

[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.

[00:00:09.220] - 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.

[00:00:21.490] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:26.860] - Lisa C. Qualls

Hello, friends. Welcome to Episode 233 of the Adoption Wise podcast. I'm so happy to introduce you to my guest today, my friend, Nakole. Nakole is part of our Reclaim Compassion community, and she's also a friend. I'm excited for you to hear her story. I've wanted to have her on for a while because kinship care is a big part of our community. We have so many people that are part of Reclaim Compassion who are providing kinship care. You may not even know what kinship care is, so we're going to talk about that today. So, Nakole, welcome to the podcast.

[00:01:03.910] - Nakole Wooley

Hi.

[00:01:04.560] - Lisa C. Qualls

Why don't we start by you just introducing yourself, who you are and what the makeup of your family is, and we will go from there.

[00:01:15.100] - Nakole Wooley

My husband and I have been married for 15 years. We have three kiddos by birth. Two kiddos we have guardianship of, and then one kiddo that we have adopted. We went from one to six kiddos in three years and five days, exactly. A little whiplash and whirlwind. I'm a licensed master social worker in Missouri. Never expected to be working in this environment or using my clinical skills or my clinical brain in this environment. But that foundation, I think, has helped me with researching, understanding, and accessing different things to support our family.

[00:01:56.500] - Lisa C. Qualls

That is wonderful. Your kids didn't come to you through typical foster care channels or adoption channels that we might be familiar with. Can you tell us a little bit about... Well, okay, actually, what I really want to say is you had no idea that you were going to be a foster or adoptive mom. That wasn't really part of your plan. Is that correct?

[00:02:19.440] - Nakole Wooley

Correct. That was not part of our plan. And we knew that there were some concerning things happening outside of our home and outside of our view. However, we did not realize the level of concern that others had for my nephews or my niece.

[00:02:43.500] - Lisa C. Qualls

So when did it first become apparent to you that your life was about to change? How many kids did you have by birth at that point?

[00:02:53.430] - Nakole Wooley

We had one by birth. My nephews had came and stayed with us for a short period of time under an emergency plan through Children's Division. They did reunify with their parents, and we supported that. I really believe that if we can be emotionally safe and physically safe, kids should be with their families. And I don't know if I always thought that, but with the view that I have now, I feel differently about that. So they came to us, they went home, and we became pregnant. And lo and behold, six months later, my nephews were back in even a tougher situation. They were under emergency placement. I want to say it was with their grandparents. And then we had gotten the call. And so that

was on December 10th. They came and stayed with us in 2018. February of 2019, our daughter was born. In April of 2019, we started visits with our niece that was born in another state, and she was born in December of 2018. So she was born. The boys came to us. Our daughter was born. And then we started visits with her in April of 2019. And then she came home to us September of 2019.

[00:04:33.850] - Lisa C. Qualls

So your daughter-by-birth and your niece at that point- Correct. -are how close in age?

[00:04:41.580] - Nakole Wooley

Two months and 24 days apart.

[00:04:44.020] - Lisa C. Qualls

Okay. Okay. So at what point did some of those children... Did you realize, Oh, this is not going to be just a short thing where they need help for a while. At what point did you realize that these children are really actually going to join our family?

[00:05:07.740] - Nakole Wooley

For our daughter, we knew fairly quickly, and I, in Iowa, if I'm remembering correctly, I want to say they told me it was four and under or three and under that they moved to TPR, which is termination of parental rights, at six months. So when she came to us, she was born in December of '18 and then July of 2019, her parental rights were terminated. We were visiting with her since we were already a licensed foster home in Surrey. Our ICPC, Interstate Compact, went through very quickly. I think it was like two weeks that it went through and then she came to us. I knew when we started seeing her in May that there was a chance that she could possibly come home. But I did not know for sure until it was August of 2019 that she was going to come home and be with us. The boys took a little bit longer just with Missouri's laws and reunification and how things happened in our story. We did not know that they were going to be with us under guardianship. I want to say it was 2020. I think it was October 2020.

[00:06:22.130] - Nakole Wooley

I think that that was some of it too, is like we did not understand what would be asked of us and what the needs of my nephews would be. And not just that we had two little ones that had ear infections, doctor's appointments, wellness checks. And so at one point, I think we had 13 appointments in one week in five days, and that was just a lot. Just talking with the parents and talking with the team, I just forgot what they're called, family support team, that's what it is, and that it would move towards guardianship, meaning the parents still have the parental rights. We just no longer have all the requirements that are required to be in a state-licensed foster homes.

