

[00:00:00.840] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:09.240] - Lisa C. Qualls

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

[00:00:18.080] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:24.490] - Lisa C. Qualls

Well, hello, everyone. Welcome to episode 242 of the Adoption Wise podcast. I have a special guest today, my friend and coworker, Amber. Amber, welcome to the podcast.

[00:00:38.470] - Amber Reynolds

Well, I am so happy to be here.

[00:00:41.310] - Lisa C. Qualls

Well, we're happy to have you. We're happy to have you on the podcast. We're also really happy to have you on our team as our Director of Communications. Would you like to tell people just a little bit about what your job entails here?

[00:00:53.700] - Amber Reynolds

Yeah, I am so excited. I have obviously been friends with you and Melissa for years, and the fact that now I get to work hand in hand right alongside you guys has been so fun. I handle basically all social media. Anything that has written word on it probably has come through me in some way, shape, or form, shaping how the message gets through to other people. And also I get to communicate and message with people on Facebook and Instagram, which is probably my favorite part.

[00:01:26.590] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah, we have amazing people who are involved in our work or coming to us for support and help. And so you get to be one of the first people to talk with them. It's really wonderful. We love that.

[00:01:39.750] - Amber Reynolds

It's been super fun. I love it, too.

[00:01:42.050] - Lisa C. Qualls

Good, good, good. So why don't you introduce yourself now, who you are as a mom and a wife and a person. Tell us a little bit more personally about you.

[00:01:52.770] - Amber Reynolds

My husband and I have been married for almost 11 years, and we live on a farm in Northwest Illinois, really close to the Iowa border. My husband's a ninth generation here on this property in this land, so we have a lot of family around us. My husband's whole family still lives on the property here with us, and so that is really wonderful. In 2017, we became licensed foster parent, and at that point, we wanted to... Our dream was to be able to foster large sibling groups. We knew that we had the space in the capacity to do that. We told the licensing worker that we wanted siblings. Naturally, that is what we got. We've fostered 11 kiddos, both short term and long term, over the last seven years now. And wow, that feels like a whole lifetime. It's crazy how seven years can feel like a blink and also an entire life's worth of times.

[00:03:03.050] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah, and especially when your entire life changed. Seven years ago, your life changed forever.

[00:03:11.130] - Amber Reynolds

Correct. Yeah. And Chris and I, we went from having no kids to having... We had two kids really

quickly, and that ended up being a short term placement. And then we had no kids. And then we had three in diapers all at one time. And so that was really, really crazy. My degree in Communications, and I worked at the time, was working at a church in ministry. I worked in ministry most of my adult life. And when we got our placement that we ended up adopting. So we've adopted three kids. And at the time that they came to us, they were 2, 14 months, and 7 weeks. Biological siblings, three kiddos under two. Our life got real shook.

[00:03:58.350] - Lisa C. Qualls  
I bet it I bet it did.

[00:04:01.970] - Amber Reynolds  
At the time, I am a jump into... Anything that I'm going to do, I'm going to jump in with two feet, really without doing a lot of research, really without a lot of prep work. If I feel like God's telling me to do something, I'm going to do it 100 percent. When we were in the process of getting licensed, it wasn't going as fast as I wanted it to go, and I wanted to be involved immediately. And so I googled how to get involved in foster care in my area, and ended up connecting with somebody that was a advocate for the Forgotten Initiative, which we love, the Forgotten Initiative. So I ended up actually volunteering with the Foster Care Ministry, and then two months later got our first long-term placement. And so I went from being just a regular human person to being all involved in the foster care system on all ends. Our kiddos are 8, 7, and 6. Our license is on hold. We're still doing respite right now, even with our license on hold. So we've had a couple of little babies in our house, but we're looking at this end of summer to reopen our license. So that is kind of where we're at.

[00:05:17.820] - Lisa C. Qualls  
So you adopted your three, and they were your second placement, is that right?

