

[00:00:00.650] - Lisa Qualls

Welcome to the Adoption Connection podcast, where we offer resources to equip you and stories to inspire you on your adoption journey. I'm Lisa Qualls.

[00:00:10.390] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:18.720] - Lisa Qualls

Today is a Mentor Moments episode where we answer a listener question. These episodes give you a chance to join the conversation and guarantee we're providing the most helpful tools and resources for exactly where you are. This week's question is, "How do I find a skilled babysitter for my challenging kids?" That is a very good question.

[00:00:39.470] - Melissa Corkum

It is a great question.

[00:00:40.910] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, do you want to start us off? We both have a lot of experience with trying to navigate these sorts of things.

[00:00:46.680] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. I want to start off by just saying there's no perfect answer and I think we have to kind of come in with the expectation that we might have to get a little creative and we might have to compromise a little. It might not be exactly what we're looking for, and it also might take time. I know one of the things that's been really important in our family, it's taken time to have people that we trust to manage our family dynamics and for our kids to trust. In our case, sometimes it started off with just having people that hung around our family. They weren't really babysitting, but then those people became the safe people that our kids could trust. So it was kind of a process to build up to where we had people outside of our immediate family that we felt like could come, you know, provide supervision for the rest, for the kids. So I think setting our own expectations just about how to solve this problem is probably a really good place to start.

[00:01:44.260] - Lisa Qualls

It helps if we think about who is already in our circle, who already knows us, who already knows our children? If you are fortunate enough to live near extended family. I mean, that's a really obvious choice, even if it means hiring an older cousin or somebody that you're going to pay. I'm not just saying, you know, not just grandparents are going to come out of the goodness of their own hearts, but think about your extended family and who really knows your kids and who your kids already feel comfortable with. I mean, that's kind of an easy place to start, if you have family. We have never lived near our family, and so that's not been an option for us now. Melissa, that's worked for you.

[00:02:30.120] - Melissa Corkum

Well, we live with a lot of extended family, so there's obviously downsides to that, too. But there's also been a lot of lessons in it. We currently have four generations of our family living at our house, so there are a lot of adults around. I think the other thing that I've talked about, I just was talking to a family I was coaching recently is that they were having trouble having to continually ask extended family. They felt like they were being a burden, even though they were pretty sure extended family was willing to help, and in this case it was grandparents. We talked about, you know, maybe you need to just set up, like, a every third Friday kind of situation. So it's like a one ask kind of, but then it's regular and you don't feel like you have to bug that person every week. Can you come help me again? It's kind of just set up. Because it does take energy for us to plan each of these things. So if you can create a situation that's recurring, it feels a little bit more like one ask, you get a whole lot of benefit from it.

[00:03:32.780] - Lisa Qualls

Well, and the other advantage to that is you can actually plan ahead for it. You know, I've shared lots of times about a friend of mine who took Kalkidan on every Wednesday afternoon until after dinner, and so I could plan. I knew that she would be happy and safely occupied for those hours, and so I

could plan for it. I think anytime you can get someone who's willing to do a regular commitment, it lowers the stress. You know, it's hard to ask for help. It's really hard and it takes a lot of mental energy if we have to do it over and over. So I totally agree, Melissa, that if you can establish a regular pattern with extended family or good friends, that's a great option.

[00:04:16.440] - Melissa Corkum

Well, and I also feel like if there's a wedding or something that comes up that's not the third Friday, I feel like it's an easier ask to say, hey, could we move this month date night or babysitting or whatever to the second Saturday? Like, it's easier to move it, like to kind of have it and then move it then to keep asking for it. I don't know, maybe it's just me.

[00:04:34.610] - Lisa Qualls

No, I agree. Another way to plan a really regular maybe time to get help or have a date would be to find another family, another adoptive and foster family, well foster families are a little different from state to state, so we'll just say an adoptive family, and agree to trade. So one Friday night you take their kids, another Friday night they take yours, and maybe you're thinking, oh, my goodness, it's so much chaos. Nobody could handle it. Well, if there are two adults in that family who already know how to parent kids like this and who aren't going to be freaked out by anything, they would probably be willing to put in all the energy for a couple of hours in exchange for you doing the same thing another week, right?

[00:05:20.540] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, absolutely. And I also think depending on your kids, like, our kids tend to do better in that situation. I don't know if it's because there's friends or if it's because it's a pattern interrupt different caregivers. Like, sure, it's busy, but it might not be as chaotic or terrible as you might think. So I think that's a great option as well. And maybe it means, if you have a really big family, maybe it means finding a couple of other families so that half your kids, like, maybe if you have a younger set and an older set. We've done a lot of that is splitting our kids up because, honestly, six kids is a lot. So, you know, at some point in time, we have needed to have actual supervision for them all and so sometimes it felt easier to send, like, the older three, you know, to a game night at one friend's house and the younger three to do pizza and a movie at another friend's house.

