

[00:00:00.000] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:09.160] - Lisa C. Qualls

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

[00:00:21.250] - Melissa Corkum

And this is Melissa Corkum. Don't worry, we get it and we're here for you. Hey, friends. Well, we are super excited to bring you this episode. Often we'll get DMs, emails, posts to our Facebook group that goes something like, We need hope. Is there anyone out there who has overcome blocked care? Or does this get better? Lots of those types of themes. And so we just thought we would love to have folks on who are on the journey of reclaiming compassion have seen the light at the end of the tunnel, have success stories, transformation stories, if you will, that you can refer back to when you're feeling really, really at the end and just remember reclaiming compassion is possible, hope is possible, joy is possible. We're excited to bring you our first transformation story. Welcome, Angela.

[00:01:17.720] - Angela Coston

Hi, I am Angela Coston. I am an adoptive mom, a foster mom, the executive director of a nonprofit called For the Sake of One. We wrap around foster and adoptive communities or caregivers. It has been a journey for me, ups and downs.

[00:01:34.950] - Melissa Corkum

Can you tell us just a little bit about who makes up your family in as much or as little detail as you want?

[00:01:40.410] - Angela Coston

Yes. I have a 11-year-old son who was our first foster baby. We got into fostering to foster school-age kids only. My husband and I are both teachers. Then our first placement was a two-day-old baby who is now my 11-year-old son. We fostered for seven years. Then I have a biological son who is 8, a biological son who is 5. Most recently in September, we added a 17-year-old foster son who we've known for 10 years, and we don't know for sure if that's going to adoption or not just because he's so old. We don't know exactly what's going to happen, but he's a permanent part of our family too.

[00:02:33.880] - Melissa Corkum

I think a lot of us have stories where we have kids who may not be legally adopted, but we've folded in to our family. So let's back up. We asked this at the beginning of Reclaim Compassion in our book. What were some of your expectations going into parenthood or maybe even going into foster care? And maybe how have those panned out or what has been different?

[00:03:02.060] - Angela Coston

Well, since our first baby came, our first foray into parenting was fostering a two-day-old baby when we had planned for school-age kids. That was a craziness of trying to get baby stuff together in that first week. We expected, I mean, even though we had the foster parent training, it's not super in-depth. We were like, Oh, he's a baby. He'll be fine. No issues. Then got kicked out of daycare for biting on his second birthday. It's because I was a bilingual teacher and so I had these grandiose plans that for the first two years of his life, I only spoke to him in Spanish. My husband only spoke to him in English because we were going to make him a bilingual baby. Then after he got kicked out of daycare for biting, we had a speech evaluation because we thought he was just frustrated with speech. They suggested an OT evaluation also, and that led to a diagnosis of sensory processing disorder and a speech delay and told me I had to stick to one language. So none of my kids are bilingual now. With both my husband and I being educators, we thought we knew what to do. We're educated people. We thought we knew all the answers. But we just had struggles with big behaviors with siblings and a lot of big trouble at school, which my husband is now an assistant principal, there's that. With me running For the Sake of One and him being an assistant principal, there's that pressure of we're supposed to know what we're doing, but we don't. It's a different world. There's more and more trauma education

now. We're in a very rural town in Texas, and there's not a whole lot of knowledge out there about what trauma does. When he was 7, he was diagnosed with autism. And that actually was super, super helpful because that's a diagnosis people can recognize. Even untrauma-informed people recognize autism. And so that got us a lot of help in school, didn't necessarily make things go away. But we also went through TBRI camp. We were able to go to TBRI camp with him, and where he was like the whole Dr. Purvis, where he was with a buddy and we were learning and that changed our mindsets and helped our healing journey. And then I think I heard you talk for the first time at Filled East in, I don't know, 2021 maybe? I think it was right after COVID.

[00:05:51.470] - Melissa Corkum

Was it the year we still had masks? We all had masks on?

[00:05:54.810] - Angela Coston

I think so. Yeah. I think so. Just hearing about blocked care was like, Oh, okay. So I'm not just a crazy, horrible person that doesn't like my child. So that's where we are. Our journey was not, I think I answered more than you just asked, but our journey was not what we expected.