[00:05:24.770] - Amber Reynolds  
Yes.

[00:05:25.500] - Lisa C. Qualls  
Okay. And what year was that?

[00:05:29.390] - Amber Reynolds  
We adopted in 2021. Covid really messed up their process, messed up the... Just got them stuck in the system for a super long time because our children's biological parents both direct surrendered to us in November of 2019. And we were supposed to have court in March of 2020. And we all know what happened in March of 2020, and the whole world shut down. And here in our little part of rural Illinois, we did not have the technology technology to do court over Zoom or to do any sort of anything like that. They actually shut down the court system for about six months. By that time, I think it was maybe June or July before we even had the TPR hearing where the judge accepted the termination, the direct sign. Our court date wasn't until January of 2021, and that was when our adoption happened.

[00:06:26.870] - Lisa C. Qualls  
Yeah, COVID really affected so many adoptions, so many foster placements, so many things. The word you used about your kids just being stuck in the system, that's exactly what we've heard over and over. I'm sure you hear it all the time. People say, Yes, me too, me.

[00:06:46.110] - Amber Reynolds  
Yes. It was really frustrating, I think, for people, especially where we were at the finish line. We knew that it had happened. We had had conversations with the biological parents. We had stopped having visits. We were literally just in this limbo land for a year of, well, we haven't adopted, and we can't change things. It was affecting school stuff and all this stuff. It was really hard to be in this limbo of knowing that it's happening, but it can't happen. And a lot of people, I think, got stuck there. Because reunifications also got put on hold, at least in our area, because court wasn't happening. And so there was no forward progress being made in any direction.

[00:07:30.120] - Lisa C. Qualls

Well, apart from that, which was so unexpected, the truth is, the timeline is all... It's never what we hope it's going to be. I mean, this was extreme. But one of the things we talk about so much with parents is our expectations going into fostering or adopting and our reality, and processing the significant gap most of us experience between what we expected and our reality. And I have thought about that so much for myself. I've written about it, I've talked about it. But I would love if you would share more of your story, what you expected and what you experienced and continue to experience.

[00:08:20.070] - Amber Reynolds

I would describe myself as a fairly educated person in the world of trauma and mental illness and special needs. I have spent a lot of time in trainings and going to conferences and speaking at conferences. So going into the adoption portion, our kids had already been with us for three years. I had gotten so much information about IEPs and special needs and advocating well. My expectations of being able to handle my kids and their needs, and advocate correctly for their needs, was just completely blown out of the water as to what our reality ended up being. Everything leading up to our adoption, we made sure that all the services were in place. We were actually a spec home or a level four home. It's called different places, different things, different places. But we were able to have basically the most hardest needs we were trained for. We had extra training so that we could do that. Our son was in that highest category, our oldest son. When he was adopted at five years old, we already knew that we were dealing with a significant amount of needs. My expectations was, Hey, we've been working on this for three years. We have a good team in place. We know what we're getting into. We've done diagnosis. I had taken him all over the state for testing and services things like that. We had a really good handle. I thought we had a really good handle on what our future was going to look like.

[00:10:08.310] - Amber Reynolds

We even had things written into our adoption about long-term care, like post-high school services, things like that, because we really did know that we knew what we were getting into. Almost exactly a year after our adoption, our adoption was January of 2021. And in January of 2022, our oldest son started really falling apart, really deteriorating, his mental health deteriorating. We were seeing things that were so foreign to us, even being what I would consider very well-informed. My husband is a paramedic, so he works in emergency services, and so he sees it on the front line. And I, volunteering and working in the foster care world, I was still very shocked by the things that were happening within our own home. Very quickly, our son started having crisis after crisis after crisis, where hallucinations and suicidal ideations and homicidal ideations, and attempts. It was just over and over and over again. He ended up having several short term stays in mental health facilities. At the time, he was six or had turned seven. These facilities would say, Oh, he is just so cute. I would literally say to them, I'd say, I never said he was ugly. His brain is just not working. It was really hard for me to face the reality that this is just harder than we thought. This is not something that we can cover up with services. This is not something that we have capacity to handle. It got to the point, honestly, where, which I know Lisa, you've experienced this to some extent. It was hard keeping the other kids in our home safe. It was hard as a mom to balance the decisions to be made over which kid am I going to try to keep safe in this moment. Or if I'm throwing all of our energy and power on the hardest kid, then I was seeing our other kids just really start to struggle and just wrapping our brains around what that looked like.

