

[00:00:01.150] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:00:09.040] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:14.440]

Happy Tuesday, Lisa. Welcome to Episode 41.

[00:00:17.890] - Lisa Qualls

Good morning, Melissa. I'm really glad we're doing this episode today. I'm excited about our topic.

[00:00:23.140] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. So this topic came about because, I'll speak for myself, but our adoption journey did not pan out the way that I thought it was going to and I thought that I was prepared. We thought we were prepared. When we went into our first adoption, our first adoption was from Korea, I'm an adult adoptee from Korea, I blew through all the trans racial blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Right, because half our family looks Korean and so it wasn't like our son was going to be the only child of color in our home. Our adoption agency had pretty minimal training. A lot of it revolved around institutional care and our son had not been in an institution. So, I mean, we just really thought we were going to be good to go. And gosh, it didn't take us more than a couple of weeks to realize we were way in over our heads.

[00:01:10.710] - Lisa Qualls

Well, I'm glad you made it a couple of weeks. I would say we made it, we didn't even make it home from Ethiopia before we knew that this was going to be far different than we ever, ever imagined. And like you, we thought we were very prepared. I mean, we had been parents for twenty years. We knew a lot about parenting, I had a background in mental health, we totally thought we knew what we were doing. We did all the training, and we got to Ethiopia and met our little girl and we were like, OK, wow, this is this is going to be different, this is going to be hard, and we better get ourselves ready before we get home with her. So, yeah, I think there's a lot of preparation that we all wish we had done and we wish we'd known. So what's so great about this episode and our next episode is that we went to our people in our private Facebook group, the Adoption Connection Private Facebook group, which we invite you to join, and we asked them, what do you wish you'd known, what would have been important to you? And what we found is that the answers tended to fall into two categories. Either they were about internal preparation, what do I wish I had known, how could I have prepared myself mentally, emotionally, spiritually? And then the other category they fell into is practical things. What do I wish I'd done with my house, what do I wish I'd done with my schedule, my life, my other children?

[00:02:33.160] - Melissa Corkum

And I will also say, for those of you who feel like you're pretty prepared, still listen, we went into our second group of adoptions as empowered to connect parent trainers thinking, OK, we already did this once unprepared, we won't do it a second time unprepared, and we still got blindsided. And then I would also say, if you already have kids in your home, this episode is still great for you, because if you feel like you're struggling, it is never too late to make some of these shifts, both mentally and practically. So we'll cover how to mentally prepare for your fostering and adoption journey this week and then next week we'll talk more about the practical things. But there's always things that we can be doing to make what we're doing better, to make improvements, to shift our mindset, especially if you feel like you've tried everything or you're beating your head against the wall or you're at the end of your rope or you're just stuck. You may find some wisdom in here that will help you kind of get unstuck, get some forward momentum going again.

[00:03:31.100] - Lisa Qualls

I definitely think you'll find wisdom because just reading the comments and information that our readers shared with us and our listeners, I learn new things. I learn new things all the time, because this is a lifelong journey of being an adoptive mom and a foster mom. And so there's just tons of good

stuff. So why don't we jump in with, we have eleven points we're going to cover, so we'll jump in with number one. We need to remember the importance of taking care of ourselves and our marriages.

[00:04:02.920] - Melissa Corkum

It's very easy to feel like our kids get the highest priority, especially if we've adopted kids with really challenging behaviors or who have really high needs, maybe because they have special needs. I lived in a world for a long time where I thought meeting the needs of my most problematic child were the top priority because she was the most challenging thing in my life and I wanted it to go away, the challenging part to go away. But in the process of that, I almost lost myself and my marriage definitely took a hit. So I talk about it in this pyramid thing. Maybe I'll get to post a picture of that in the show notes, but that we need to not make our pyramid top heavy, right. It has to be ourselves at the bottom, but not the bottom priority. The bottom as in the foundation, the biggest part, so that our whole existence has a solid foundation and that these self care and marriage care things are actually the things that make us better for our parenting journey.

[00:04:57.880] - Lisa Qualls

Absolutely. And, you know, we see we see a lot of marriages fail under the stress or really become very, very strained and gosh, if that's happened to you, first of all, if your marriage has fallen apart completely, I'm so sorry, because this is hard, this is very, very hard for people. If your marriage has gotten into a rough place, I get it because Russ and I have had to work hard to dig ourselves out of some of the places where we found ourselves. It is a foundation. And we also know that one of the things our kids experience is a lot of fear and having a solid marriage is good for our kids, all of our kids in terms of helping them build trust with us.