[00:07:13.100] - Lisa C. Qualls

With your daughter, we've got these stories running concurrently and not to mention you had your kids by birth. You've got these different streams of children and all the needs and all the care and all the meetings and probably a lot of uncertainty through a lot of it too, because with your daughter, it was clearer because parental rights were terminated. You were asked to adopt her, so that was clearer. But I think with your nephews, there were a lot more questions and things happening. I don't know how much you're comfortable sharing, but your daughter, who was previously your niece, is she a brother or a sister's child?

[00:07:57.820] - Nakole Wooley

Brother's. So all of our kids come through my brothers. I only have brothers, and they came through my brothers.

[00:08:04.770] - Lisa C. Qualls

Okay, let's just talk about her for a minute. What was the relationship like with your brother? It must have been complicated when all of a sudden you were adopting her and becoming her parents.

[00:08:18.670] - Nakole Wooley

I'm getting a little tearful thinking about that question. That brother was always an easy relationship

for me. I felt like he was an easy relationship for me. I'm not sure if he would say it was an easy relationship. We even had a bet on who would have a baby first, and I owe him \$100 because I had a baby first. As a kid, he was very easygoing, very laid back. And I would still say that he's very easygoing and very laid back is how I would describe that relationship.

[00:08:51.840] - Nakole Wooley

If I reach out, he's responsive and he does reach out with us. And I feel like I'm as responsive, I feel like I'm very respectful and I try to respond as quickly as I can. I think adopting his daughter for me was just another way to say, Hey, you have all this sticky situation to be rewarded that you have all of these sticky situations and all of these complexities, but just know that I still love you. I still care and that we're still family and that your daughter will always know how great you are and how much you loved her and how much I loved you. I feel like that is one narrative that I'm able to express and share because they are kinship and they are my siblings, not cousins down the lane. But we were raised together, so I understand the complexities and the things that we went through as children differently.

[00:09:51.930] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah, that's true. You share a childhood with your brother, and you understand all the things that contributed to him having the struggles that he's had. You understand it more than anybody. And I think you have a really compassionate heart toward him and toward your daughter's mother as well. I think you have a lot of compassion toward them.

[00:10:18.490] - Nakole Wooley

I believe with all my heart that they love her. And I tell her that your first mom and dad love you, and I love your first mom and dad. And it's just it's complex because there's circumstances and it's just really hard to overcome.

[00:10:39.930] - Lisa C. Qualls

How much contact? You share as much as you want, but how much contact did you have with them? Your daughter now is four?

[00:10:50.270] - Nakole Wooley

She'll be five in December.

[00:10:52.810] - Lisa C. Qualls

Wow, almost five. Okay, so in the like almost five years, so I guess you've had her for more like four and a half. But anyhow, during that time, how much contact did you have with them? And has it come and gone? Has it been pretty steady? And then what about your daughter and contact with her first family?

[00:11:17.180] - Nakole Wooley

I would send pictures and they wouldn't always acknowledge them. And then their Facebook had changed and stuff. I just continue to send pictures. If they were to respond and they responded. And if not, that's okay too, because I'm doing what I want my daughter to see later on in life. This is what we wanted. I loved your mom and dad, and I wanted them to see you because that's how I want her to see that we treat people. I would say there for a while, it was very consistent and then they responded. And then I think just during certain times of the year, I think it's harder for them. And it may be a little harder for me too, on how do I share these moments for them? We actually have had a lot of conversations with our daughter about her first mom and dad, or her first mom and dad is how we explained it to her since she's little. And we asked them to come see us. We said, if you're in the area, if you come down because they do go see my parents, my mom and my stepdad. And I knew that they were making a trip or I thought they might be making a trip. So I was like, please come see us. We would love to have you. That was the first time I had never met our daughter's birth mom, first mom. I never met her. And the moment that we saw her, our daughter ran to her and she was glowing. She was the happiest, I think, I've ever really seen her. And then I hugged her and I teared up because we don't know each other. But we both love this little girl. I want to give her a well-rounded idea of what family looks like. Our family looks different, but it's still family. And so we have been in touch with them. We have called them. They have called us back, and we're hoping to see them again. There's

talk that they're going to come in December and see us, and we're all looking forward to it.