[00:12:36.090] - Amber Reynolds

Our hand ended up being forced in May of 2022, when there was an attempted homicide in our home, and emergency services had to be called, and there were lots of police officers in our home. At that point, he ended up not living in our home since that point. It's been almost exactly two years, and we are still grappling with the reality of what that looks like to have a child that you love so wholeheartedly, so dearly, but had not safely lived in our home. And I think part of the challenge with that as a mom, too, is he is young. He's only eight. His ninth birthday is in two weeks. And he has a lot of life ahead of him. The reality that I am missing a lot of that is... It's heavy. Man, our schedule, like last year, how many therapies and supports and things that we were in was very overwhelming. But we are getting to a point where we are starting to feel a shift of peace in our home.

[00:13:47.680] - Lisa C. Qualls

Can you talk at all about this strange combination, if you experience this, of relief and grief, both at the same time when your child had to be removed from your home?

[00:14:02.930] - Amber Reynolds

It's insane. It honestly made me feel a little bit like a crazy person because he spent 34 days in an adult emergency room, which was that I got to do a whole podcast episode on how the health care system is struggling to understand mental illness because he did not have a "physical need." They would not transport him to a better hospital that was better suited for him. Instead, he was in our tiny little ER in our tiny little town for 34 days. At the end of that 34 days, when I left the hospital without him, and I was staying with him at the hospital. When I left and I came home in the first couple of nights, I was crying myself to sleep. Also, I would wake up and feel this immense relief that I wasn't going through this fight, or that I wasn't going to have to spend the entire day trying to keep my other children from being injured. It was just this crazy balance of being so sad, heartbroken, hurt. I felt betrayed in a lot of ways by the community because we had this great system. And the day after adoption, we lost so many services, and I felt like other people had failed me, and I had failed to advocate well. It was so many feelings all at one time that when you're mixing feelings of joy and relief, but also grief and sorrow at the same time, it's really hard. It's not easy to walk that line of all of the feelings coming up at one time.

[00:15:54.010] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah, it is far more complex than I think most people would realize I mean, I've shared this before, but one time I asked my older kids, What's been the hardest thing for you about our adoption? And my oldest daughter said, Seeing the people I love hurt the people I love. Right? I mean, this is it. You love him, and you want to advocate. You want the very best for him you wanted to heal. And you have these other two little ones who you absolutely love, and you have to keep safe, and you need to help them heal from all the trauma they just experienced. It's like being pulled apart. That's helpful for me. But I also did experience that relief of knowing everybody was safe now.

[00:16:42.900] - Amber Reynolds

And I think people have asked me, I've shared a lot of my story on Instagram, and people will ask me, Well, how did you talk about this certain situation with your younger kids? Because at the time, my other two were only four and five when this started. They were in it. They were in it with us. It wasn't like we had to explain why he had to leave to go to the hospital. It happened because of something that happened, what's happening to them or with them. It was a lot of you're feeling all these emotions as a mom, but also walking my tiny little children through also these feelings of relief and sadness. Because it would be like, Oh, my brother would love doing... We would go to the movie, Oh, my brother would love this movie. But also, we would probably have to leave because he would start throwing things. And so it was like, they were also grappling with it in their head, the feelings of like, Hey, we actually get to go to do things because he's not with us. But also, he would have loved it when he was here. And so it's a lot. It's a lot to walk through yourself when you're also walking other children through expectations versus reality. In my case, I had a really good community around me, so I wasn't alone in doing this with myself or with my children.