[00:06:16.050] - Melissa Corkum

I would just want to back up to something you said. You talked about your roles in the community and feeling really visible and having that pressure of kids. It's not even just the pressure to know what you're doing. It's like the pressure for your kids to behave properly. Because we're supposed to know what we're doing, then we should be able to create or raise children who behave appropriately or don't embarrass us in our roles or whatever. Can you talk just a little bit more about that? Is that like an internal sense of imagining what people are saying? Have you had experiences where people have been more... Where it's been more concretely evident that people are having certain expectations? Because I grew up as a pastor's kid or a youth pastor's kid, and I feel like there are a lot of similarities pastors feel towards how their families are, and of course, we're an adoptive family through multiple generations. So my parents were raising kids that came to them through adoption, and we didn't know anything about trauma, but in hindsight, we had a lot of trauma behaviors. I think for my parents, it felt much more visible or on display than maybe it did for the average layperson in our church. So I don't know. Do you want to share a little bit more about that?

[00:07:41.950] - Angela Coston

For us, it has more been like self-imposed. We have had difficulties at church and difficulties just with how we've had to advocate for him a whole lot through the schools and everywhere we go. But all of my kids, because if you look at the trauma indicators, all of my kids are trauma kids. One was in the NICU, one had a stressful pregnancy, even my bio kids. So we haven't gotten people saying to us that our kids should be better behaved. We've gotten looks that we have read to be like, Why are your kids acting like this? Who knows if that's what they were thinking, but that's how we read them. So I'm a TBRI practitioner now and I lead trainings and I feel like there's spiritual warfare there, too. And every time I'm about to do a big TBRI training, my kids lose their ever-loving minds. And it's an inner battle of why on Earth could you train someone else if you can't even get your kids together?

[00:08:52.590] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. Thanks for sharing that because I think there are a lot of folks who listen to the podcast who are in leadership in some way, shape, or form, whether it be their churches or their community leaders like a teacher, or they're running a local support group, or they are running a book group or something to support foster and adoptive families. And I think a lot of us have moments like that where we think like, Who am I to be... I spend a lot of time reassuring people that Lisa and I are not like... We haven't arrived. There's nothing special about us, except that we have, for whatever reason, been called to share all our stuff in public. That we're still in the thick of it. We're still facing similar parenting challenges. We're still bouncing in and out of blocked care. We're doing the same work that we're asking you all to do. No one has arrived.

[00:09:53.900] - Angela Coston

No, not until heaven someday.

[00:09:57.720] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, and I feel that my husband and I set out to write a marriage book for foster and adoptive families like five years ago, and literally every time we work on it, I feel like our marriage is going to fall apart. So it has yet to be published. So same thing. I get it. There's something about that. Yeah, just to put you in here to keep us humble. Keep us in our place.

[00:10:20.200] - Angela Coston

Yeah, exactly.

[00:10:23.370] - Melissa Corkum

Before you knew what Blocked Care was, before you knew it had a name, what were you experiencing internally or personally that made it such a relief to know that Blocked Care existed and it had a name? Does that make sense?

[00:10:41.130] - Angela Coston

Yeah. Well, I think the worst of mine was during COVID shutdown, which the farther removed we are from that, the more I realized that wasn't just me because people are actually talking about it. But at the time, I was in complete emotional meltdown, had my kids at home all day every day and was trying to work from home, and my husband was still going to the school. I had all three boys that we had at the time home. My son's behaviors were big. I was just ready to be done, completely done. I would go on walks in the neighborhood crying because we couldn't go anywhere at that time. I'm sure my neighbors all thought I was this crazy person walking around the neighborhood crying.

[00:11:31.720] - Melissa Corkum

I don't know. They're probably thinking like, I wish I could be out there walking and crying too. I mean, I've never seen so many of my neighbors in my life. We live in a neighborhood that's not super-connected. And I've literally never seen so many of the people from my neighborhood as I did during COVID. It was like everyone crawled out the woodwork and started walking.

[00:11:52.540] - Angela Coston

Yep. Our neighborhood is pretty connected. We have a small little neighborhood, but they're mostly... There's four families with kids. The rest of them are older, and so just a little bit different lifestyle. But I was feeling like I know I made this commitment to him for life, but this wasn't what I planned on. How do I get out of this? Just that it was too hard and I didn't know what to do. It wasn't normal because I had friends and sisters who had biological kids, and they weren't thinking that about their kids, or at least I didn't know that they were. I just felt like maybe if we just send them away or I don't know. I was ready to be done completely, and it wasn't just... Sometimes it was all the time.