[00:05:39.780] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, and if you need some ideas on what are these things, one of our listeners, Anne, said, "think about what will help bring you peace when your child isn't peaceful." So that's a great question to ask and then we actually did an entire episode on kind of relieving our stressed out brains and ideas for self care. It's episode 31 and we'll link to that in the show notes as well. So first thing, importance of self care and marriage care, and then second is expectations. And this is a thread that'll probably run through the next two weeks. We talk a lot about it. What are some of the expectations that you had to adjust in your family, Lisa?

[00:06:16.740] - Lisa Qualls

Well, I think one of the biggest ones was that I truly did not know how hard it was going to be. And I know Anne said in the comments, different Anne, "I wish I'd known how hard it would be, I wish I didn't have so many expectations that I'd had to give up, and I wish I knew it would get easier eventually." I think for me, I wish I had realized how hard it would be and that it was going to be a long process. I think in my mind, the hard was going to last a little while. And I said this before, you know, it was going to be hard for a little while, of course it was. Think of what my children had been through, think of the changes they were experiencing, but this hard was not going to go on all that long, right? I mean, like, how many months could it go on? And that was very a very unrealistic expectation because it was more like years, not months, but years. I wish I had been prepared more for that.

[00:07:12.510] - Melissa Corkum

We talked a little bit about this last week when Eileen was talking about kids with brain differences, but there's different ages for our kids, right. They have a chronological age which is determined by when they were born, but then there's also an academic age and an emotional age and a developmental age, and all of those ages can be vastly different, right. You could have a child who was 15 who has the life skills of a twenty one year old because maybe she's been living on the streets for a couple of years, but who emotionally may only have the social and problem solving skills of a two year old who may be academically like a third grader, right. So there's all of these different things to take into account and that can really help us manage our expectations for our kids. And then, you know how we can have compassion for where they're struggling and then how we can accommodate them.

[00:08:06.780] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, it's a good point. In that, I think in our episode that you mentioned with Eileen, she talked about the fact that our children's brains are impacted by their histories, whether it's prenatal traumas or before they came to US traumas, their brains have been impacted and that their behavior is a symptom of what happened in their brain. That is a really good thing to understand so their expectations can be realistic.

[00:08:33.300] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I love what one of our listeners, Rachel, said. She drew a parallel between our heading into our adoption journey and kind of laboring. She said, "I would remind myself quite a few times that things will not be like I imagine them and they will probably be harder. Kind of like laboring without pain medication. You think you can do it and then you get into the middle of transition and you start yelling to everybody that you are done and that you want your epidural." So sometimes parenting, especially with special needs kids and kids with attachment struggles, you feel like you're on a ride and you can't get off and it is scarier, harder, more painful than you thought you would be OK with and it's not what you thought it'd be like. So she says, "just go ahead and prepare yourself for different periods of disillusionment. It doesn't mean you're doing it wrong."

[00:09:23.520] - Lisa Qualls

That's the most important thing right there. It doesn't mean you're doing it wrong. Just because it's so much harder or so much different than you imagined, does not mean that you're doing anything wrong. It's just the process, because this is a very, very big life change and experience for you and your kids. Here's another comment. This one is from Mama T. She said, "My husband and I have adopted seven children. Every child will test you at some point in their life, they will want to see if you truly love them. They will take you to the edge of insanity and you will need to be able to let the hurt roll off and keep the love going." Really, really good words.

[00:10:00.450] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, so much easier said than done, but that's that's what we're aiming for, friends. So we talked about the importance of self care and marriage care, number two, expectations. The third thing that came up was: understand what you can control and then also what you can't. I had to do an exercise at a parent training thing one time where we had to make three columns. We had to write down things we could control, things that we had influence over, and things that we couldn't control. And it sounds silly because if someone had asked me before that, I knew I really couldn't control my kids, but I think I was operating in a parenting paradigm that told me I might be able to. And so when I sat down and in that chart and realized that all of my kids decisions fell under, either I have no control over or I have a little bit of influence over, it radically changed the way that I was parenting them because I was parenting them thinking that I could control them and then when I couldn't, it was driving me insane. And so when I understood kind of where my control did lie, I was able to feel so much more successful because I wasn't trying to do the impossible.