[00:06:18.500] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah. That's a good point. Another great potential source would be someone who volunteers for the children's or youth Ministry at a Church or your Church, if you have one. Most churches now background check their volunteers before they allow them to have regular contact with the kids. So that's always a nice thing to know that these people have already been screened to some degree, and they're people who enjoy kids and enjoy serving families. And so that is a potential place. And I'm not saying you just trust somebody just because they volunteer in your kids ministries. That's not wise, but if people know them, let's say you have a children's Ministry pastor or somebody who actually knows this person, then that could be another good place to start.

[00:07:09.210] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. I think another kind of situation like that are College students. If you live anywhere near a College or University, and there's a way for you to post a flyer or reach out to folks who are already studying to go into special education or some kind of child development. Again, these are folks who are looking for a little extra money, are obviously looking to work with kids or children, like, social work majors, like, people who kind of have this heart to serve and potentially are also learning a lot about the brain and maybe more willing to kind of hear your input into the best ways to serve your family in terms of how they handle behaviors when you're not there.

[00:07:55.240] - Lisa Qualls

Another organization that you might want to look into is Royal Family Kids. They do Royal Family Kids camp. And those would be people who've been trained in being, like camp counselors for foster kids and presumably also all background checks, that's another. If you have Royal Family Kids where you live, that would be another option to look at.

[00:08:18.120] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, absolutely. I have trained the Royal Family Kids camp volunteers in my area, and these are people who sacrifice an entire week of their summer to go be a one on one with a child who is in foster care. And so these are people again, with some training already under their belts and big hearts already for kids with early adversity. So if you can find out who those people are in your community, they're, I think, a great untapped resource as well.

[00:08:47.920] - Lisa Qualls

Another thing we talked about was hiring the older sibling of another large adoptive family. So if you know other families, you know, think about hiring some of their big kids because they will not be very surprised by the things that go on with your kids, and hopefully, they will have learned some things from helping out with their siblings and from watching their parents. So that's another possibility.

[00:09:14.100] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, we actually did that for a season. We had a gal who spent 20 hours a week in our house. Her family had done foster care while she was growing up. And so, again, she wasn't surprised by anything that came our way, which is like such a huge blessing. Speaking of people who spend a lot more time, like, this isn't just like a Friday night thing is, I didn't realize until recently, but if you have extra space in your house, and I realized that that's not everyone, so each of these solutions, like, will be helpful to a section of whoever's listening. Au pairs. I always thought they were kind of, like, quote unquote for rich people, and obviously if you have extra space in your house there's a certain amount of privilege that comes with that, but they are not nearly as costly as I would have thought. And you literally get someone who you can train, who's living in your house and who has flexible hours, right. Like, this person could potentially help drive your kids places and watch them. Potentially teach them how to swim or teach them how to play the piano on the side and maybe also help with a little light house cleaning or helping get lunch for the kids or pack lunches before school. So there's just so many ways that that could be helpful. So if that seems like a remote possibility, that is actually, I think a lot more approachable financially, then a lot of us think by the time we pay a babysitter, do all the other things that come with that. Having an au pair to help with so many of the different aspects of how this is hard for our family might be a really great investment.

[00:10:47.340] - Lisa Qualls

Well, someone in our Facebook group, when we were discussing this question, said that she's had success with hiring actually kind of younger teen babysitters, not college age, but younger because she finds she can train them more to handle things the way she wants them handled. So that's just an interesting thing to consider.

[00:11:08.330] - Melissa Corkum

And then you have them for a while. Like, the worst is to have a 17 year old babysitter that you fall in love with, and then they go off to college.

[00:11:15.400] - Lisa Qualls

Right. The other thing is, I think, of course, it all depends on the level of needs of your kids and the ages of your kids. But if your kids could be managed by a younger teen, I do think it's a good idea. The other thing is younger teens are sometimes more available than older teens and sometimes less distracted. It's something to consider anyhow.

[00:11:38.070] - Melissa Corkum

Right. And that mom also said that she actually hires a babysitter per kid. Like, she has two kids, she actually hire two babysitters. And also at 13, they're a little bit more affordable. I feel like you could do that. So, Lisa, when you think about training a babysitter, what resources would you use? Like, what would you tell a thirteen year old?

[00:12:03.940] - Sara

Hey, this is Sara. I'm briefly interrupting this episode to make sure you know about an upcoming support group for adopted teens that I'm facilitating. As an adoptee, I'm passionate about supporting adopted teens because I wish I had had a group like this when I was younger. During this eight week

session, teens will explore the seven core issues of adoption; learn better ways to respond to others adoption related questions, even the more insensitive ones; have an opportunity to process their personal adoption journey; and hear from one another in a supportive and collaborative way. We get started on September 23, so for more information or to sign your teen up, head to theadoptionconnection.com/teen. Now back to the episode.

[00:12:48.990] - Melissa Corkum

What resources would you use or like, what would you tell a 13 year old?