[00:18:04.760] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah. That reminds me that we had one Christmas where our daughter was in inpatient psychiatric care. And that's the saddest thing, to not have one of your siblings, like for the kids with us for Christmas. And we had Christmas. Everybody got to open presents. We had a meal together. Sadness and relief and all those feelings running at the same time through everybody. My kids experienced it differently just because of their unique personalities, who they are, and where they were in the family in terms of age, too.

[00:18:44.090] - Amber Reynolds

I'll never forget our first vacation after he was no longer living with us, and we took a vacation. It was a blessing because we already had it planned. And so it wasn't like, Oh, we need to plan a trip, but we needed to get away. Our bodies were tired and our souls were weary, and we needed to get to go away. My husband's family has a cabin in Minnesota on a lake. We were able to... There's very little

cell service there. It's a very remote little part of Northern Minnesota. The kids, it was the first time in almost a year that they were just playing care-free, playing care-free, going on a boat, watching them just like their bodies, their little tiny bodies, had been so pent up with stress that Chris and I, just day by day, we were there for nine days. And by the third day, my husband even had tears in his eyes because we were watching their little bodies began to relax for the first time in a year.

[00:19:46.860] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah. I wonder if you experienced this. I remember one day telling Russ, I think they remember how to play. It even makes me choked up even now. But the stress on our children is It's incredible. It's incredible. So speaking of that, what toll did it take on your nervous system and your body and your mental health?

[00:20:12.370] - 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.

[00:20:26.390] - Lisa C. Qualls

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[00:20:52.480] - 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](http://reclaimcompassion.com).

[00:21:08.920] - Amber Reynolds

Yeah, I think secondary trauma isn't talked about enough within this space, within foster and adoptive parents, because I think we're so focused on our kids and the trauma that they have experienced or are experiencing. We do a lot of work around what they're going through that we don't stop and think about the toll that's taking for us caring for somebody in that intense trauma cycle. And so for me, it manifested very, very clearly in my body. It didn't for a long time. Which I think is why I did not prepare myself well. I didn't do enough nervous system work or bodywork to prevent things from happening. Because what happened was one year after... Basically, one year after his first inpatient stay, my body kept the score without me asking it to. I actually had a stroke. I actually had a stroke I was in the neurological ICU for about a week, and they never really... They couldn't find a cause. I was meant to so many specialists, and my stroke ended up starting this cycle of seizures and I was having hemiplegic migraines. Half of my body was going completely paralyzed. They kept saying, Are you experiencing a lot of stress?

[00:22:39.560] - Amber Reynolds

I would say, No, actually. We're a year removed from the most stressful day of my life. The more and more that I was learning about my body and about stress and the nervous system, well, silly me. My body is starting to... I'm able to take a break long enough that my body is released all of this and all of my stress and my hormones and my brain. I still have done a lot of work since then. But I would see it, the day after he would come home from inpatient, I would have just a horrible migraine. It was like my body saying, Okay, we're in the fight or flight again. We're constantly on edge. We're constantly on edge. But in the middle of that, even though I preach it now to people, it is so hard to stop and care for yourself. It is so hard. Because you're going, going, going. You're caring for your hard child or your multiple hard children. And also your other kids that need... It felt like everyone needed me. Yeah. In the middle of this, I was still helping run a nonprofit in our area. I was still working full-time. And so it was like everything was happening, and I didn't take the time to stop. And so So then my body is like, Okay, well, you're not taking the time to stop. We're going to put you in the hospital for a couple of weeks to see if that does the trick.

[00:24:09.710] - Lisa C. Qualls

When you look back, you said you wish you'd prepared your self, or taken better care. But when you look back, is there something that you wish you had known, you know now, but you didn't know then, that maybe would have helped?