[00:11:08.530] - Lisa Qualls

I think this is true too if our marriages are under strain. We cannot control anybody but ourselves. And so I think that the Serenity Prayer has become really meaningful for me over the years. You know, God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, right. Wisdom to change the things I can and the courage to know the difference. I mean, that is, it maybe the prayer for 12 step groups, but it's really a great prayer for all of us as parents. Another comment we got is from Sandy. Such great thoughts here, she says, "memorize verses you can use when you struggle with fears and doubts. For a good long time, when we were struggling with our child, the first words that came to my mind upon waking in the morning were "fear not for I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." That's Isaiah 41:10. Literally, I had to cling to that verse all day and by the power of God it did and still is keeping me afloat. Memorized many, many verses you can stand upon in your time of trouble and your times of joy."

[00:12:13.270] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I think that's so great. I mean, like, if your definition of success for the day is that you memorize a Bible verse, you can go to bed feeling successful, don't make success that your child won't have a

meltdown because you can't control that.

[00:12:24.640] - Lisa Qualls

Absolutely. That's so good. And number four, be flexible. That's a pretty hard one for some of us moms.

[00:12:32.260] - Melissa Corkum

Super hard for me. This may have been one of your blog readers, Lisa. Some of these comments came from your blog comments as well. Peace Living says, "so many great things have already been shared here, but I will add that perhaps the most important thing is to be flexible. Don't pigeonhole yourself and plan your next 15 years of fostering and adopting before you have even started. You won't know what is the right path for your family until you are actually into it. I regret announcing to the world how exactly we are going to foster and all of our plans only to find out after one month that our plans had completely changed. We didn't even take the adoption classes during our foster training, only to realize after our first placement that we were actually interested in adoption after all. This is coming from a mom of eight and so you just never know how God will change your heart and all the ways you will humble you about your set plans." So it's kind of like a super practical way to think about being flexible, but I know, Lisa, you had some really good examples of ways that you've had to be flexible in your parenting.

[00:13:30.400] - Lisa Qualls

Yes, I actually think flexibility is almost a foundational characteristic of adoptive parents who manage this well, because, you know, some of us are used to running pretty tight ships before we bring our kids home. On a small end of flexibility, I was a mom who did not allow my children to chew gum. At least not in the house ever. I hated gum, I did not want my kids to chew it, and then we went to work with one of the best therapists in the country. And this was even before I really knew Dr. Karen Purvis, who called herself the Queen of Bubblegum. Anyhow, this therapist said that letting my daughter chew gum would actually be calming to her. Well, this sounds like a small thing, but I'm telling you, this was a hard thing for me to give up. So I was able to adjust myself down and say, all right, I'm going to accept that my kids are going to chew gum in the house. Now, I did still have some parameters around that, but I had to be flexible and give up the no gum rule. On a much bigger end of the scale, probably one of the areas where I had to become most flexible was in how I educated my children. And I've written a lot about this, I've talked about it, but it was a painful letting go, like, slowly peeling off a Band-Aid or something. I can't even explain how hard it was, but we had to go from being an exclusively homeschooling family to becoming much more flexible in our education options for our kids who slowly went into more group education situations, into private school, and then some of our kids into public school. And that was a very big lesson in becoming more flexible for the sake of my children.

[00:15:16.360] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, definitely. And we've experienced all of those things and all the things in between. So number five, speaking of education, is your own education coming into your foster and adoption journey? Education on everything from trauma to attachment, to child development, to brain science. I think all of these understanding pieces help us kind of feel the compassion we can have for our kids when things get really, really tough. And there are so many different ways to do that. There's conferences and books and coaching. If you're not sure where to start and any of those things, we encourage you to hop into our group at the adoption connection on Facebook and ask people what's been the most helpful, depending on which type of journey you're going down, but kind of the Hallmark book that we've all read is the Connected Child. And Lisa, you're writing the sequel, finishing up the sequel to that. Anything by Dan Siegel, anything by Daniel Hughes. All of these have concepts that are really friendly to the kind of compassion that we want to have around our kids and their really challenging behaviors.

