

[00:00:00.000] - Lisa C. 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.

[00:00:09.950] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:17.980] - Lisa C. Qualls

Welcome to this month's mail bag episode where we answer your questions. Our first question is from Dana.

[00:00:25.370] - Dana

My name is Dana and my husband and I are living in Canada and we're currently working on a waiting list to adopt. We are open to children under six, sibling pairs, and children with various degrees of substance exposure. What I'm finding at this point is just we are very excited and wanting to make sure we're as prepared as we can be. And so I find myself listening to a lot of resources, trying to educate myself on a lot of different situations, as well as making sure that my husband and I are doing our own work to ensure that we're ready to provide the best home we can. I am starting to find a bit overwhelming to prepare for all of the different situations that may arrive at our doorstep. And so I was just wondering if you had any suggestions as to what balance you would suggest in regards to providing education for ourselves as well as doing our own work and making sure that we're also taking time to live our lives.

[00:01:17.810] - Melissa Corkum

Well, first of all, Dana, I think it's great that you're thinking ahead and doing so much prep work. I certainly didn't even know to do all that prep work when we were preparing for our adoptions. I think what I heard you say in all of that really is, how do we balance all that we feel like we need to do before we get a placement? And how do we also keep living our lives and not be completely consumed? Something that you mentioned, you and your husband doing your own work is probably honestly what I prioritize because you're right. There are a million different scenarios that we could prepare for, and we can't be prepared for them all. But I think when we are really anchored well in our own nervous systems, we talk so much about that even in preventing blocked care, then that gives us the ability to stay in our thinking brain, in our creative brain for whatever circumstance comes along. And I would say that's probably more important than trying to prepare for every specific scenario.

[00:02:23.030] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah. And I would add to that this is an opportunity to really not only nurture yourselves and care for your nervous systems, but nurture your marriage, and just remember that when you get this placement, this child, these children, time for each other is going to be much harder to find. No matter how intentional you are, depending on the needs of your kids, it can be hard to find people to take care of them. I would do the things that you think you want to do. If you're thinking, Well, our fifth anniversary is next summer, so next summer we should go on a special trip, maybe you should do it sooner because who knows what the needs of your kids are going to be and whether you're actually going to be able to take that trip. Or if you have family that you are really wanting to visit or things, I would do those things and just prepare to clear your calendar and really give a lot of space for adjusting to life with new children. Make time for the things that you're thinking you want to do in the next year or even two.

[00:03:39.680] - Lisa C. Qualls

Also, there are a lot of practical things you can prepare to in your home and in your life. We did two episodes quite a while back. Episode 41 is mentally preparing basically for adopting and fostering. And episode 42, which is more about the practical aspects like decluttering your home and just all these different kinds of things. You might want to go back and listen to those two episodes. I happen to think they're really good and they're really packed with great ideas of things you can do while you're waiting and preparing. We'll have the links for both Episode 41 and 42 in the show notes of today's episode.

[00:04:13.300] - Melissa Corkum
Our next question comes from Glynda.

[00:04:15.590] - Glenda
Hi, Melissa and Lisa. I have a question about our 19-year-old daughter. She no longer lives at home. They're a really hard last few years and she ditches us regularly. She'll ditch us for days, weeks, sometimes even months. We won't really hear from her at all, don't see her really aren't a part of her life. Explain to us how she does that to us and yet she can jump into the deep end with people that she's known for five minutes, people that she meets at the bar, people that she meets on social media, literally strangers. She dumps right in, they become her ride or die. They're her everything, her top priority. She just goes all in with them. She knows nothing about them, and yet we're the people who have stood alongside her all this time through everything. Yet in our view, we get treated so horribly, we get dismissed by her, ignored, rejected, and yet these virtual strangers become her everything. They don't typically last very long. Most people don't stick around with her for more than two or three months, but nonetheless, she keeps diving right in with them and they just take over everything. Please help us make some sense of this. It's super hurtful, frustrating, disappointing. You understand. Thank you so much for your help. I look forward to getting some insight.