[00:12:52.580] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. As we learn more and more about blocked care, and sometimes we have questions around, Is this blocked care? Is this not blocked care? And I think any time we're having trouble feeling care towards someone, I think that's a flavor, a piece of blocked care. But then when you think about... Sometimes we talk about behaviors this way, like frequency, intensity, and duration, right? And that helps us evaluate or assess how, or if we think about how much it's impacting our day-to-day life, our relationships. If you have block care at a really hard moment with your kid, and then you are able to come back into connection, and maybe that only happens for a couple of minutes every day or for an hour a week or something, then that's, I think, just being human, right? And not that more intense blocked care isn't human, right? Our nervous systems are all trying to help us survive. But I think when you get to that place where the amount of blocked care that you're experiencing then starts to lead to that feeling of hopelessness or done the end of your rope, then it gets really tricky, and it gets really hard. I think for a lot of people, there's a lot of shame. Like you mentioned, I felt like I was a horrible person or I wasn't normal. I think a lot of folks can relate to that. So once you heard about blocked care and understood what it was, what were you able to change? What are the things that have helped you overcome block care?

[00:14:46.680] - 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.

[00:15:18.020] - Melissa Corkum

This episode is sponsored by our book, *Reclaim Compassion: The Adoptive Parent's 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.

[00:15:46.660] - Angela Coston

The very first thing I remember helping is I remember you told us to find our first picture of our kid and put it on our lock screen of our phone. So I did that. At Filled, I found the very first picture of when he came home, this tiny baby, and put that on my lock screen. Anytime I would get frustrated, I would just look at that picture. That was the start of it. You also talked about taking care of yourself, and that was something I had not... That is probably the biggest game-changer for me. That's what I tell everyone. It's not selfish. Self-care is not selfish. You have to take care of yourself. I think the two biggest helpers for me were just remembering his preciousness from when he was little, seeing the good things in him, and then really actually taking care of myself. And what that looked like for me was I now have, let me think, two different text threads with other trauma mamas who are like, we can just shoot off a message. One of them the other day was like, I think I'm in blocked care with my husband. Is that a thing? So if you have any tips for that, just let me know. And then I also have three different groups. And one of them is friends from high school. One of them is friends that we've never met, but our husbands have. They supported each other and we're like, All right, we need to get in on this, too. Then another one is local friends here in town.

[00:17:25.020] - Angela Coston

Just being able to have those people who really get it and are living it every day. I have other friends who are amazing friends, but I don't tell them all the ins and outs of all the hards because they're not living it. They can be empathetic, but they're still not going to completely understand it. I think that that was hugely helpful for me. Then I also started exercising. I just lost taking care of myself. Now I have completely changed myself. Weirdly, I don't know what's happened. My husband is like, I don't even know who you are anymore because I get up super early and go run before the sun's up with friends. And that's what it is. I'm an enneagram 7 and I need the people. So if they're getting up at 5:00 to go run, I will get up at 5:00 to go run.

[00:18:13.240] - Melissa Corkum

And you just completed your first half marathon, right? Did I see that? On social? Or a full, or something? You completed a something.

[00:18:21.120] - Angela Coston

I did. It was my eighth half marathon.

[00:18:23.240] - Melissa Corkum

Oh, your eighth. Okay, sorry. I did not mean to not give you credit for the first seven. That's amazing. How many have you done since 2021?

[00:18:39.710] - Angela Coston

Well, I've done three so far this year, and I'm doing another one this weekend. The one this weekend is the one that I've been training hard for, that I'm trying to actually run fast. But I did before having kids, I ran five of those half marathons and then just quit when life was hard. And so since really getting through blocked care, I guess I've done three more of them, and they were all this year. So yeah.

[00:19:12.560] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, that's amazing. I think you hit on a couple of things that are really important. One, a lot of times it's easier to go back to something that we knew brought us joy or that we loved in our previous lives, right? Sometimes it's great to pick up something completely new, but sometimes there's something familiar about that thing, and so if you were a runner before you had kids, like to pick that up again, like your brain already knows, is already conditioned to how that makes you feel. I think knowing yourself and knowing what motivates you. So I'm a lot like you. I will do almost anything if it's in a group. But even if it's something I adore, if I'm not doing it with other people, it probably won't happen. I was not the COVID person who was like, Oh, I can just do my gym membership on my phone. I'm not going to work out by myself in my house, even if I'm on a video with other people. But if I sign myself up for a class or tell people I'm going to meet them, I'm going to show up, even if it's a dark thing, even if it doesn't sound fun on paper. So I think that matters, because if you had just decided I'm going to just start running by myself in the morning, it's very possible that you would have maybe made one of those appointments with yourself and then bailed on many more. And so I think knowing... And I think listening to our bodies. I had a lot higher tolerance for harder physical things 10 years ago. I was training in taekwondo and I was doing triathlons, and now I'm like, Just give me a good yoga class. I have to listen to my body. And I've been doing a lot of just walking, which isn't super hard. I'm really consistent with it. I know I can be really consistent, but it's not like... I know it's not revolutionizing my physicality or anything.

[00:21:16.820] - Angela Coston
No, but it's moving.

