin the term, so take this all with a grain of salt. But it seems to us.

[00:21:14.120] - Lisa Qualls  
And remember that we are still learning as well.

[00:21:17.350] - Melissa Corkum  
Yes. But it seems to us that the way that it's described by Baylin and Hughes, is that it's specific to an attachment relationship. And we think that they brought attention to it because their work focuses on using attachment-based parenting and therapy to help our kids find a place of healing. And like Dr. Purvis said, what's broken in relationship has to heal in relationship. And so in the idea of our kids needing a relationship and connection and attachment rich relationship and environment to restore that sense of felt safety, that it's imperative that the attachment figure and the primary caregiver for that child be open and available for that level of attachment relationship. And so we think that puts blocked care specifically on a slightly different plane than compassion, fatigue, or burnout. It's a specific type of compassion fatigue, or burnout.

[00:22:32.400] - Lisa Qualls  
We actually had a long conversation about this because we know that other kinds of caregivers can get really burned out and can really struggle relationally with a child who's difficult to, say, teach for a teacher, or to care for in a daycare. But there is a difference in those relationships because the primary caregiver, the attachment figure, we are required to provide care for a child, care that is not going to end at 5 PM, care that is not going to end when school gets out in June. It's a very different experience to be a parent to a child who has experienced trauma and abuse and neglect and has developed a defensive posture that we call blocked trust to their caregiver. It's a very different experience. And so as far as we understand it right now, we do think blocked care is specific to a primary attachment figure. That being said, everything in *Reclaim Compassion* about overcoming blocked care can help someone overcome compassion fatigue as well.

[00:23:50.560] - Melissa Corkum  
Yeah, for sure. So because of that, and even some of the reasons behind it resonate, taking the shame out, all of that matters for all of the caregiving relationships. The third part of the book, we talk about how to overcome blocked care. And because blocked care is a type of compassion, fatigue, or burnout, all of the things that we talk about in that section will also help someone overcome compassion fatigue, or burnout. Short answer is yes, everyone should read the book.

[00:24:28.870] - Lisa Qualls  
Everyone should read the book. I was just going to piggyback on that, that part three is so much about caring for your nervous system to give you the capacity to have an openness toward your child and the ability to connect in the ways our kids need. The whole book is going to help people, but that part three is going to be very similar for all kinds of caregivers, whether they're the parent or not.

[00:24:54.980] - Melissa Corkum  
Yeah. And so you can find that book for sure on Amazon and hopefully soon wherever books are sold. The full title is *Reclaim Compassion: the Adoptive Parents Guide to Overcoming Blocked Care with Neuroscience and Faith*. But like we said, it could be the teacher's guide, the therapist's guide, the caregiver's guide, the daycare providers' guide. We encourage you all to pass it on to anyone who is caregiving and struggling.

[00:25:27.520] - Lisa Qualls

I'm going to add one more thing. If you read *Reclaim Compassion* and it speaks to you and it helps you, please take a moment to hop into Amazon, especially if you purchased it on Amazon, and leave a short review, even a couple of words, it truly helps the book. Amazon pays attention to this, and well, their algorithms do. And it really helps the book be shown to more people who are looking for the help that we all need as adoptive parents and foster parents.

[00:25:58.760] - Melissa Corkum

So if you would like us to answer one of your questions on a future MailBag episode, we invite you to go to the show notes of this episode, [theadoptionconnection.com/215](http://theadoptionconnection.com/215). There is a little widget there that will allow you to record your question. We love hearing them in your voice. We think it also adds interest for the listeners, for you, the listeners, and we look forward to hearing from you.

[00:26:27.180] - Melissa Corkum

Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. Our new Instagram handle is [@postadoptionresources](https://www.instagram.com/postadoptionresources). For better yet, join our free Facebook community at the [theadoptionconnection.com/Facebook](http://theadoptionconnection.com/Facebook).

[00:26:42.100] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:26:50.280] - Melissa Corkum

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