[00:05:30.560] - Lisa C. Qualls
Glenda, I just want to take a moment to pause and acknowledge how painful this is. It is also very, very common. I'm guessing that many people listening right now are thinking, Yes, this is what I'm experiencing. Why does my child choose these other people over me when I'm the one who's been here and I'm the one who's loved as faithfully as I can? I just want to say yes. I understand how painful that is. I think it really comes down to, with many of our kids, that because of all the broken attachments and loss in their lives, their hearts are always yearning for love. They're yearning to be filled. I think there's something that happens when they make a connection with somebody who has not parented them, who's never had to do the hard things, none of the guidance or boundaries or limits or any of those things that we have to do as parents, and they meet somebody who they think is going to pour that love in and fill some of that deep, empty well that they have. They very quickly connect. It's almost like they're trying to form an attachment. They very quickly connect, and often they'll just take and take and take and take, and then the person burns out and separates from them. Then they go through this big loss again because they feel like they've lost somebody who loved them.

[00:06:49.310] - Lisa C. Qualls
I have just found in my own life that I try to take every opportunity to be faithful, in loving to the best of my ability and to the degree to which my child will receive it. If my child is receiving care, and we're talking teens and young adults here, if my child is choosing to receive love, care, attention, affection from someone else, I'm still the safe haven that he or she can come back to. I'm still here. I'm still going to be faithful. I'm going to be solid. When everybody else fades away or a real crisis happens or a holiday comes around and all those people who've acted like family aren't really family, we're still here. We're still here to faithfully love and be family to our kids.

[00:07:49.180] - Melissa Corkum
I also know that it stinks to be treated that way. It's not an unusual situation, and so I don't know if that helps you, Glenda, on any level to know that you're not alone in this. I know for me, that helps me understand, Oh, it's probably not about me. This is actually a fairly typical behavior, I would say, among young adults who have early adversity, who have attachment challenges. I don't know what age your daughter came into your family, but I would say it's especially prevalent in situations where kids came to their adoptive families as older children. I think that a lot of times our kids, and this was explained to us by our therapists when we were going through a similar situation, that a lot of times our kids need a concrete scapegoat to place a lot of the hurt that they experienced in their childhood that they may not have a concrete place to put that on. In our case, our kids changed countries when they came into our family. They don't have a lot of living relatives, and so there's no concrete person to put place blame on for all of their adverse experiences and their hurts and their grief, and we're a safe place to do that.

[00:09:10.130] - Melissa Corkum

So we often... I think we collectively, as adoptive parents, often become the scapegoat for a lot of hurt, and then that allows our kids to go and look for the best in other relationships, which is incredibly hurtful. I also think there's a honeymoon period to every relationship almost. I know there are honeymoon periods in a lot of our adoptions. You mentioned that these were short-lived relationships, and so it's like she's hopping from honeymoon to honeymoon with all of these people. And like Lisa said, you're the one who's consistent. We've experienced with our kids, as they've gotten older, they've gotten a little bit more life under their belts, that they do start to appreciate the consistency and the stability that we offer when they've been chasing this elusive, belonging, feelings of love, affection, all of those things and lots of other places that they do appreciate this consistency, the fact that we were true to ourselves as parents. And I think the other part I would add to that, I wish I had known more about this when we were going through this, but all this work that we've done around blocked care, I think, also has shown me that it's hard to be in this scapegoat position, the one who's getting the scraps of our kids' attention and affection, and maybe sometimes even worse than that.

[00:10:48.460] - Melissa Corkum

The only way I know how to not fall into blocked care for that, and I did with some of our kids who rejected us, I got to the point where I was like, Fine. You reject us, we reject you. We have to, taking care of our own nervous systems really well when we're in this cycle and this rejection with our kids in order to remain the safe haven that they're going to need at some point. And it probably won't come with some big grand apology or how they've been wrong all these years. They might just come sliding back in and hoping to be included like everyone else or like they have been in the past. And you might feel like, I don't know if I'm ready to have you back. And so I think our jobs as parents to the best of our ability, I think, for the sake of kids who are acting this way because of no fault of their own, because of their own experiences, need us to do our work so that whenever they do are ready for connection, that we are ready to accept their bid for connection and not react out of that blocked care space, which is like, Oh, now you want to connect, which is so easy as human beings to fall into.

[00:12:19.600] - Lisa C. Qualls

Is your adoption journey turning out differently than you imagined? You had so much love to give, but now you feel ashamed and bewildered by your lack of compassion. You may be experiencing blocked care, a self-protective mechanism in your nervous system that makes it difficult to connect with your child and maintain compassion. When this happens, it's like your heart seems to have left the relationship. But the good news is you are not a bad parent. You can heal from blocked care and compassion can be rekindled in your heart.