[00:16:23.320] - Lisa Qualls

Absolutely. I remember going to a training before we brought our kids home and the way they had the day organized, the very first speaker was talking about attachment disorder and I told Russ, I said, man, that's a real bummer to start a conference with or a training with. Oh, how I wish I would have

listened more closely, right. This is coming from Deborah, who said, "don't just read the books with all the happy endings about how great adoption was for so and so. They are harder to find when you don't know what to look for, but look for the worst case scenario books and decide what time is right for your family and your other kids in your family based upon how this decision may affect them, too, if the worst case scenario is your reality." So I think what Deborah saying is, I think it's tempting, especially before we bring our kids home, to protect ourselves from the hard things. She's right. I think it's important to understand the full range of what could happen because we can't control it and then make your decisions based on that.

[00:17:19.860] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, and I think statistically, I think Dr. parents used to share this that a third of kids will actually do really well and they'll adjust really well. A third of kids will kind of struggle moderately, you know, maybe do well in some areas, but struggle and others. And then a third of kids kind of really, really struggle and may put you in crisis. So even if we just take the, those two thirds that have any degree of struggle, that's pretty compelling. Right, that there's a more likely chance the not that you'll hit some kind of challenge that maybe you weren't prepared for. We've also been debated how we share about how our adoption journey went and how we talk to families who were getting ready to adopt. And I would say, you know, part of your education should be talking to other families who have gone through it, asking them to tell you everything. And if you feel scared by what they're telling you, that's OK. It's OK to, you know, get into the world of orphan care through some other way. Maybe you can be respite for a family or support them in other ways. We actually have a hand out at the adoptionconnection.com. We'll put it in the show notes as well, called Eight Ways to Help or something. I don't remember the exact title, but it's eight ways basically to help an adoptive family. I think, you know, the people who hear all the stories and still feel called, that's the kind of grit that we need coming into the adoption journey to give our kids the best chance of the stability and the consistency they need.

[00:18:51.680] - Lisa Qualls

Absolutely. All right, number six, define success appropriately. So I mean, what do we see as successful for our families? Based on what we can control and our goal of connection? Do you want to talk about that, Melissa?

[00:19:07.910] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I talked a little bit about this, but one of the things that we have chosen to define success, one of the ways that we have chosen how to define success in our family is by connection, the connection we have with our kids. Not necessarily by behavior. And that has changed some of the decisions that we've had to make, it's required us to be flexible, right. We had certain expectations of how we would parent, especially teenagers, right. And that has really been challenged when we want to stay connected to them. As Emily said, like, our marriages are really important. And so she said, "I just want to make it out with my marriage intact." That will be success and that's really, really important because we have been in the situation where it feels like we have to choose between our kid and our marriage. First season, Patrick and I had to live apart because of one of our really challenging kids and, you know, there's just things that we never thought we would have to decide. And so I think knowing how you will define success before you ever get started is really helpful to help you know where you're going once you get in there. These are hard decisions to make on the fly. But if you are making them, know that it's never too late to redefine success, we were able to do that with our older kids and we have seen an amazing amount of redemption come through that and so it was worth it.

[00:20:34.580] - Lisa Qualls

OK, so just to review, number one, the importance of self care and caring for our marriages, number two, having realistic expectations, three, understand what you can control and what you can't, four, be flexible, five, educate yourself in all kinds of ways and even in the things that feel hard, six, define success appropriately. Number seven is an interesting one. Remember that what's normal for your kids may not be normal for you or vice versa, what's normal for you, may not be at all normal for your kids.

[00:21:06.740] - Lisa Qualls

Do you want to tell a story about that, Melissa?

[00:21:08.960] - Melissa Corkum

I think there's certain things that we think are universal, like respect. And so we tell our kids, you have to treat me with respect and we have a certain idea of what that looks like. And then our kids, either one, don't even have a paradigm for that word or two where they've come from, whether it be because they're from a different country or just a different culture within the United States, what they think is respect or what their definition of dad or mom totally different than what you're thinking. And so we're speaking the same language in some senses, but we're not in a lot of other senses. And so we had a young man stay with us for a while who had age out of the foster care system. So unlike our other kids who had come home through international adoption, we had English as a common first language, right. But there were so many things that he would say that didn't mean what we thought they meant. But just one kind of silly example is he would play rap music booming, like, the bass going, all the things at like three o'clock in the morning pretty regularly. And of course, most of you listening probably would understand that that wasn't appropriate. And if that had happened in your house, may have thought that he was trying to be rude or disrespectful or willfully obedient, but we would say things to him like we we really need you to to use your earbuds overnight, like, you're too old for us to tell you that you have to be sleeping, but you have to at least be quiet. This concept of quiet overnight was literally brand new to him because he grew up in Baltimore City in a neighborhood that really never, ever went to sleep, right. There was there were people in the streets all night long, there was music playing from different houses all night long and so it had never occurred to him that nighttime was a time for quiet. And so there was an initial expectation where we told him something and so him not listening to that was a kind of a different issue, but part of it was, like, it's almost like he didn't believe us or he thought that the expectation that we were putting on him was completely unreasonable. And a lot of people would have seen that as just flat out disrespect, but we really had to work with him on it and hear him and try to understand why this concept of being quiet over night was so hard for him. And once we understood it, it didn't make the rap music any more welcome at 3:00 a.m. in the morning, right, but it helped us kind of understand why he was struggling with that. It gave us more compassion, it helped us work together when we told him kind of how we grew up and how nighttimes are always quiet, right. We could kind of understand where our wires had crossed and gone wrong.