[00:12:52.880] - Lisa Qualls

Well, a 13 year old? Well, well, I think I would probably send anybody to the YouTube channel for the Karen Purvis Institute of Child Development. I think if you go to YouTube, we'll put it in our show notes, but if you go to YouTube and just search Karen Purvis or Karen Purvis Institute, it will come up. But one of the things they have that I think is really simple for a lot of people are these graphics, these animates that teach things about the ideal response and toxic stress and things like that. So I think those are useful. Of course, I think that *The Connected Parent* is a really good book for introducing a lot of the basics of caring for these kids with all these needs and like simple things like using scripts and how to offer choices and those sorts of things. So I know I wrote it with Dr. Purvis, so I may be a little biased, but I do think it gives a fairly simple explanation and introduction to a lot of the basic TBRI connected parenting principles. And Melissa, we were talking about the fact that if you're going to invest in a babysitter, pay them for their time to read the book. So, you know, I'd really like you to read this book, and this is how much I'll pay you to read it, and then we'll talk about it. You know, we can't expect people to read these books or watch these videos necessarily on their own time. If we're serious about hiring and training a babysitter, we have to invest in them.

[00:14:25.560] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. I also think, especially if you're thinking about younger teens and possibly even adults or older teens, is maybe have them come spend some time with you. Almost like shadowing you, kind of spend some, and again, pay them, but I think one of the best things we can do is show and demonstrate to these people how we would like them to interact with our kids, give them a chance to watch you untangle a couple messy situations, and then you'll also have a little help, like a mother's helper or again, I think we can all use a second adult or a second person in the house when we're having really challenging kids. So I think having them spend some time with your family on purpose for the kind of reason of learning how the best way is to serve your family would be really helpful.

[00:15:14.000] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, that's a great idea. So let's talk a little bit about what to do when you really just can't find a sitter and you need a break or you have a spouse and the two of you really need time together, you need a date, but there are no babysitters to be found. You know, Russ and I have been parents for 34 years. We've had many seasons where we did not have access to babysitters and we just learned to be really creative about finding time together. So a couple of things we did, we put all our kids in a Juana. If you know what Juana is, it's like a children's Bible club and often they meet on Wednesday night. I don't know about everywhere in the country, but we would put our kids in Juana and we would use that, like, hour and a half really, really well for connection and time together. And, you know, the kids were safe, they were occupied, they were having fun, and it just became like a sacred time for us. Another thing we did when life was really, extremely hard for us is our Church had two services and we would take the kids during the first service and we would put them all in Sunday school and we would just get coffee and sit and have that time together. And then we would all go to the second service together because we really couldn't leave our kids at home with anybody. And just even that hour was just so special. When our kids were all in school, Russ would come home sometimes at lunchtime and we'd have a lunch date because going out in the evening, there was no way that would work for us. But he works close enough to home that he was able to come home and we would have lunch together here. Or if that's not an option, maybe you and your spouse could meet somewhere for lunch. So I think we just have to really make use of the opportunities that are already there, either for our own restoration or for time to connect with a spouse.

[00:17:15.720] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. For us, we've utilized the time after the kids go to bed a lot. Like, even when our house was in complete and total chaos, once everyone was in bed, they were pretty much in bed for the night. And so we live in a situation where my parents live across the kitchen in an apartment. And so they were around just to make sure the house didn't burn down. But, I mean, you could hire, I mean, I actually remember babysitting for a family where I did this in high school, like, I came after their kids were in bed. They just needed someone to be at the house. And then they went out because they were unsure about behaviors and things like that. I've also used the childcare at our local YMCA. You know, you get, I think, 2 hours in the morning and 2 hours in the afternoon or something crazy like that. So I've taken the kids to child care just so I can get some time. I've taken the kids, I've taken some of the kids to child care while we were home schooling a whole bunch of kids. And I would take the ones that need the most supervision to child care and keep the other ones out so we could get some school done in the lobby. I mean, I think you really just have to think outside the box. And I think the hardest thing about being creative about this is when we're chronically stressed, the creative center of our brain really starts to shut down. So I think borrowing other people's creativity is great. So listening to the podcast or even jumping into our Facebook group, we already have a conversation about this started, we'll put a link in the show notes. You know, hop in and start, you know, once we hear other people's ideas, sometimes that gets our creative juices flowing, but it's hard sometimes to come up with creative solutions in a bubble. We totally get that. So we hope this kind of helps, you know, spark some ideas of things that might work for your family. We know each of your families are incredibly diverse and individual, and so you might have to tweak any one of these solutions to make it work for you, but hopefully it gives you a good starting place.

[00:19:23.230] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, we know how much you need a break. You really, really do. So we hope that you can use some of these ideas and maybe come up with more of your own or find more in the Facebook group.

[00:19:35.320] - Melissa Corkum

If you'd like to submit a question for a future Mentor Moment, we'd love for you to join our Facebook group and post a question in the group. The link for that will be in the show notes at theadoptionconnection.com/144. Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. You can find us on Instagram as [@theadoptionconnection](https://www.instagram.com/theadoptionconnection). Or better yet, join our free Facebook community at theadoptionconnection.com/facebook.

[00:20:05.500] - Lisa Qualls

Thanks so much for listening, we love having you. And remember, you're a good parent, doing good work.

[00:20:13.680] - Melissa Corkum

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