[00:24:29.180] - Amber Reynolds

I wish that I would have taken advantage of respite care. Because at the very beginning of our parenting journey, my husband and I decided that every other month, so every 8 to 10 weeks, basically, we did one overnight. So we got respite for 24 hours. We did that for two years, really, until COVID hit. We were going every 8 to 10 weeks just for 48 hours because he works on a weird schedule. We oftentimes would have 48 hours. But we would just go to a hotel locally and order Chinese food and stay in and watch reruns of MASH and Andy Griffith on TV land. And that was like, we weren't doing anything exciting. We were literally just resting. And so we had set the precedent of that early. But then COVID hit, and then I felt like I couldn't get away. I couldn't leave. I felt like if I left, then there would be so much to come back from. I'm sure anyone that listening that has neurodivergent children know that if anything is different for any amount of time, then there's a time period where you have to reintegrate systems and rules and things. I just thought it would be too hard to do that. And so we didn't take any breaks. Basically, that entire time, we didn't take any breaks. And now, looking back or when I am talking to other moms in the trenches, I'm like, You have got to take breaks. I wish so badly that we would have kept on that schedule because my husband and I would go maybe three weeks without having a conversation. When we were in the midst of this. We would have conversations, but every conversation was revolved around, How are we going to pay for this next treatment that isn't covered by insurance? How are we going to... I was picking up extra jobs to do this. Then he was working days, and I would work nights, and we would be passing ships, and all of our conversations would be surrounding around the behaviors or what's the next thing to do and all that. I think if we would have taken time to breathe, even for 12 hours, even an entire day, because towards the end, he couldn't stay in school. Even with an IEP, he was getting suspended, and I was having pick them up a lot and those things. And so we couldn't even take a workday off because we knew that we would have them with us. And so I think I would have done a better... I wish I would have done a better job of reaching out to people that volunteered or asking for a respite from the agency.

[00:27:20.910] - Lisa C. Qualls

That is really good advice. It's important. And I think when we're in crisis, though, it's very hard to think clearly. And had COVID had not happened, you might have been able to stick with the plan you made before you were in crisis to have regular respite. But COVID just changed a lot of things. But we're past that now. Hopefully, we're never going back. Those of you who are listening right now, I think what you're saying, Amber, is set up regular respite, regular breaks. If you have a partner, time to connect with your spouse, your partner, don't wait in crisis to try to figure these things out because, I don't know about you, but my brain was so stressed and so taxed that I could not think about things like that. I was just in the moment, the next thing, the next thing, the next thing. So, yes, that is really good advice. I hope everybody listening is hearing it and you are writing a note to yourself to see. Because it takes time to find the right person, to make the right plans. It's intentional. It does require a little bit of energy on our part.

[00:28:33.240] - Amber Reynolds

I think if also you get decision fatigue so fast when you're in that crisis mode, because it's you're constantly trying to decide things for your kids, decide the best thing, decide how to keep people alive, those stuff that even if we would get a rare moment, Andy would be like, Where do you want to go to dinner? I cannot even think about one other thing. I cannot think about another decision.

[00:28:59.830] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah, I totally understand that. I feel like I quit everything. I couldn't think about going out. I just quit everything. I think that's one of the things that happens when we're under this stress is we isolate because we are barely holding it together. And the idea of trying to add even the tiniest thing might just make us fall off completely, fall off the world. I don't know.

