

[00:00:00.500] - Melissa Corkum

Is your parenting journey turning out differently than you imagined? It's never too late to begin your family's transformation journey.

[00:00:10.100] - Lisa C. Qualls

Welcome to the Adoptionwise Podcast, formerly the Adoption Connection Podcast, where you'll rediscover the confident and connected parent you long to be. I'm Lisa C. Qualls.

[00:00:21.860] - Melissa Corkum

And this is Melissa Corkum. Don't worry, we get it, and we're here for you. Well, hello, friends. Welcome to a new episode here at the podcast.

[00:00:32.030] - Lisa C. Qualls

We're so excited to share on the podcast something you may have noticed if you are in our big Facebook group or you follow us on social media, but we have changed our name to Adoptionwise. We hope you love it as much as we do. In case you're wondering why we would change our name from the Adoption Connection to Adoptionwise, there's a very simple explanation. It turns out that there is an adoption agency in California named the Adoption Connection. From time to time, we get emails from people searching for their adoption records or inquiring about adoption. And in order to just keep everything clear and easy for everybody, we have made the decision to change our name to something new. And that's something new is Adoptionwise.

[00:01:17.950] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. So as it turns out, the process of rebranding is exactly that process. So we will submit a new podcast name to Apple will be the Adoptionwise podcast. We'll be switching the website over if it's not switched over already. You'll see changes on social media. Our emails will be changing all of those things. But it will be a process because each of those things takes time. We have zero control over when, for instance, Apple Podcast updates their information. But we wanted to mark the change with this episode, even if your podcast player takes a couple days or a week to catch up in case you notice the graphic has changed or the name has changed and you're like, What happened? So here we are. We are officially Adoptionwise.

[00:02:11.460] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yes. And we are the same people doing the same work, just a new name and a new website. And actually it's exciting.

[00:02:17.240] - Melissa Corkum

We are the same people, and we're doing a lot of the same things. But over the years, this started five years ago, we have honed in and focused in on the best ways that we can help adoptive families, and in some ways, even families beyond the scope of foster care and adoption. And earlier this year, we released our book *Reclaim Compassion: The Adoptive Parents Guide to Overcoming Blocked Care with Neuroscience and Faith*. We've become known for providing resources for preventing and overcoming blocked care. We also now have a group curriculum for agencies called *Foundations for Preventing and Overcoming Blocked Care* that will probably primarily be used in adoption and foster care spaces, but we did make it not as adoption-specific. There also isn't a faith element, so it's appropriate for agencies. It's appropriate for all mental health workers. And so with that, we've slowly been on this journey of really focusing in on our messaging, how we're serving families, our coaching program, all of that to really have this theme of reclaiming compassion and this idea of getting the word out about blocked care and what it is and how it happens and how to overcome it and all of those things. So the focus of the podcast will also slowly be shifting to really have a theme of reclaim compassion running through it. And that will fall in line with how we've already redesigned the website and the coaching program and all of those things.

[00:03:59.850] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yes. And in our conversations about the podcast, we were thinking about the fact that we've been guests on many people's podcasts, especially with the release of the book *Reclaim Compassion*, where we have talked about what blocked care is and what are the signs of blocked care and how do

people overcome blocked care and how do we help parents, how do we prevent it in ourselves? But we realized we have never done an episode right here on our own podcast explaining those very things.

[00:04:27.460] - Melissa Corkum

That's the second reason this is the most exciting episode because we get to talk about the thing that we're so good at talking about that we talk about all the time and that we haven't given space right here on our own show. We are going to talk about what blocked care is, how it happens. We're going to answer the question, Can a Parent Recover? And we'll talk a little bit about the process of overcoming blocked care.

[00:04:53.750] - Lisa C. Qualls

So to start us off, I want to take a minute and just talk about why we are even interested in this in the first place. What got us interested in blocked care? And what we tell people is we were interested in it and talking about it before we even knew it had a name. And way back, we were teaching workshops on... What did we call it? Let me think of it. Trampled Heart. The Trampled Heart. What if your heart feels trampled? Yes. It was like we were speaking about the fact that there can be this deep, deep discouragement that parents feel, and that sometimes that discouragement becomes so great that parents' hearts just leave the relationship. They're still taking care of their kids, but something happens where just emotionally and their hope and everything just begins to evaporate and leave, and they're left with a relationship with their child that is not very fulfilling and they can grow super, super discouraged. In all of our discussions about that and even in all our teaching about it, we did not know it had a name. And then one day, Melissa called me. She was reading the book, *Brain-based Parenting* by Jonathan Baylin and Daniel Hughes. She said, Lisa, listen to this. She read me this little part of the book, and they talked about something called Blocked Care. She said, It has a name. I will tell you the truth, I got very choked up and tearful because if it had a name, it meant it was real. It meant that I wasn't the only one who felt this way. And that there was an explanation for what I and so many other parents were experiencing.