[00:13:19.020] - Nakole Wooley

And it was really, I think it was really easy because this brother, I don't know if I've ever been angry at him. It's just an easy relationship. And then her mom, they're still together and they have another child. And so I think it's just that this is what family looks like and to not have this curiosity. I used to think that their parents needed to do X, Y and Z. And now I don't feel their parents need to do X, Y and Z. I feel like their parents come to our home, which we would prefer them to come to our home if they're comfortable because that's our safe space. Our kids want to show them where they live and show them their bedroom and all of those exciting things. And it's more important for me now for that they're appropriate. Are they appropriate when they're visiting? And if they're appropriate, I can't ask for anything more. And Millie's first parents were very respectful of that conversation because I did have that conversation with them before they came. And then they turned to me on things with her, like how do we say goodbye? So I was able to coach them and help them. And I thought it was really a beautiful thing to be a part of and to witness. I hope for our daughter's sake that we can do that more frequently, at least once a year, just so she always knows who they are.

[00:14:43.980] - Lisa C. Qualls

That's beautiful. I just love hearing that story. And especially for me as a first mom, that would have been such an entirely different experience for me than having my son with parents who I did not know at all. I think I love hearing that story. Now, you have another brother, and his children, his sons have been with you in a guardianship situation for quite a while. That's a really different story. Again, this is a public podcast, of course, so just share what you feel comfortable about. But I would love to have you share more of that story as well.

[00:15:28.140] - 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.

[00:15:59.460] - 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.

[00:16:28.900] - Nakole Wooley

So that brother, that relationship has always been a little more challenging. And I'm not sure why that is, but I go back to, I intimately understand our childhood, and I have worked through a lot of things through counseling, therapy, through Bible studies, that I've really worked through those things. So I intimately understand and have a lot of compassion for my brothers. This brother, it's a little bit more challenging due to several factors, but I feel like we do a lot better at communicating. I'm very intentional about the words I use and what I say to try to convey respect. And then their mom, I have known her since I think she was 15. I think I've known her 17 years. And when you meet someone when they're 15 and you know them at 20 and 25, you get a very well-rounded view of where they've come from, where they're going and what their struggles are. They actually lived with us for a while when she was pregnant with her oldest son. We do the same. She has consistently always texted almost every single week since the boys have been with us. And for her, we respond, we send pictures, and it's a very easy relationship. And the boys through COVID and all of that up in the air, not knowing, not understanding. We did not see them for quite a while, even though they were living in the same state. I should say that our daughter's parents live in another state, so they live in the same state, not far from us. And we have reintroduced them now at this point. And I think that those visits go well. I think they might be a little harder on our kids because they spent more time with their

parents versus our daughter did not spend time with her first parents. We love them and we talk about them frequently. And the boys have visits with their parents and spend time with their parents. And how do we co-parent and how do we maintain emotional and physical safety for them has been the big discussions that we've had with them.

[00:18:56.610] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yes. And another thing that we haven't touched on yet, and again, we'll just see where you want to go with this. But you share parents with your brothers. And so this is where I think kinship can be so tricky because you've got your sibling relationships. You share parents, which means the children share grandparents. There's cousins, there's aunts and uncles. It's a whole different thing.

[00:19:27.010] - Nakole Wooley

It is. And then that was one of our conversations. I just remember this with you saying that one of our conversations was he said, The boys could come with us so our son doesn't lose his grandparents. Was another conversation that we had and that we were younger and we're already doing this. And then they can stay in the grandparent role and then we'll be the parents or stepping in as a parent role for them. And that is some of the complexities because we're trying to set healthy boundaries. However, in the end, my family still struggle even seeing our adopted daughter. She's our daughter, not my sibling's daughter. And how do we balance that and be respectful at the same time teaching our kids healthy boundaries. So we're not repeating dynamics that are not helpful or supportive of our emotional health.

[00:20:23.660] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah. I always marvel at the way, I think, for whatever reason, God just intervened on your behalf. And you made some really great choices that changed the course of your life. And it's now quite different from that of your siblings. Do you want to talk just a tiny bit about that?

[00:20:43.820] - Nakole Wooley

Well, I think, too, I had... The study came out, I can't remember what university, of one adult can be the changing factor for a child. And I think God throughout my life has placed an adult or a family in my life at all these big stages of my life. So I had an escape for myself that was a healthy escape that showed me different families, how families did things and different choices and what those relationships looked like. I think that has probably been one of the biggest things is like, I can look back at my life and I can see where God was working when I didn't understand or didn't know. And I wasn't even a Christian at that time. So I think that was a huge impactful thing for me. I also went to the military for six years, and then I got out and got my Master's in Social Work. And I studied attachment. Why was I looking at attachment or when I was in grad school when I was working with veterans? I have no idea, but I think God knew and was preparing me for stuff that I wasn't even knowing I was being prepared for.

[00:21:56.320] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah. It's a pretty remarkable story. When I learned that you had been in the military and you served in Iraq, right?

[00:22:05.160] - Nakole Wooley

Correct.