[00:23:53.110] - Lisa Qualls

I think another really common place where the expectations are going to be different is revolving around food and mealtime in particular. So those of us who are used to having a family dinner at night, we're going to have kids who come into our homes who have never experienced a family dinner, who perhaps have never even eaten at a table. We're going have kids who the only chicken they've ever eaten is chicken nuggets. The only fruit they've maybe had is fruit snacks. And so what is normal for them may be entirely abnormal to you. And the more that we understand this, the kind of more flexible we can be and like with the young man in your home, you were able to explain this to him. He was able to understand what your expectation was, but you're able to understand where he was coming from, which is so key and funny, too, is that we had a similar kind of thing with bedtime at bedtime. You know, we had this whole bedtime routine and it was well established in our family. And after we'd gone through the whole thing, including reading and prayers and songs, we turned off the light, we left the room. Night after night when she first came home, she would immediately hop up and turn on the light and think it was time to play. And we were like, what on earth is happening? Well, when she had enough English to tell us, she explained that in the orphanage, when the nannies left their rooms, that was the time that they would turn on the light. They'd get up and play, they clean their room because really sleeping was not all that safe. And so it was better to be awake during the night. So anyhow, normal to us and to our other kids was that we turn off the light, we go to sleep. That was not at all normal for her. So I think just understanding that our kids may have a very different concept of what is normal.

[00:25:37.720] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, it's it's kind of hard to believe sometimes, but it is, the more that we've explored this with our kids, the more we've understood how different our paradigms are coming into these things, how this word normal isn't universal, a lot of words are not as universal as we think they are. So good things to

keep in mind. So number eight is that our kids perception is their reality. And this is really tough because we talk a little bit about felt safety in other places and we call it felt safety because it has to do with how safe our kids feel. And this is really hard for some of us because once we bring our kids home, we know that they'll be safe, right. We're taking them from a situation that may be undesirable and bringing them to a safe, loving home. And we can't understand why they're still acting like they don't feel safe. This was a really important thing for us to adjust to as well, to understand how our kids feel is the reality. And we have to parent them in that reality, not the reality that we know in our heads to be true. And this was really hard for Patrick and me, especially being kind of engineer minded and and having a lot of logic and looking at a situation and logically saying your perception is wrong, you are safer. This is your permanent family. Here's the documents that say it. All of these things, all the evidence based things that we wanted to share with them. But they still acted like they could move at any day or that we weren't safe people. Two, three, four or five, six years in, sometimes we still run up against that deeply held belief that they may not be as safe as we know they are, or that their perception of what's going on, maybe because of some special need or some other cognitive thing, is not the same way that we are perceiving it. And so that can really rock a relationship. If you're coming in with two different perceptions and your realities are completely different.

[00:27:39.610] - Lisa Qualls

In other places it shows up a lot, I think, is in terms of how kids perceive who we are as their parents and who their first families and birth families are and what those roles are and why they're not with them and they're with us instead. And Rachel said, "I wish I had known about the primal wound and how much my kids would struggle with losing their birth families." I think this is especially hard for adoptive and foster parents who are parenting kids who've been severely abused or neglected, and wrapping our heads around the fact that our children love and want to be with their first parents despite the wounding can be really, really hard. But if they perceive their first mom as their their mom who loved them, which is true. But I'm just saying, in terms of our perception, this can be hard. If they perceive it that way, we're going to have to accept that that is their truth and their reality. And maybe as they mature and grow, they will understand things in a more abstract way, but that first mom is their mom and, you know, they may struggle more than we could ever expect.