[00:29:27.800] - Amber Reynolds

Yeah. In the end of or in the middle of what I would consider our crisis season, which was January through June of 2022. In the middle of that, I had so many people that knew at least bits and pieces of what was going on. Of course, not everyone could fully grasp the whole story unless you're living it, especially because with children with reactive attachment disorder, in public, everything looked awesome. And so much so that oftentimes, we would just be in public just to be in public so I could get a break from what was happening in our home. But a lot of people did know bits and pieces of what was going on. I would ask, Hey, how can I help? What can I do to help? Which I think when you're in crisis, you're like, I literally cannot even think of one thing that would be helpful. I can't even think of one thing to decide. So I'm about halfway through a couple months in, whenever I get ideas like this that don't come from anyone else, I say that the Holy spirit downloaded. The Holy spirit downloaded this idea to just make a note on my phone of everything that would be helpful. So it was things like, take my youngest to the library. He loves going to the library, but I did not have capacity in that season to take him to the library. Pick up Buffalo Wild wings. Here's our Buffalo Wild Wings order. And I literally had our entire order written out on a note on my phone. And so once When somebody asked, Can I bring you a meal? I would just screenshot that Buffalo Wild Wings order and send it to them. It's already been decided. So even if we were in the midst of a really horrible day, I didn't have to think about what would be helpful because I already had things written down. So I had people that would come and I would just place all of our dirty laundry on our back porch, and they would come and do our laundry, fold it and bring it back. Because I had that written down on my phone, and I would say, Here's a list of things that would be helpful. If you want to pick one, that It would be awesome. If not, don't worry about it. But I couldn't. That way it was already decided for me, if that makes sense.

[00:31:36.660] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah, it's a great idea. And it also speaks to the fact that there are people who want to help and they don't know how to help. And I wrote an article about that a long time ago. I should bring that around again. But one of the things I remember saying is, if you know a family who's dealing with really complex parenting and children, and you know that you're going sign your kid up for parks and rec swim lessons or baseball or whatever, see if their kid wants to do it, too. And you just commit to doing all the driving, all the practices, all the games, or all the lessons, whatever it is. Because just like we get overwhelmed, Our kids end up missing out on stuff because we don't have the capacity to take them to the library. It's interesting you said that, too, because I have a friend who literally did that. She took Claire one morning a week. She'd come pick her up, take her to the library, then they go back to her house and have tea before she brought Claire home. It was just the sweetest thing. So in all of this, your physical health took a real hit. I mean, really big. But your nervous system did, too. We talk so much here about the nervous system, nervous system care, blocked care. Can you talk a little bit about your experience with blocked care?

[00:32:57.090] - Amber Reynolds

I would say, and we talk about blocked care a lot now, but three years ago, we didn't know that term. My husband and I would say all the time, It's really hard to love someone you don't like. It's really hard. It's hard to love someone you don't like. Now we know the term blocked here, and we've done reading and research and all of those things. But when we were experiencing it, it really just felt like, how do we continue to care for somebody that is physically harming other people in our house, is physically and emotionally causing harm to us? I wish that you had written your book four years ago.

[00:33:43.170] - Lisa C. Qualls

I wish I had learned all this then.

[00:33:46.750] - Amber Reynolds

Yeah, there just wasn't really a lot of guidance as to what it looks like to be loving somebody and not liking them. And so we had to do... My husband and I had to do a lot of tag teaming, a lot of tag teaming. Because it would get really bad towards me. I would say, I have to remove myself from this situation or something not great is going to happen. It wasn't like I was actively considering harming or anything like that. It was just more like, I will leave this house and never return if I have to spend one more minute caring this child that is actively hurting me. Blocked care is one of the hardest things I've ever experienced because you don't have a choice when that's a child. You just don't have a

choice to care for them. They are in your care. My oldest son couldn't tie his shoes or get dressed by himself or mealtime. And there was just so many things where if I didn't make him food, even though I knew he was likely going to throw it, he wouldn't eat anything. And that was a big responsibility when you are in the midst of blocked care.

[00:35:05.100] - Lisa C. Qualls

We talk about this. We would never be in a relationship with someone who physically hurt us, who screamed at us, who swore at us, who hurt other people we loved. But this is not a relationship where you can say, Well, I'm just going to put boundaries. No, this is your child. You're in it.

