

[00:00:00.140] - Lisa C. Qualls

This episode is sponsored by The Adoption Connection Village, a place where you can connect with other adoptive moms who get it and be surrounded with support so you know you're not alone.

[00:00:11.200] - Melissa Corkum

We are really excited about The Village because adoptive and foster parenting really brings unique challenges to families, and a lot of people around us don't understand, and so we need to be surrounded by people who get us.

[00:00:24.220] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yes, that isolation is really the breeding ground for shame and guilt. And both of us have been to these dark places. I don't think either of us could have anticipated what this journey would cost us in our relationship, sometimes even with friends and family. It's very hard for people to understand what we're going through.

[00:00:45.250] - Melissa Corkum

Absolutely. But we do get it. And we want to have a special place where we can really connect in a much deeper way as close as we can to actually be in person. So obviously we can't all gather around Lisa's Kitchen Island, but we have created something called virtual coffee chats, and these happen over video chat, and it's a whole group of us. And it's been really, really fun to see your faces, get to know your stories, and connect with you on a much deeper level. We do these coffee chats in The Village three to four times a month, and we focus at least one of them a month on specifically the challenges of teens and young adults, because we have heard from you guys that that is a space that needs a little extra TLC and support.

[00:01:32.790] - Lisa C. Qualls

So The Village is for you if you feel like you need more people in your life who understand you. You crave authentic and intimate community, and especially if you don't have Facebook or you want to limit your time there. So you don't want to be in a group maybe that's based on Facebook. I think the thing that's so important is that we know you are pouring your hearts and your souls into your kids, and maybe nobody is pouring back into you. But we want to do that.

[00:02:03.170] - Melissa Corkum

Besides the coffee chats, we have a discussion forum that's like a Facebook group on steroids that really helps connect to you with topics that are relevant to your story and folks who are local to you. We also release monthly premium content such as deeper dives into what connected parenting really looks like in real life. And there's even a monthly enneagram connection video where we help you better understand yourself and your family's dynamics. The Village really is your one-stop shop for personalized support. We want this to be accessible to as many parents as possible. So it's just \$24.99 a month. There's no commitment you can cancel at any time. Go to [theadoptionconnection.com/village](http://theadoptionconnection.com/village) to find out more or get started.

[00:02:43.630] - Lisa C. Qualls

Welcome to the Adoption Connection Podcast, where we share resources by and for adoptive and foster moms. I'm Lisa Qualls.

[00:02:52.110] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:02:56.990] - Lisa C. Qualls

Hi, friends. Welcome to Episode 94 of The Adoption Connection Podcast.

[00:03:02.420] - Melissa Corkum

Hey, Lisa, how are you?

[00:03:04.250] - Lisa C. Qualls

I am doing pretty well, thank you. How about you?

[00:03:07.470] - Melissa Corkum

I am doing pretty well. I had an episode a couple of days ago, actually, right before we talked. Literally, this has never happened before in the history of our meeting. I almost called you to cancel. It was book launch day, and I knew you were crazy. But I literally, something happened with our bathroom because it's not 100 % finished yet, and I was so stressed out and I was angry and I was grumpy and I had just snapped at three people in my family, and usually work stuff and talking to friends is how I get out of folks like that. But I literally was just in such a funk. I was like, I don't even know if I can talk to her and be a decent human being. Actually, what I did was listen to about five minutes of special music that we're going to talk about today, and within minutes I could feel like my nervous system calming, because now that I know all the brain science, I knew that there was probably something I could do to snap myself out of it, like that pattern interrupt. Anyway, so that's today. We're going to talk about special music.

[00:04:17.220] - Lisa C. Qualls

We are. We're going to talk about this special music. It's an auditory intervention designed to reduce stress and auditory sensitivity while engaging social engagement and resilience. I didn't come up with all those words. Those are actually from the website for this method we're going to talk about. But the reason we're talking about it is because our children who've experienced adversity or trauma, they tend to have a lot of fear in their bodies. They are just running on fear. I always say, I feel like it was courses through my daughter's veins. And in some ways it was. And the thing about chronic fear is our children are then functioning in the lower regions of their brains and the the more developed prefrontal cortex, they just can't even get it online. So they can't access that part of their brain when they're activated like that. So today we want to talk about a method called the Safe and Sound Protocol that you are very familiar with, Melissa, and just as another tool and potential intervention that people can use for their kids.