[00:22:05.890] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah. You have an amazing story.

[00:22:09.580] - Nakole Wooley

And I think just looking at my time in Iraq and making meaning out of it, it also gave me the opportunity to have more compassion and to really work on self-compassion, one, a compassion for others. But also it was more time that I was working on my emotional health and trying to understand what my behaviors were or why I was sick or what was going on with me internally.

[00:22:40.010] - Lisa C. Qualls

Well, and it also quite literally physically removed you from your family for a time.

[00:22:47.110] - Nakole Wooley

It did, which also the military is high structure, high nurture, I believe, which is what we want for our children that come from hard places is high structure, high nurture. I mean, your day is set, but you also get a lot of attaboys. When you do good, you get a lot of pat on the back. And it's very predictable. And it's also that group mentality too, that I had a group of people that I was with doing these really hard things and we were accomplishing and meeting our goals. I think, again, how the military was preparing me for the life that I have because running a house with this many humans and this many little humans, like structure is huge. And I say all the time, like when we're not getting sleep, oh, I was in Iraq. I did two hours on, two hours off. I can go without sleep. I've got this. Just like those types of things, like I see even how my military training has helped me for that.

[00:23:48.650] - Lisa C. Qualls

Well, you know how to handle intensity, for sure. So at this point, how old are your children?

[00:23:55.170] - Nakole Wooley

Well 10, 9, 4, 4, 4, 22 months. I had to count because everybody was getting ready to flip, so I gave current ages.

[00:24:07.680] - Lisa C. Qualls

Okay, yeah, I understand that. That happens to us in the spring. Everybody starts having a birthday over and over. Okay, so we could do a whole episode on how you manage so many little people in your family because you are phenomenal at it. Talk about high structure, high nurture. You do an amazing job at that. But what I'd love to touch on now is your experience of blocked care, because that is what we're talking about so much right now with our book, *Reclaim Compassion* and our community. When you were in blocked care, did you know that something wasn't quite right?

[00:24:44.560] - Nakole Wooley

I did. I'm like, What is wrong with me and what is wrong with these kids? Not that there's anything wrong with me or wrong with the kid, but just those words is what came to my mind because that's what was used when I was a child. All I knew is that it felt off. It didn't feel right. This doesn't make sense. Why do I not enjoy certain kids in my home? Why do I enjoy certain kids even less? Why do I have a child that wants to hold my hand and I want to run away? Why was I having all of these feelings? And I was like, but I have a secure attachment. I'm attached to this child. I can't get enough of this child. What is going on? And I'm like, Is there something different? Because these kids came to me through birth and these kids came to me through different ways. All of those thoughts that don't make sense, but yet make sense because you're trying to make sense of what doesn't make sense.

[00:25:46.960] - Nakole Wooley

Have read the *Reclaim Compassion* book four times. Every time I read it, I think it's like Bible scripture. You read it and then this is what comes out. But then you read it again and then this is what the message is. And I feel like that's kind of how it is with *Reclaim Compassion*. I read this and this is what came out. And I think literally 50 points of joy because I've struggled with self-care my entire life, I really think the 50 points of joy is what really helped me because I could hit those. I could hit five of those a day, or I could look back on my day and see what brought me joy. I think the other thing was, why did I choose adoption? Why did I choose this? And what was that? I think it's a word like what anchored me into this? And I think I was able to remember why I did it. And my why was I wanted my nephews and my niece to know that even though their parents were struggling, they still came from good family. They still had people that valued family, and I wanted them to know that. And that was really important to me, and it still is.

[00:27:02.550] - Lisa C. Qualls

Okay, so some people listening, first of all, may not really know what Blocked Care is, but we just did a whole episode called Blocked Care 101. And so please go back and listen to that if you want to know more. But the two practices that you just talked about, I want to touch on those for a minute. The first one is looking back at what was your original motivation, what was your why, and then really exploring

that, I think. Then when things get really hard, let that why be your lighthouse, the thing or your anchor is another way to put it. The thing that you hold to like, okay, when things are hard, this is what I call to mind. So that's a really good exercise. And the other one you mentioned is 50 Points of joy. Do you want to... And we teach that to everybody. It's one of the first things we teach both in the *Reclaim Compassion* book but also in our community. Can you describe what that exercise is like or that practice?