[00:35:27.550] - Amber Reynolds

Yeah. And my sister said, my sister said one time when I was just really struggling, she said, Amber, if he were 10 years older, he would have already been arrested. If you were dealing with an adult person that was treating you the way that you were being treated, he wouldn't have had a choice, and you wouldn't have had a choice. But when you're dealing with a seven and eight-year-old or even a nine or ten-year-old, you don't get a break. You don't get an option or a choice.

[00:35:57.470] - Lisa C. Qualls

When you first heard about blocked care, what did you feel? What did you think?

[00:36:05.300] - Amber Reynolds

Initially, because it was several years ago when I heard the term compassion fatigue before really blocked care started talking about. And I think that I even hopped on, I don't remember what it was called a long time ago when you would have these meets for people that were experiencing compassion fatigue. And that was the first time that I heard even that term. And I was like, I felt so much less lonely.

[00:36:33.710] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah.

[00:36:34.500] - Amber Reynolds

I think when you can give names to feelings, it becomes real and it becomes less of a burden. So when I started digging into blocked care, I just remember feeling like, if there's a whole book written about this, if people are talking about it, then it's not just me. I'm not the only one feeling like it's so hard. And so it made me feel like there's a whole new world that opened up of other parents that were experiencing these thoughts and these feelings that they didn't have to exist only in my head anymore. It was real.

[00:37:11.410] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah. And if it's real and it has a name and we can talk about it, then we can start making a plan for how to heal and overcome it. So as you began to understand blocked care and you were understanding more about your nervous system and how your nervous system was actually protecting you, and it was not something intentional. It wasn't about your character. It was truly a subconscious process that was happening in your nervous system. You realized that you could heal from this, that you could overcome this. What were some of the things that were most helpful for you in reclaiming compassion and healing your nervous system and finding some joy again?

[00:37:58.250] - Amber Reynolds

The big thing for me, which is really funny to people who know me well, is getting in nature, seeing water. Oh, my gosh. We live on property. We have a little pond. It's not a big pond. You can put a boat in it or anything. Just a little fishing. But I would just walk back to the pond and just sit and literally just stare at the water. And I could feel my body healing. Our family started hiking, which is so funny because I was such an anti-hiker, vocally, loudly an anti-hiker. I'm like, what? You're just walking around looking at rocks? I don't understand. But we started doing the little hikes around us, and then we hiked part of the Adirondacks, and then we hiked part of the Appalachia Trail, and we went to Smoky Mountain. And we started just together as a family and myself individually, started getting outside more. And I am one of those people where it is not warm unless it's 85 degrees. The fact that

even today, it's 41 outside, but it's sunny. I'm like, I might go for a walk outside. Because I know that even if I'm going to be grumbly and it's cold, I still know that my nervous system is going to be able to stay in a safer place if I'm outside in nature. And it's such an easy thing. My husband bought me a hammock, and so I will take a blanket, and I'll take my coffee in a thermos, and I'll just sit out just with a breeze on my face in my hammock and just being outside and just can feel my body my nervous system, relax.

[00:39:48.510] - Lisa C. Qualls

That's so good. Yes. I literally wrote in my little journal yesterday that the weather was so beautiful. I have a good routine for walking, but I wrote, I need to get outside more. Because when I can get out in nature, like you're talking about, it's like I can breathe more deeply. And it does, it begins to just calm my nervous system. And we know that walking is rhythmic, it's repetitive. And when you're with other people, it's relational, which we know equals regulation. Thank you, Dr. Bruce Perry, for that. So, yeah, I feel like walking outdoors in nature. Now, I live in a really cold climate, and so sometimes the treadmill is the best you can do. But getting outside in nature and walking is extremely beneficial for me. What else? Is there anything else other than being out in nature?

[00:40:41.550] - Amber Reynolds

Yeah. And I think, too, listening to classical music has been another one where I am not... I'm not a music person. I'll listen to the music if it's on. And people are going to laugh who know me because I say I'm not a music person, but I play quite a few instruments, and I'm on worship team at church.