[00:05:25.670] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, because I know that when we were in really desperate places, all I did was research all the things, and if there's anything that seemed like it was a little bit promising, I was jumping on board. We dragged our kids to all kinds of therapists, and we did neurofeedback, and we did supplements, and we did the cortisol test study with the saliva and the amino acids and all the things. And so there's not one size fits all. There's not one magic tool. But I think there are a couple of things that are important parts of our toolbox. And the Safe and Sound Protocol, I wish we had had it six years ago, but I have done a lot of research and really believe in it. I've seen it change a handful of families that I've worked with. And the science and the research shows that it's really had a significant impact on the world. It's one of the simpler things to do. It doesn't require you having to go to an office necessarily. The price point in all things considered is fairly reasonable for the return on investment you get.

[00:06:38.340] - Lisa C. Qualls

Let's go back. I want to hear about how and why the Safe and Sound Protocol works.

[00:06:44.730] - Melissa Corkum

A lot of us are already familiar with fight, flight or freeze. We use a lot of terminology about our upstairs and downstairs brains where we have this part of our brain that's always scanning for survival, and it's called our neuroception. And then we have what we call our upstairs brain, the part that's thinking. It's the thing that sets us apart from other animal groups, humans. We think and we have critical thinking, and we do something that a lot of other animal groups don't, which is socially engaged with each other. And of course, we know if you have experience or you've heard of trust-based relational intervention, Dr. Karyn Purvis, who you just released a great book with, used to tell us that what is broken in relationship has to heal within a safe relationship. And that's different than your turtle in your aquarium or the deer running through the woods behind my house. They don't have this the same social interaction where they can derive safety from each other, where we can interact, and where Lisa, I can look at you and understand that you're upset, overwhelmed, you're scared, and you can use me as a co-regulating force to feel safe.

[00:08:07.190] - Melissa Corkum

And so there are cues that our nervous system is taking from the environment all the time to tell us whether we're safe, whether it's from the people around us or other things in the environment. And so our brain has a nerve called the polyvagal nerve, and poly just means many. And this nerve has nerve ends to pretty much every part of our body. It comes off the base of our skull right near that fight or flight part of our brain, and it goes up into our thinking part of our brain, but then it also goes down into all of our organs. And so it's taking cues from the things that we hear, and the things that we see and some other nonverbal things to tell our nervous system whether or not it thinks that we're safe. Our kids who have had a long history of traumatic experiences, broken relationship, that system is telling them that they're not safe, even if they are, because it's one of those systems, just like the rest of us, the rest of our brains, that has this confirmation bias. So if we have a history of safety, then our nervous system assumes and looks for safety. But if we have a history of hurt and fear and broken relationships, then we're going to be looking for continued fear and danger.

[00:09:34.740] - Lisa C. Qualls

So a lot of parents might say, well, my child's safe now. They're safe in my family, safe in my home, and so they shouldn't have this chronic, problem with chronic fear anymore. But we know that even though we know the child's safe, their bodies, they don't necessarily know this. Is that what you're saying about chronic fear?

[00:09:55.910] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, and their confirmation bias is tilted towards looking for fear. So, for example, one of my kids used to always say to me, Why are you mad at me? Are you mad at me? And I wasn't, I mean, I was sometimes, but she would say it even if I was just offering a snack. She would say, Are you mad at me? Your voice sounds mad, right? Because she had a long history of not being safe, and she was hypervigilant to my voice and the tone of my voice, and she would fear that I was mad at her through the tone of my voice because she was looking for it. She assumed that I didn't want her, I didn't like her. I didn't think she was precious, and she was always looking for those cues. And so she missed a lot of the cues of safety that I was offering her because she was hypervigilant on those cues of danger and fear.

[00:10:46.990] - Melissa Corkum

On the flip side, I think I shared this in a recent podcast episode, but we have forgotten now twice to pick up our 17-year-old from a friend's house at the end of an evening. He is one of our securely attached children. And so he neither time was upset. He was like, Oh, yeah, I figured you would come eventually or I knew you were busy. The story, the underlying story that our kids are telling themselves is different based on their past interactions.

[00:11:20.100] - Lisa C. Qualls

That's such a good point. And and I think it's important to note that it's not that our children want to blame us or not believe that we care or anything. This is just literally how their brains have been wired from their experiences. And so that's part of our goal in helping rewire their brains and create new neural pathways is disarming this chronic fear so they can actually learn through these new experiences.

[00:11:50.450] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, absolutely.

[00:11:52.510] - Lisa C. Qualls

So tell me a little bit how Safe and Sound Protocol is different from other therapies.