[00:21:17.180] - Melissa Corkum
It's moving. I like a good yoga class. But just recently I was like, You know what? I feel like my body needs something a little bit more intense. I have no idea how long this season is going to last, but I was like, I think I'm going to just pick up bar pilates. Or like, I joined my husband for a run yesterday. I literally haven't run in like five years. But I felt like I needed something a little bit more. I have this desire to lift, not big, but do some of weight something, like something more intense. So I think the gift of paying attention to like, if your body is just craving movement, just get some movement in and then start paying attention to what movement, those types of things.

[00:21:56.900] - Angela Coston
Definitely. I mean, and even yesterday, all the children were arguing with me. I was just done. I think my husband had gone up to take a shower. And my kids are old enough that I can just walk out of the house and they're fine. But I just was like, All right, I'm sorry. I'm done. I have to go on a walk around the neighborhood. And that's what I did. I put my headphones on and listen to some Shane and Shane and just got myself centered again and just knowing my own coping mechanisms has been huge. Because before, I think, learning about blocked care, it was so 100% centered on my child, fixing my child and not figuring out how to deal with myself. I don't really think I learned how to self-regulate until I was like 36, and I'm 39. And so learning to be in control of myself and learning what I need to do to take care of myself has been huge in coming through that blocked care also. There's definitely times where I am still in that I feel done, but it's not... And I think that I posted in your group one time, is it normal? Does anyone else cycle in and out of blocked care? And it was like a resounding, everyone was like, Yes, I'm glad I'm not the only one. I'm glad I'm not the only one. So many people. I just remember that frequently now when I am like, Why am I done with my kid again? But it's like you just said a second ago, it's like in a behavior. It's not in life. It's not all the time. It's just like he's being super difficult right now, and so I'm done right now. But I can still see the amazingness in him and see the child that I want him to be.

[00:23:56.570] - Melissa Corkum
Yeah. So you would say the frequency of how often you feel blocked care with him is less, maybe the intensity in the moment. Even if you're still feeling frustrated or done, you're saying deep down inside, you can still reach for that pressure, reach for that, we call reclaiming compassion for your child, intensity... What did I say earlier? Intensity, duration?

[00:24:21.570] - Angela Coston
Duration.

[00:24:22.930] - Melissa Corkum

Frequency, intensity, and duration. And then how long it lasts. How resilient are you to being able to take the walk, go for a run, do something that helps you bounce back out of that?

[00:24:39.480] - Angela Coston

I'm able to now... Just the other day, he was bouncing off the walls, and that's what he does when he's anxious. He gets super energized when he's anxious. He doesn't shut down like you typically think of anxiety, but he's just super energy. I took him outside. He also is always building forts, always. He had a fort outside and just went and got in it with him. I was like, What are you afraid of? What are you afraid of right now? I didn't used to be able to find the need behind the behavior, find the why. I had been, I think, looking for maybe a need, but not necessarily the fear. What are you afraid of? He was able to tell me that he didn't know the schedule for the day and didn't know when he was going to get to see family and all of these different things, and we were able to talk through it. Whereas before I would have just, I think, been like, quit bouncing off the walls. I'm done with you. You're done. Instead of going to try to be curious about that behavior and finding out what was going on.

[00:25:42.630] - Melissa Corkum

What you're describing is, we call it, you mentioned self-care, we call it nervous system care in the book, mostly because a lot of people are resistant to self-care because it does feel selfish and self-centered. And the purpose of that nervous system care is for us to have more margin in our own nervous systems. I read recently that resilience towards stress and trauma a lot of times is defined by how in control the person experiencing the stress or trauma feels. And so you talked about what you can control. You can't control the craziness in your house necessarily, but you can go out for... You happen to have the support system, and your kids are ages where you can take control of yourself and be like, Okay, I know that if I go for a walk, a 20-minute walk around the neighborhood, I'll come back a better mom, a better person, more regulated. And so even just that little mindset shift is like, Oh, I have something I can control in this situation. And that in itself changes your resiliency towards things that are out of your control. And then as you're mentioning, when your kid's bouncing off the walls, whereas if you didn't have that strong sense of self-regulation, that makes us feel crazy inside, and then we lose our thinking brain, our connection, and then it's just all our brain is screaming to us is like, Make it stop. Make it stop. Make it stop.