[00:41:02.760] - Lisa C. Qualls

That is funny. Okay. That is funny, Amber.

[00:41:08.480] - Amber Reynolds

But I would not say, I could hear a song, I could never tell you who's singing it. I'm not in the music culture in a way where my husband has a degree in audio engineering. He took so many classes in active listening and music theory and those things. I guess compared to him, I'm not a music person. But listening to classical music while right now with my kids, we've been listening to classical music, we homeschool, and so we've been doing that while we're doing math. I just feel like it's something that has been super an easy switch to start playing classical music while we're doing school and just the music just melting our little bodies, just a little way to help our brain get rid of the noise and relax.

[00:42:02.820] - Lisa C. Qualls

Okay, so someone's listening right now and they're thinking, That sounds great, but I have never listened to classical music in my life. I would have no idea where to start. Is there one thing, one composer, one symphony whatever that you know the name of?

[00:42:17.860] - Amber Reynolds

No, I say, Alexa. Play nice classical music.

[00:42:22.520] - Lisa C. Qualls

I love it. Okay. There's the tip of the day. Just ask Alexa, or I would say, G-O-O GLE, but if I say it, it'll reply. Ask that.

[00:42:34.740] - Amber Reynolds

Yes. Or on Spotify.

[00:42:37.430] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah, so many great playlists.

[00:42:39.050] - Amber Reynolds

Yeah, on Spotify, there's so many playlists that are just. One band that we do like, it's called Hammock. And my husband loves Hammock, and so I always know that I could go there, and it will help to relax. My son, my youngest son, has pretty extreme ADHD, and not in the like, Oh, he's just a hyper six-year-old. His brain legitimately struggles. And so we have found that playing classical music,

playing Hammock, it helps him actually be able to focus and study. There's one more thing I would love to share with anyone listening. And it's find a simple prayer. Find something simple that you can pray to Jesus, because like we talked about, when you're in the middle of decision fatigue or not being able to, I honestly stopped reading my Bible and felt closest to God when I was crying out to him. But I could not. I had one more thing to what I was doing. I could not open my Bible. I could not listen to it on the app. And so I just prayed Psalm 56:3 over and over and over again, When I'm afraid, I will trust in you.

[00:43:58.970] - Amber Reynolds

And I would replace that word, afraid. So I'm like, When I am stressed, I will trust in you. When I am hurt, I will trust in you. When I'm angry, I will trust in you. And I just felt the presence of the Lord so, so near just having that repetitive prayer. And my kids all know it because I would say it out loud over and over again, Lord, I am afraid. I'm trusting in you. I am hurt. I'm sad, I'm trusting in you. And so I just really encourage people that if you're in a season where you feel like you're far from the Lord, or you're in a season of hurting, find something that's... Or even steal mine. Even if you just need to grasp onto that, you can say, When I am afraid, I will trust in you. And Just having a prayer that I could come to over and over again was so important in this journey in the last couple of years.

[00:44:53.560] - Lisa C. Qualls

That's beautiful. Thank you for sharing that. I definitely have experienced the same thing, and If you can pray, we call it breath prayer. If you can say the whole phrase in one breath and just say it again and again as much as you need to. I can remember going in my laundry room, shutting the door and getting on my knees and just praying, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me. For whatever reason, that was the one that just went so deep into me. But also, When I am afraid, I will trust in you. There are so many simple, simple phrases. And scriptures. Yes. Thank you. Thank you for sharing that and sharing everything, your story. And maybe we'll get to do this again, and we'll talk more about overcoming and recovering from blocked care because this is so sweet. I'm so pleased to spend this time with you. Thank you, Amber.

[00:45:47.600] - Amber Reynolds

Yeah. Thanks for having me. I always, always enjoy chatting.

[00:45:51.600] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:46:05.800] - Lisa C. Qualls

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

[00:46:13.740] - Melissa Corkum

Music for the podcast is composed by Oleksandr Oleksandrov.