[00:12:52.310] - Melissa Corkum

This episode is sponsored by our book, *Reclaim Compassion: The Adoptive Parents Guide to Overcoming Blocked Care with Neuroscience and Faith*. This practical and powerful guide offers a simple step-by-step process for reclaiming compassion for your child and yourself. Included in the book is a blocked care assessment, which is now free to you, our listeners. You can take the assessment at reclaimcompassion.com/assessment.

[00:13:25.430] - Lisa C. Qualls

This question comes from Claire.

[00:13:27.430] - Claire

How do I help my spouse with blocked care or compassion fatigue?

[00:13:32.250] - Lisa C. Qualls

Claire, first of all, I want to say that I really appreciate you asking this question because I think it's a question that many, many of our listeners have. If you've been listening to the podcast and you've been hearing us talk about blocked care, or if you have read *Reclaim Compassion* or something, you can recognize the signs of it in yourself, in your spouse. You're potentially quite aware of it, whereas your spouse may not have ever even heard of blocked care. They have no frame of reference. They may just know that they feel crummy as a parent and they really don't want to be doing it anymore and it feels too hard and all of those things. I guess the first thing to ask is, are you also in blocked

care? Are you experiencing blocked care and so you're recognizing it in your spouse? Because if that's the case, then you can come to it from a place of, Wow, I am really seeing this in myself, and I wonder if you'd like to read this book with me, if we should start doing some of the things recommended in this book to care for our nervous systems together.

[00:14:38.960] - Lisa C. Qualls

If you are not in blocked care and you're in a pretty healthy space, or if you were and you're working your way out of it back to a healthy space, then I think one of the best things you can do is just maybe make a lot of gentle mentioning of things. Because the one thing we do know is that when people are in blocked care and even when they don't know what it is, they often just feel a lot of shame because they feel like the worst father in the world or the worst mother in the world. We don't really want to put a label on our spouse and say, Hey, I think you're in blocked care. But maybe just to introduce it through normal conversation and then make lots of space for them to begin caring for their nervous system.

[00:15:21.840] - Melissa Corkum

By personality, neither my husband or I do well when someone tells us what we should be doing, even if it's helpful, even if we can come back around months or years later and be like, Oh, yeah, I probably should have done that thing. I think, first of all, is validating what you see his experience to be, even if it's not yours, right? So, man, it must feel really crappy to be treated by the kids that way, or That was probably a really hard day. And again, the language that you use is going to depend on whether or not you're also in blocked care, if you have been in blocked care. I think if you are in a good space, the way that would work in our marriage the best, I think, is to just give space and suggestions for nervous system care. Like, for my husband, it would be like me saying, You know what? Why don't you take this weekend and go fishing? Like giving him permission to go and take breaks. Or would it be helpful if I just took the kids out of the house for the day so you could have some quiet?

[00:16:21.980] - Melissa Corkum

And again, it depends on how your husband's nervous system is fed. But my husband's an introvert, and he doesn't like the chaos and the loud, and he's got auditory sensitivities. Those are the things that I know would fill up his soul. But I think giving language to it in some way without being like, Hey, dude, I think you're in blocked care. That might be too direct in your marriage, but I think saying like, Hey, I've been reading about some things, and it makes me wonder if this thing you or we are feeling about parenting right now is blocked care. And if you don't have the book, even if you're not in blocked care, maybe grabbing it so that you can see what the ideas are so that you could, again, encourage him towards the nervous system care things. Probably, no husband's going to be like, No, I'm out for a weekend by myself. So if you're encouraging the types of nervous system care that we talk about in the book, then you might be able to build enough margin in him to then have an even more constructive conversation.

[00:17:26.010] - Lisa C. Qualls

This question brought to mind something that we did, and I was thinking it was probably like 13 or 14 years ago, and we were working with this phenomenal therapist. It was before we knew about blocked care, before we had that language. But she was recognizing this huge degree of burnout in my husband, Russ. He was so depleted because he was trying to support us, take care of us. He had a very high-pressure career that was getting quite messed up because things were so difficult at home that I often had to call him home, and we weren't sleeping and all these things. He was very, very burned out. She recommended to us that he take a 24-hour break every... I can't remember how often now. I'd have to go back and read my own blog, but she wanted him to take breaks. I was like, I don't think I can handle him being gone anymore than he already is. I feel like we're not safe. Things are very tumultuous. I just was overwhelmed by the thought of it. We did a lot of thinking, and we finally came up with a way that worked for us.