[00:11:59.650] - Melissa Corkum

So the Safe and Sound Protocol through listening, because I talked about the polyvagal nerve that goes to all of our different sensory organs and also goes to our lungs and our digestive system, is taking cues, and a lot of the cues it's taking are sounds that we hear. And if you've been doing trust-based parenting or connected parenting for a while, you may feel like you could do it all right and your child's still going to have that underlying story of fear that we were just talking about. And sometimes

it feels like, how can we ever get over this hump where the story and the landscape starts to shift? And like you were saying, Lisa, it's not a conscious decision on the part of our kids. It's their nervous system doing what it was designed to do, which is protect them for survival. What the Safe and Sound Protocol does is through special music that uses certain frequencies that we know through brain science help spontaneously tell the nervous system that it is safe and moves the nervous system into what we call social engagement or our upstairs brain. It helps to reset the story that our nervous system is telling us.

[00:13:18.340] - Melissa Corkum

And so instead of looking for the bias towards fear, now it's going to start looking for the confirmation bias of safety. And so it's different than other therapies in that one, it's very physiological, right? So it doesn't require our kids to have verbal memories of what they've experienced. It doesn't require them to necessarily process them out loud or acknowledge them. It doesn't require them to even have language. But it also, I like to call it the gateway therapy. It helps other therapies be more effective.

[00:13:57.920] - Lisa C. Qualls

So can you describe for us what this would actually look like? If a parent were doing the Safe and Sound Protocol with their child, what actually happens?

[00:14:07.850] - Melissa Corkum

So the good news is it's fairly simple. It's a listening protocol. So what happens is, thanks to COVID, this is one of the silver linings, is instead of needing physical equipment, Integrated Listening Systems, who is the company that delivers the music, now has an app where people can download an app to either an Android or an Apple device and access the music. So every day or most days, a child or you, because we actually have parents do this too because our nervous systems need to be calmed down, like I mentioned at the beginning, I listen to it to calm down as well. Your child or and/or you would listen to the music up to 30 minutes a day, so no more than 30 minutes a day. And the length of a session actually really depends on you and your child. So one of the things about trauma is that we don't have control when we're in traumatic situations, and that's one of the things that makes them register as trauma in our nervous system. And so when we do the Safe and Sound Protocol, we like to give as much shared control as we can to the person doing it.

[00:15:23.190] - Melissa Corkum

And so if you get five minutes in and all of a sudden you're like, or your child's like, I'm done, then that's okay. So there's not this expectation to try to coerce them or bribe them to do something very long. It's very self-moderated, and we attune to our own nervous systems and to those of our child. We always have parents be with children who are doing it, so they'll notice sometimes a child might not say, I'm done, but they might start to get really fidgety or a little bit agitated. And then we can say, Hey, it's time to take a break. We'll pick up tomorrow. And children don't have to sit still to do it. They can be playing with Play-Doh or even going on quiet walk. It's just nothing super loud to interfere with the music. But there's a lot of flexibility in that. And so we want kids to feel like this time of listening is a really special time, and it can be a really great time of bonding. Lisa, you talk about your famous double person rocking chair. You could definitely curl up with your child in your lap. And while they listen and just rock gently, that would be a great option as well.

[00:16:34.100] - Lisa C. Qualls

And can you listen to it together? I mean, completely co-regulate and listen to this?

[00:16:40.040] - Melissa Corkum

You can. I always have parents do a little bit first, because sometimes depending on the parent's nervous system. And because this is creating such a big shift in the nervous system, if we do it too fast or if we're not used to it, it can feel a little uncomfortable at first. And so if you're one of those people that feels a little uncomfortable as you're getting used to the music, you probably don't want to do it with your child because you want to be able to focus on your own regulation, and you won't be able to co-regulate with them if you're feeling distracted by it. But if it is calming to you, then for sure you could do it with your child as well.

[00:17:19.150] - Lisa C. Qualls

So if you listen to this and rocked in a rocking chair together and chewed gum, you have it covered, right?

[00:17:26.310] - Melissa Corkum

I mean, I have it all.

[00:17:27.870] - Lisa C. Qualls

Right, you have it all. So we've talked about this already, but just to clarify a little more, who would you actually recommend this for?