[00:28:47.480] - Melissa Corkum

I think this is also important. We did an entire episode with Rebecca Vahle on "are infant adoptions easier?" What happens if you're bringing a child home from birth, you're there when their birth mom gives birth, you're maybe the first person to hold your baby. I think there's this common misperception that a lot of, some of the trauma and struggles that our kids who have come to us a little older have had may not apply. But this whole idea of a primal wound and that our kids come to us with whatever their chronological age is, plus nine months of history with a first mom is really, really important. And so some of our kids will struggle with this identity issue about where they've come from and their perception of who their "real mom" is may be different than our perception. And so all of these things and keeping all of the emotions in mind and validating our kids and how they both feel and perceive their world is really important.

[00:29:46.010] - Lisa Qualls

Absolutely. Absolutely. Number nine, radical acceptance. So I'll start this with a quote from one of our readers. She said, "begin the habit of contentment. Be content in your season of preparation. Be thankful for today. Do not worry about tomorrow. This is still something I work on, but it's a life changer."

[00:30:06.710] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, this came into my world when someone had talked to us about a particular kind of therapy, which I wasn't convinced was trauma informed, but started doing a little research and within this therapy, radical acceptance is one of the key components of it. And there was something about that phrase that just started rattling around in my brain. And I started to realize that regardless of what this even meant and in that therapy model, if I applied just what I thought the words meant, you know, being one 100% accepted of where we were, even if it was in a place I didn't like, or if my kids were behaving or in a developmental place that I didn't wish for them, that I couldn't make progress until I had radically accepted where we currently were.

[00:30:58.370] - Melissa Corkum

It's kind of like stopping and knowing what your surroundings are if you're lost before you try to navigate a way to what the end goal is and that fighting against this idea of radical acceptance kind of had us spinning constantly and so that's why we couldn't figure our way out. And so radical acceptance isn't giving up that you're going to be here forever, but it's it's accepted where you are in the present moment. It's almost a form of mindfulness and this has drastically changed my contentment level in my own self, my own family with my kids, which has in turn improved everyone's relationship.

[00:31:35.600] - Lisa Qualls

It's so good. It's really good. And it's useful in all areas of life, not just in parenting our kids who join our families through foster care and adoption, but radical acceptance of our spouses, radical acceptance of our bosses, things that we cannot control and working toward contentment. I really like that.

[00:31:53.750] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, absolutely. So number ten is understand your history and how it affects your parenting. I mean, the thing is, right, we all come to the table with what we've already talked about, perceptions and paradigms and understandings of certain things. We were raised a certain way with certain values; we were disciplined a certain way; we may have made statements that we would that we would never, ever do it one way or that we would always, always do it another way; we may have triggers from our own past that maybe we didn't even know that we had and now our kids are pushing all of these buttons that we didn't know we had and just to understand, all of these things can be really helpful in understanding how to best parent our kids or why some kids feel harder or some days feel harder.

[00:32:40.100] - Lisa Qualls

Absolutely. I've had to really think hard about my own childhood and my relationship with my parents and just how that what I've brought into my own parenting and also what tends to bubble up under stress. I think the unique stresses of adopting and fostering tend to sometimes put us in a place where we are more vulnerable to the weaker parts or the parts that we thought we could overcome. Those tend to bubble up more and so just spending a little time thinking through this, I think is very helpful and important.

[00:33:18.080] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, one of our listeners wrote in and it's a little bit long, but I think it's valuable. Her name's Karen and she said as an example, she is the youngest daughter born to a musician and an artist and grew up with a degree of acceptable chaos and disaster. Her husband is an engineer and the oldest child of a neatnik. And for 16 years she's been learning how to be more organized for her husband. Some of these things may make her seem like a slob, she admits, but she learned all these habits over her growing up years, years ago. So she said, "I'm learning to make my bet each day, do the dishes before going to bed, put my clothes away instead of tossing them on the ground" she said, "I know, I know I'm feeling shame even as I type." But the reason that this impact is important for her fostering and adopting decision is now she is trying to learn what she wants to instill in her kids. She says, "It's not easy. More importantly, the more disorganized I am, the less patience I have to meet their needs. If I am scattered, I can't handle disruptions well. Another reason this impacts adoption and fostering is that I would very much like to increase my family." It's hard to do that if there's too much chaos. Everyone's capacity seems lower, so she feels like she has more capacity when things are more organized but didn't come from that and so maybe that's not a natural tendency for her. So thanks for sharing that Karen. That was open and vulnerable.