[00:06:34.750] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. And we know that when we name something, it helps us process it better. It helps us communicate better. Dan Siegel tells us, we name it to tame it. So in our book, *Reclaim Compassion*, we define block care as a self-protective mechanism in the nervous system activated by excessive stress. I don't know about you, but I don't know anything about that. But anyway, this excessive stress suppresses the higher brain functions that we need for caregiving, which causes our nervous system to develop a defensive stance towards our child or children.

[00:07:15.530] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah. As we studied this, we really did a lot of reading and discussing and talking with lots of parents, and we identified 10 signs of blocked care. As I read through these 10 signs, just think about which ones you identify with. You can go back later and take an assessment, a free assessment on our website, adoptionwise.org/assessment. You don't have to remember all of these right now. Just listen as I read. You are too caught up in coping with your child's behavior to be curious about the meaning behind it. You feel defensive and guard yourself from rejection. You feel burned out, chronically overwhelmed, and fatigued. You feel resentment toward one or more of your children or your situation as a whole. You feel irritable with other family and friends. You isolate yourself. You become cynical about helpful ideas. You feel you've lost compassion, which leads to shame. You experience a crisis of faith or a challenge of a personal belief system. Lastly, you don't feel real pleasure in parenting.

[00:08:33.340] - Melissa Corkum

Often when we are teaching workshops and we read the signs, we see the relief flood over parents' faces when they realize, Oh, there's a reason why I've been acting this way, and I'm not a terrible person. We hear that all the time. I'm so glad. I'm so relieved to know I'm not just a bad parent. I think the other thing to iterate over and over again, and we say this so often is, this is a self-protective mechanism that's happening subconsciously in your nervous system. And so what that means is you are experiencing these signs of blocked care, and you don't have to have all of them to be in blocked

care. So the assessment will help you understand better where you fall on the blocked care spectrum. But this is not your fault. This does not make you a bad parent. Your nervous system is doing this without your permission. Now, that doesn't mean that we can't intentionally help our nervous systems overcome that, and we'll get there. But I think it's really important for, if you're listening and resonating with these signs to hear over and over again, You're a good parent doing good work. This isn't a character flaw.

[00:09:54.290] - Lisa C. Qualls

Right. Because I think we are so hard on ourselves, and especially those of us who maybe chose to become foster or adoptive parents. It's like we chose this, right? What is the matter with me? Why has it gone this way? Why do I feel like I'm not even myself anymore? I mean, so many moms have said to me, I don't recognize myself anymore. This is not the mom I ever dreamed I would be. Our message is very hopeful because you can find your way back to being the parent that you have been in the past or the parent that you long to be.

[00:10:28.900] - 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.

[00:10:43.620] - Lisa C. 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.

[00:11:09.880] - 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.

[00:11:25.570] - Melissa Corkum

In the book, we talk about four different types of blocked care. And so if we go back to the definition, it's caused by excessive stress in the nervous system. And when we very first started talking about blocked care, we focused a lot on this cycle of what we call what Baylin and Hughes, named blocked trust, which happens in our kids when they've been raised in an environment where they haven't gotten the care and empathy that they've needed or that they've had excessive stress in their nervous system because of the process of changing primary caregivers once or twice or more. But now, especially in a post-COVID era and in a world that seems to just have more and more stressors in it, we're talking more and more about excessive stress in general. Those excessive stresses could be big behaviors and parenting a child with a lot of needs who is reacting to their early experiences. It could be loss of a job, a sickness. It could be COVID. We were stuck in our houses with our kids, feeling a little bit maybe scared, uncertain with not nearly enough tools for regulation, education. How many of you turned into accidental homeschool parents? So many different things. It could be a loss of a job. I don't think we need help naming stresses. If you have what you would name as excessive stress in your house or in your family situation, or you can feel it in your body, then you're at a higher risk of developing blocked care.

[00:13:13.580] - Melissa Corkum

So if you're listening, you might be wondering, how does a parent recover? How do you recover? How do you come back to being the parent that you long to be? And the good news is we've actually created a really clear pathway for parents, and we walk parents through this pathway of recovery. It includes really a good understanding of the science of the nervous system. I mean, we keep it simple. Nobody needs to be a neuroscientist here, but a good understanding of the nervous system and why it is that our nervous system is responding the way it is. Then once we understand that, how do we address the needs? How do we help our nervous system deep within ourselves to feel deeply safe, or

as we say, to cue safety to our nervous system so that we can begin to recover and we can regain this compassion? I'll explain it in the most simplest way, and Melissa can flesh it out however she wants. But when we talk about the nervous system, we talk about our nervous system is taking in a lot of information very, very rapidly all the time. Some of that information comes from within us, so within our bodies and our minds. Some comes from without us, it's cues in our environment. Some comes from between us and other people. There's inside, outside, and between. Those are the three pathways that our nervous system uses to take in information. Our nervous system is always trying to determine, Am I safe or am I not? It's very protective of us. And so when we think about it that way, we try to focus on literally those three different pathways and how we can begin to help ourselves, our nervous system, feel safe both within, without, and in between.