[00:17:37.230] - Melissa Corkum

I recommend this for anybody who's really having trouble regulating. If they're having trouble regulating and they have some other indications like sensory processing issues, digestive issues, sleep issues, any... All those things are regulatory systems in our body, right? Digestion is supposed to have a rhythm, sleep is supposed to have a rhythm. And when our nervous system is not feeling safe, all of those rhythms are off. And so this Safe and Sound Protocol can really help restore that balance. Kids have to be willing to at least put headphones on to start. Each parent knows their child and knows whether or not they would be compliant or willing to listen to music as something that's helpful. I even have parents do this with teens. And a lot of the times because a lot of the other therapies we're asking our teens to do require so much, and so this one feels like, well, could you just listen to music for a little while? But also sometimes our kids understand that the way that they're behaving in the world is not the way they want to. They feel just as confused and out of control. And so they are looking to have something be helpful. And this is really accessible and has a low entry point to... It's not like you have to sit down with a stranger and spill all your dark secrets.

[00:19:01.610] - Lisa C. Qualls

What would be the youngest you would recommend this for the youngest child?

[00:19:06.830] - Melissa Corkum

I normally say about three, although I just saw a presentation recently that said children as young as 18 months. There's been a lot... Initially, this protocol was designed for kids on the autism spectrum who had significant sensory, specifically auditory sensitivity issues. And then it was this happy accident that they realized all the different ways that the polyvagal nerve helps the nervous system calm, and that had all these implications for things like trauma. And so the original protocol was a very acute, specific, five-day thing. You listen for an hour. There was all of these like... Because it was done for research, there were all of these things. Everyone had to do it the same way because that's how they could get the most accurate data. So now that it's been out in the world and practitioners have been using it in their practices with real-life families, we've really learned a lot more about it. I think we're understanding that it can be beneficial for even younger children because we can modify how we're using the music more than we thought we could even a year ago.

[00:20:14.400] - Lisa C. Qualls

That's so interesting. I think this is a great potential tool for parents to be looking into. If someone's listening to this today and they want to know more, how can they find out more?

[00:20:27.700] - Melissa Corkum

I am a practitioner and I.. People can go to my website at [thecorkboardonline.com/ssp](http://thecorkboardonline.com/ssp) for safe and Sound Protocol and schedule just a free consultation to just chat with me a little bit more to see if it is a good fit for your family. No obligation, of course, we can just chit chat and see. But every single family that I've helped has seen either nominal gains in one area, and some kids have seen massive gains across all different pillars that we measure. We do a pre- and post-assessment. And some of the situations where the gains haven't been huge have been through COVID. And so when you take the regression we might expect from our kids and know that sometimes the Safe and Sound Protocol has just kept you stable through a worldwide crisis situation, it's pretty incredible. And the other thing that's so interesting is Dan Hughes and Kim Golding, they created this pyramid of need, which is like Maslow's hierarchy of need, but for a different part of the nervous system, really. And felt safety is at

the very bottom of that pyramid. And without that foundational layer, the other things on top are things like developing healthy relationships, comfort and co-regulation, empathy and reflection.

[00:21:48.080] - Melissa Corkum

How often have we looked at our kids and wondered, why are they so self-centered? Why can't they see how their behavior is affecting everyone else? Or why are they so ego centric? Resilience and resources, which includes our kids' self-esteem. So how often do we talk about our kids, especially our teens, their confidence level and their ability to go out in the world? And then lastly, our ability to explore trauma and mourn our losses, just a lot what we know we need at the end for healing, and a lot of times, I know when our kids came home, we put them right in trauma therapy, and it was talk therapy. And we expected them to go talk to this therapist who did take weeks to build rapport with them, but we wanted them to exactly that, explore trauma and mourn their losses. But without this pyramid of need, which I didn't have six years ago, I didn't understand how to move them from the bottom up. I started at the top of the pyramid.

[00:22:43.480] - Lisa C. Qualls

That's such a good point. Well, if you are listening to this episode today and you would like to know more about the Safe and Sound Protocol, Melissa mentioned you can go to her website. But if you are not in a place where you can write it down, you can find her website in our show notes, which will be at the [adoptionconnection.com/94](http://adoptionconnection.com/94).

[00:23:04.710] - Lisa C. Qualls

Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. You can find us on Facebook or Instagram as the Adoption Connection.

[00:23:12.780] - Melissa Corkum

Thanks so much for listening. We love having you. If you enjoyed this episode, please leave a quick review over on iTunes. It will help us reach more moms who may be feeling alone.

[00:23:23.230] - Lisa C. Qualls

Remember, until next week, you're a good mom doing good work and we're here for you.

[00:23:28.900] - Melissa Corkum

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