[00:34:45.220] - Lisa Qualls

I loved, I loved her example. OK, we are at number 11 and then we'll go back and quickly review but, number 11 is a marathon. This is not a short give it everything we've got. You know, when you sprint, you take every bit of energy and you just it's like combustion. You used it all up so that you get to the end of the sprint and you're just exhausted. A marathon is very, very different because you have the same energy, but you've got to spread it out over a long, long period of time.

[00:35:17.820] - Melissa Corkum

I would just say that I tend to be a pretty reactive person and one of the things that I've learned in this marathon is to be less reactive. Sometimes my kids would say something or do something and I would feel the need to fix it or I would let fear take over and so I would get on that slippery slope. If they're doing that now at 11, what will they be doing at 18? And we have to nip it in the bud now. To know that even that reaction felt probably a little chaotic to our kids and probably fueled the fire. And so I wish, looking back, that I had been kind of more steady, more in it for the long haul, that I hadn't overreacted and fear to every little thing that had happened that I would have realized how long we could have with our kids if we prioritized connection, and that there wasn't this pressure to get everything right or to teach them everything they need to know by 18 that if we use connection as our compass, then we would have years with them to keep continuing to pour into them and and that we didn't have to be so reactive because, you know, our last set of kids came home at 11, 13 and 14. And and for our 14 year old, those four years felt super short. And so everything that would happen that I knew wasn't going to be acceptable in a real life situation, I would jump right on that. Gosh, we need to fix that before you turn eighteen, go off into the real world. And so I just wish I had been a calmer, more anchorite presence in this whole situation.

[00:36:49.380] - Lisa Qualls

It's interesting that you talk about fear, because that is definitely, I tend to go there, too. And when things are not going well, I think, oh, my goodness, here it is. This is over. This is, we're going to end up with a child in prison or whatever. And I think we do need to calm ourselves because we, I do not parent well when I'm being ruled by fear for sure, because we all going to fight, flight, freeze, right. So we've got to remain calm, fight the fear. And one thing I talk about is that love is patient. What does that mean? You know, I think sometimes we think of love as patient in the moment. And what I've learned, having been a mom now for thirty two years, is that love is patient over the years. Love is patient for the long haul, that we need to keep praying, keep loving, keep connecting.

[00:37:40.350] - Lisa Qualls

We can't even begin to imagine the good that may be coming still because the road is long. And so I think we just need to embrace that, accept it and press on. Just press on in in what we know we need to do.

[00:37:57.510] - Melissa Corkum

Absolutely. So as a real quick review, one was the importance of self care and marriage care; two, expectations; three, understand what you can and can't control; four, be flexible; five, educate, educate, educate; six, define success appropriately; seven, understand what's normal for your kids may not be normal for you; eight, that your kids perception is reality; nine, radical acceptance; ten, understand your history and how it affects your parenting; and then what we just chatted about was this is a marathon, not a sprint. This collection of eleven things is what we know from experience and doing it wrong for years is what can help us find the joy and hope and content and peace in our parenting and adoption journey. If you're just in the matching process or just thinking about adoption and fostering, these are the things that can help prevent the most heartache so that you don't have to kind of learn the hard way like we did. If you're in the middle of it, these are the things that can help get you unstuck. And so I know 11 is a big number and a lot to remember. So we will have all of these listed out at the show notes. Just quick bullet points so you can remember them. You can find those at theadoptionconnection.com/41.

[00:39:25.190] - Lisa Qualls

And I just want to add that be patient with yourself because you are a good mom and I know we say that in every episode, but we really mean it. Be patient with yourself, be kind with yourself, and remember, this is a marathon for you too, so just keep walking through the journey.

[00:39:39.230] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, absolutely. And this is also a good time to mention if you haven't subscribed to the podcast, this is a great time to do that. There's usually a button on whatever podcast app that you're using to, you know, subscribe or add it to your favorites list or whatever, if you need more help with that, we have

made some quick little videos, tutorials on how to do that at theadoptionconnection.com/subscribe so you can get some quick tips there as well. But next week we're going to jump into the second part of this and so we don't want you to miss that episode and this all make sure when you subscribe that the next episode kind of just comes right to your device. You don't even have to think about it.

[00:40:18.350] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:40:25.970] - 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.

[00:40:36.140] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:40:43.320] - Melissa Corkum

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