[00:28:06.930] - Nakole Wooley

So 50 Points of Joy is you write down a list of 50 things. Small doesn't have to be big like a trip. Now, trip is on my list because that gives me a lot of joy. But getting a coffee gives me joy. Blow drying my hair gives me joy. Baking gives me joy. Just a heated steering wheel in my car gives me joy in the because I have Raynaud's, which is a circulation issue. Not circulation, vascular spasms. And so those things give me joy. Looking at baby pictures gives me joy. Dreaming, planning, where would you go, if we could go anywhere if my husband gives me joy. And so you try to get you make this great big long list. And sometimes my points of joy is it's a coffee every single day, and sometimes it's not. But you try to get five to seven of those in a day. And I think for me, what that did is that was like self-care, which made me feel good. But also it was giving myself compassion that it was okay to take care of myself because it's difficult to take care of children with complexities when you're not taking care of yourself. And I didn't realize how my nervous system was so dysregulated. I forgot what it felt like to have a regulated nervous system where your insides just feel calm and swaying and a calm rhythmic motion. I did not remember what that felt like. And so going back through, *Reclaim Compassion*, reminding me what regulation was and what it felt like.

[00:29:41.790] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah, that's so good. And I think also when we brainstorm this list, we begin to think of things. And like you said, they can be really small. Like one of mine, literally, when I had all my kids at home is after dinner every night I would step out on the back porch just for a moment while we were all clearing the table just to catch my breath and calm myself. But the view outside my back door is beautiful. I would just take a few breaths. That was a point of joy. It really can be small. When we begin to put those things intentionally into our lives, it begins to shift things. We start to experience more joy. We make a note of it because a lot of these things are happening, whether we're noticing them or not. But when we notice them and when we actually choose to bring these points of joy into our daily lives, it does begin to change something in our nervous system. It's surprising how powerful it is. I had no idea how powerful it would be, but we hear it over and over and over that it really speaks to people and it begins... It's a really good first step in overcoming blocked care. It's a really good first step for all of us in terms of caring for our nervous system. I'm so glad you brought that up.

[00:30:57.030] - Lisa C. Qualls

All right, if somebody was searching online for kinship care and they found this podcast episode because someone has come to them and asked them to take in children that they are somehow related to, so this is Kinship Care, and either they are thinking about it or they've said yes, and now, oh, my goodness, what do we do? Do you have any tips, just a couple of tips for that mom or dad providing kinship care?

[00:31:27.420] - Nakole Wooley

I would say overcommunicate is one thing because I find that I am communicating with everybody, grandparents, first parents, and I just overcommunicate with all of them so everybody knows so there's no confusion, because confusion happens in these situations. And I try to do, I've started doing videos with my family when things have come up, so they can see my face, see my emotions. So I would say overcommunicate so there's no confusion. And I would communicate with everybody because no matter what, they're still somebody's grandchildren and they're still somebody's children. And that's not something that we can change and it's not something we want to change. I think we just want to hold it and draw it closer. The other thing I would say too, is whatever you're saying and doing can be seen by anybody. And what do we want our children to see is how we're responding and behaving. And that this is extremely emotionally hard for the first parents, biological parents, and for you. I think just recognizing how difficult it can be, and that there's no shame in how hard it is to manage these relationships because everybody's role is changing.

[00:32:42.230] - Lisa C. Qualls

That is such a good point that every single person in the family is actually affected by how this shifting and changing is happening. That's such a good point. I think that alone really highlights exactly what we're saying is that kinship care, it is unique. It is different from those of us who signed up to be foster parents or those of us who decided, Hey, I think we want to adopt. You, it's like, Well, here's the need. Will you jump in and will you receive this child into your home and into your family? It's really beautiful. I love watching your story unfold in all its truly, I think we use the word complex, but the complexity in all of the relationships is really... It requires an extra measure of thought and grace, and you do it really, really well. So thank you. Thanks for sharing your story. If someone wants to reach out to you, they have a specific question about kinship care, are you available for people to reach out to you?

[00:33:50.120] - Nakole Wooley

I am. You can use Facebook Messenger. It's Nakole Wooley, N-A-K-O-L-E, W-O-O-L-E-Y, and I think I have my maiden name in parentheses.

[00:34:04.620] - Lisa C. Qualls

Well, thank you, Nakole, so much. For anybody listening, if you couldn't write down how to spell Nakole's name or you want to find a way to reach out to her, that will be in the show notes, as well as, of course, links to our book, *Reclaim Compassion*, which Nakole mentioned as well. So thank you very much, my friend.

[00:34:25.420] - Nakole Wooley

Thanks, Lisa, I appreciate it.

[00:34:27.260] - 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](https://www.adoptionwise.org/facebook).

[00:34:41.330] - Lisa C. Qualls

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

[00:34:50.520] - Melissa Corkum

Music for the podcast is composed by Oleksandr Oleksandrov.