[00:18:35.050] - Lisa C. Qualls

I'll just share it in case it puts a light bulb on for anybody else. Our kids were young enough that they went to the most challenging children went to bed on the early end. What we would do is he would come home from work, we'd have dinner. He always put the kids to bed. For decades, he put the kids

to bed. He would go through the normal nighttime routine and put them to bed. Then once they were in bed, he would leave. He would go out in the woods and there was a place he could go and he would take no technology with him. Of course, he did have his phone, but there was not really great service there. It was more for emergencies. He'd take his Bible and a book and things like that. Then he would go there and spend the night. When the kids got up in the morning, they were used to him working long hours, so they just assumed he'd already left for work. I did not say anything. If they'd ask, I'd say, Oh, yeah, dad's not here. He'd leave, everybody would get up in the morning. It would be like dad was just at work, and then he'd be home by dinner.

[00:19:36.090] - Lisa C. Qualls

It really did not rock the kids' world at all, and it really worked well for me. It brought my anxiety down about him being gone, but it was incredibly restorative for him. I think it speaks to the fact that if our partner is really struggling, we may have to get really creative to help them. But we want to be as loving as we can and see that they have a need that needs to be met in order to help them be the parents that they want to be. Our last question today comes from Danielle.

[00:20:10.900] - Danielle

How do you help a kid who needs a lot of choice and control in order to feel safe, use that control wisely? I have a kiddo with suspected FASD who really struggles to learn from natural consequences. He will make the same mistakes in the same situation over and over and over again. However, this is also a child with very high anxiety, and that anxiety is helped by allowing him to make choices. However, often the choices that he makes are not really beneficial to him, and he ends up suffering for those choices, but then going back into the same situation and making the same choice he made in the first place. What guidance can you give about how to set him up for more success and to help him grow in his decision making skills when he doesn't seem to remember the cost of certain decisions from event to event?

[00:21:09.880] - Melissa Corkum

I super appreciate this question because I feel like she's living my life. We also have a child who was exposed prenatally. Yeah, but his ability to learn from his choices is for sure one of the parts of his brain that's impaired. There's a couple of things. One is, I think even when our kids don't learn from their mistakes or their choices in the way that we think they should, as in, Man, I would only need to make that mistake once or maybe twice, and then I would figure out, don't make that choice again. Our kids are capable of learning, but it just takes way more repetition than we think. In low stake situations, we are currently letting our son make a lot of mistakes in order to have that experience, because not only does he not learn from those choices like we would expect him to, he also doesn't seem to learn unless he lives through those choices. And so what that leaves us with is exactly what Danielle is alluding to, which is he has to live through bad choices more times than the average person, which watching as a parent is really painful, right?

[00:22:39.590] - Melissa Corkum

And so I would say in low stake circumstances, I would just keep giving the choices and keep letting him go through that experience, but with some debriefing. So you may also want to brainstorm what are some ways that we can mark how this choice went in the past. Our son, after our road trip this summer, is really into journaling. And so it might be like encouraging your child to journal after a poor choice, even if it's just not like a super emotional journaling, but just like a record of like, Hey, today I had these choices, and this is the choice I made. And afterwards I felt satisfied, dissatisfied, happy, sad, mad, or whatever. And you might need multiple choice there. And so you can use that if everyone's regulated when you're going to make the choice again and he's getting ready to make the same choice, you might want to say, Okay, let's just talk that through. What might happen if you make that choice? Or, Have you ever made that choice before? Or, How did it go for you? Things like that. I do think giving choices is helpful, and depending on the age of your child, you may want to provide choices that both have pretty decent outcomes like, Do you want ham or turkey for lunch? If you know that he likes both of those. Try to give the choices in the low stakes arena category as much as possible so that you can maybe direct the situation in higher stakes circumstances more, but you're giving choices in other places, if that makes sense.

[00:24:20.420] - Lisa C. Qualls

If you'd like to submit a question for a future episode, we'd love to hear your voice. It's so great to actually get a sense of who you are and your question. You can find the button for recording your question in the show notes for today's episode, which you'll find at theadoptionconnection.com/227.

[00:24:39.560] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:24:55.190] - Lisa C. Qualls

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

[00:25:03.980] - Melissa Corkum

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