[00:27:28.250] - Melissa Corkum

And so then we say to our kids, Oh, my God. For the love of all things, sit down and shut up or whatever. But what you're talking about, when you care for your own nervous system, you get your own resilience. So now your kid's bouncing off the walls, and instead of that ramping up your own anxiety, you're able to anchor in to your own sense of regulation and be able to tell your brain like, I'm not going to die. This is not actually a dangerous situation. Sometimes our kids put us in actual dangerous situations, but in this situation, you're able to be like, Okay, he's just a little hyper. You can stay regulated, and then you think all the things that you just said like, Oh, maybe it's his anxiety. Maybe we could use some nature. Maybe if I get into his space, and then maybe if I ask him this question, and then all of a sudden you're through it without escalating it, or without you both feeling like you're going to die.

[00:28:25.670] - Angela Coston

Exactly. Yeah. And it doesn't happen every single time. I mean, there's times where I still lose it and where I still explode, but then we come back from it and connect again.

[00:28:39.560] - Melissa Corkum

So great. What would you tell someone who's listening, who's the one asking, Can it ever get better? Am I stuck here? What words of encouragement would you have?

[00:28:52.570] - Angela Coston

I would say, Yes, it can get better. It could get worse before it gets better, but it can get better. Really, the number one thing I think is doing that nervous system care. I have a lot of friends who tell me like, I can't go anywhere without my kids going with me. They even go to the bathroom with me. But I have

had to build those boundaries. Like yesterday, when I was upset and needed to go for a walk, literally, I got to the street and the 17-year-old came and was like, Hey, I need to ask you a question. Then the five-year-old and eight-year-old were like, Can I go with you? I was like, No. Right now, I have to take care of my... I didn't say take care of my nervous system because I don't know that language. I said, Right now, I need to go walk by myself. And previously, and I think a lot of people are like, Oh, well, that's neglecting your kids. But it's not.

[00:29:55.520] - Melissa Corkum

Or not even neglecting, especially because we're talking to an audience that has kids with abandonment issues, and we're talking and we have connected parenting, because I know I thought this for a long time, connected parenting meant if my kids want to connect, I have to always say yes. And if I say, No, I would like to walk by myself, then what if I trigger all of their abandonment issues? I don't want to be contributing to their trauma, and so we sacrifice our own self-care, nervous system care on the altar of connection.

[00:30:29.280] - Angela Coston

Exactly. Definitely. I think that when I first understood all of the trauma parenting and connected parenting, I was sacrificing myself way too much. Just saying yes to everything, connecting all the time. I think that's part of what led to the deep, blocked care was that I was just like, It's not getting any better. I'm doing all the things I'm supposed to be doing, but I wasn't taking care of myself still. And so my husband and I both, we've seen how to get through it and seen how much both of us have to take care of ourselves. And so we have an understanding. If he tells me he's a runner too, and if he tells me I just need to go run, then it's like... Unless I'm more flipped than him at the time, then it's like, Okay, that's fine. I'll just handle the fires. But just knowing that we have to take care of our... We have to take time for ourselves. Even if the kids are knocking on the door the entire time you're going to the bathroom, that's just like there's boundaries. Connected parenting doesn't mean physically together 100 percent of the time.

[00:31:49.680] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, excellent. Well, Angela, thank you so much for your vulnerability, for taking time, for making this happen. For those of you listening, Angela literally is sitting in her car talking to us because her house is a construction zone. So we appreciate your willingness to share your story, and then also for all you do locally for families in that Texas area, For the Sake of One, I have the privilege of being at the retreat you all put together and just watching you guys in action and caring for moms and I'm guessing whole families in that area as they live out this life raising kids with complex needs, complex trauma, and helping them all to be better, we're all better versions of ourselves on this journey because our kids challenge us to be better and do better. And so I'm really grateful for your friendship and for your willingness to be here on the podcast.

[00:32:54.550] - Angela Coston

Yeah, thanks. And if anyone is needing that self-care, our Connect retreat is next year, signups are live, and it's the 23rd to 25th of February. And Kayla North is our speaker this year. And so it's going to be even more pampering and the focus is rest. So I love that.

[00:33:13.590] - Melissa Corkum

So tell folks where they can... If they're anywhere close to East Texas, whether you want to fly across the country to come to the retreat, or if you're just in the area and are like, man, I didn't know that there was help and support in this area, where can folks find you?

[00:33:31.230] - Angela Coston

You can find us on all social media. It's just For the Sake of One Texarkana, all no numbers, just all words. And then our website is forthestakeofone.com. And so you can contact us there.

[00:33:47.240] - Melissa Corkum

Excellent. Well, thank you again so much. And you're a good mom doing good work.

[00:33:54.770] - Angela Coston

Thanks. I tell people that now too.

[00:33:56.350] - 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.

[00:34:10.550] - Lisa C. Qualls

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

[00:34:19.750] - Melissa Corkum

Music for the podcast is composed by Oleksandr Oleksandrov.