[00:15:22.250] - Melissa Corkum

Our nervous system is working, Deb Dana says, in service of our survival, right? We were designed to make sure that we survive. And so our nervous system is using all that data to make decisions about am I safe or not safe? And then there's behaviors that come from that, both that we can see on the outside and then some that we don't even see, like physiological changes. It's like when you get a little scared of something, if there's a big bang like you know that your heart starts beating faster. That's all because your nervous system took in information faster than you could really think and created a response in your system that historically has been good for survival. When we're under excessive stress, our nervous system is getting more cues that we're not really safe, and it's reacting in that way. And one of those results is blocked care. We talk to parents a lot about how can we root and anchor our nervous system in the sense of felt safety, not so that it never tells us we're not safe, but so that it's giving us a more accurate view of whether or not we're safe. Sometimes we're stressed about things that probably aren't going to kill us. Or maybe we're creating, like our anxiety makes situation bigger than it really is. And so we're helping parents use something that's called bi-directionality in the nervous system. So the thing is, we're taking data in and our nervous system is deciding if we're safe or not safe, and then it's making our heartbeat faster or slower or all these different changes in our body. But we can also intentionally feed data to our nervous system that tells us that we are safe. So a good example is respiration rate. We tend to breathe a little bit shallower when we're afraid or we're in crisis, and that creates this loop of you're not safe, something's not right. And we get all worked up. If we can take a step outside of that moment and be like, okay, this isn't really that bad, and we can slow our breathing rate down, then that is new data into our nervous system. A slower breath rate means, Oh, the threat might be subsiding. So we can communicate to our nervous system.

[00:18:09.850] - Melissa Corkum

And so we just teach parents lots and lots of ways to help communicate cue safety to their nervous system so that they can feel more in control of how their body is reacting to stress. They can get more margin. They rediscover things like joy and a little bit more patience, and they reclaim compassion for themselves when they realize they're not bad parents for feeling this way. And they get some more margin for starting to reclaim compassion for their kids for some of those tricky behaviors. There's just so much hope to be had. We recognize that you're tired and your life doesn't have a lot of margin. So we're not going to ask you to completely overhaul your life. We're going to ask you to do some tiny little things that we know make big changes, so that we can create a little bit more margin so you can start to do even bigger changes.

[00:19:08.210] - Lisa C. Qualls

I think that as you begin to understand your nervous system, we talk a lot about shedding the shame. So many of us are carrying around this shame like, I shouldn't be like this. I shouldn't feel like this. But as you begin to make small changes to shift what's happening in your nervous system to help your nervous system calm and feel deeply safe, as you begin to do those things, you will feel changes. It begins to bring back that joy and that hope. We have a deeper reservoir, I think, to draw on of hope. I find for myself that I just understand more how my nervous system is responding, and so then I have choices I can make to help myself respond in a healthier way and to care for myself in a better way. I do think there is so much hope. Of course, we go through a lot of all these simple practices and things in our book, *Reclaim Compassion*. We dive really deep in our coaching group, Reclaim Compassion. But from here going forward, we're going to be sharing so much on the podcast here about how you

can recover from blocked care, how you can be healthier, how you can reclaim compassion for yourself and your child because there is a lot of hope. When we were thinking of all the different ways to express this, I just kept coming back to, life can be better than this. It really can. We don't have to stay in the state that we're in of feeling like, Oh, my goodness, I just have to endure until my child is 18 or whatever. No, life can be better than that. We can help you find your way back to the parent you want to be.

[00:20:54.980] - Melissa Corkum

The easiest place to continue to dive in to resources for yourself if you feel like, Yep, this is me, I'm in Blocked Care, head to our new website, adoptionwise.org, and you will find everything you need there. So the assessment is there. Go to the tab that says, Resources for Parents, and you'll see the ways that we can serve you. There's free resources, there's a free assessment. We invite you to join our big Facebook community where you'll really understand like, I am not alone in this. If you feel like you need a little bit more help, grab the book, hop on Amazon, or there's a link on the website, find the Reclaim Compassion book. If you feel like, Man, I would love to just have a little bit of help, like I would love to have a friend guide me through this, or I would love to be able to interact, ask the questions. How does this apply for my family? How does this situation in our family change how I should find my points of joy or define success in my family? Then we would love to meet you and get to know you better inside of our coaching community. Again, all of that is on the new website, adoptionwise.org.

[00:22:16.720] - Melissa Corkum

Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. Our Instagram handle is @adoptionwise, or better yet, join our free Facebook community at adoptionwise.org/facebook.

[00:22:31.020] - Lisa C. Qualls

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

[00:22:40.230] - Melissa Corkum

Music for the podcast is composed by Oleksandr Oleksandrov.