

[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

Hi, friends. Welcome to Episode 145. Parents often ask us about different tools or therapies that might be helpful for them or for their kids and in this episode, Melissa interviews a neurofeedback practitioner who provides a type of neurofeedback that is simple enough that you can use it in your own home.

[00:00:39.280] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, so I had a really interesting conversation with Olga Ward. Olga is a NeurOptimal neurofeedback provider, but she's also an adoptive parent. I think you'll really enjoy hearing a little bit about her journey to neurofeedback. She discovered it as a powerful healing modality when she was really at her lowest point of parenting, which I know a lot of us can relate to. She is the owner and founder of Beaverton Neurofeedback in Organ, where she is a passion for restoring and creating harmony and families. Here's my conversation with Olga

[00:01:15.700] - Melissa Corkum

Olga, welcome to the Adoption Connection Podcast.

[00:01:19.020] - Olga Ward

Thank you so much for having me.

[00:01:20.830] - Melissa Corkum

Okay, so this episode is all about neurofeedback, specifically, a particular type of neurofeedback that you support families in called NeurOptimal. Will you just give our audience if they don't already know, and I know a lot of people probably have already heard of neurofeedback in some way, maybe they know a lot about it, maybe they've tried it, but for those who are brand new, can you just tell us a little bit about what neurofeedback even is?

[00:01:47.160] - Olga Ward

Neurofeedback, well, there's a whole chapter devoted to neurofeedback for those of you who are familiar with the work of Dr. Bessel and also the book, *The Body Keeps The Score*. It's a computerized system that allows the brain to heal and rebalance and calm down the nervous system. In other ways, they also describe it like PT for the brain.

[00:02:08.960] - Melissa Corkum

I love that, right, our brain is so physical. We forget sometimes because it's behind so many of.

[00:02:16.290] - Olga Ward

It's and organ.

[00:02:17.810] - Melissa Corkum

Right, like, but it's behind so many of the other invisible things, like our emotions and our thoughts and things that are a little bit more abstract that sometimes we forget how concrete the brain actually is on all those physical components, like the chemistry and the frequency, which is what neurofeedback, I think, kind of exercises and all of these other structure and function pieces of the brain.

[00:02:39.480] - Olga Ward

Yeah. Because when we hurt another body part, like our foot or arm, we need to heal that body part physically. Yes, there's emotions and feelings associated with that, but physical support is needed as well. And so the brain needs physical support as well as mental and emotional support.

[00:03:02.690] - Melissa Corkum

So we're going to jump back into neurofeedback in a couple of minutes, but I want to just back up for a second and let you tell our audience just a little bit about your story because you come to us not just as a NeurOptimal practitioner, but also as an adoptive mom. So will you just tell us a little bit about your family and how you came to adoption?

[00:03:26.620] - Olga Ward

Well, I'm originally from Russia, so I moved to the US about 20 years ago, and I've done a lot of exploration on my own and realized, and it wasn't until my husband and I adopted our daughter from the US foster care that I realized how much of my own term I had. And so I've done lots of self exploration and self healing work. After realizing that even though I had a lot of book knowledge about adoption and attachment in the brain, I realized that I needed to do work on myself. But my husband and I have one biological child and after several years, we talked about having another one. And it was actually my husband's idea, he said, Well, if we have another one, another child biologically now, there'll just be kind of two single children too far apart, and they won't be close in terms of age or being able to relate or play together. How do you feel about maybe adopting? And I thought about it for a few months, probably. And then I realized, yeah, that's actually a great idea. There's so many children in foster care waiting for permanent homes, waiting for families, and many of them are going to be age doubt at the age of 18, and they have nowhere to go. And of course, I had severe complications with having my child biologically, so I thought, Well, you know, there's trauma in adoption, but there's also trauma in giving birth biologically. So I'm not saying, you know, I picked it, that wasn't the right reason to go into adoption, but there's some perks and benefits of not giving birth biologically, for sure. Having done both.

[00:05:41.620] - Melissa Corkum

Well, and we come into motherhood and then adaptive parenthood with so many expectations and so many misconceptions, I think. And then it's not uncommon for our expectations and our reality, not always to meet up. Tell us a little bit how you came upon neurofeedback and what you are looking for when you were searching for answers.

[00:06:07.430] - Olga Ward

I first discovered it through that book, *The Body Keeps the Score*, written by Dr. Bessel. It's about trauma. We have, I was already familiar with talk therapy and counseling to process your emotions and feelings and traumas and family history, all that. But neuro feedback was different, different in the way I realized that if trauma affects our brain physically, it kind of makes it work less efficiently and there's certain regions of the brain almost gets frozen or locked up. Maybe there's something else that we can do. Not to replace counseling, psychotherapy or trauma work, but to add to it. I often think of neurofeedback like physical therapy for the brain. When you're an athlete, you need a coach to guide you through the competitive process, to somebody to cheer you on, to give you tips and advice and keep you accountable and keep you motivated, all those things that coaches do, but if you have an injury in your knee or your foot, you can't run any faster because there's this physical limitation that you have, right. And so trauma causes physical limitations in the brain. And a lot of our kids, sometimes they're born with fetal alcohol issues and maybe the concussions of traumatic brain injuries or psychological trauma in the brain, so I wanted to be able to offer something else besides talk therapy that would be physically helpful to many of us with trauma. But I started neurofeedback by finding a local provider and wanting to do it for myself. So even though I'm one of those moms that, you know, my child comes first and I want to just help her as much as I can. And she has so many needs just in less needs. I came to a point where I felt a bit burned out and everybody was telling me, like, try to do some more self care because you can't give out of an empty vessel and you will start feeling resentful. You don't want to start feeling resentful because you've give and give and give to this child, and you never know when she, at what point she'll feel better or start acting differently. So start with yourself because it's very important is also a good example to your children that you are taking care of yourself. And so my experience was amazing with NeurOptimal neurofeedback specifically. And I found that it was very helpful to me as a parent. I just felt lighter, I was able to let things go easier. An example is, if my daughter, in the past, I would get really triggered when my daughter would lie to me. Even though logically, I knew why she did it. It's just, you know, kids with trauma just make things up. Sometimes they act out of fear or defensiveness, so they lie.

But it was a big trigger for me, and it made me really upset. And sometimes I would just even being upset at myself for being upset at her. And it was just getting me nowhere. With NeurOptimal neurofeedback, it just happened seamlessly because I could talk in talk therapy endlessly about what's going on when she lies in me and how I feel about it. And I could understand all that, logically, and we hash it, and then give a lecture to you about it, but any time my daughter lied to me was just still very hard and triggering. Neurofeedback just allowed things to kind of roll off my back, something I always wanted to do, just let things go. And able to utilize the same information that I received from all the books, from all the lectures from the psycho therapy that I received, it just made it click, it made sense. And actually, I was able to implement those tools and resources. It just happened. It felt like magic.

[00:10:42.220] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I bet you that was really cool. So what I hear you saying is that NeurOptimal kind of helped you self regulate better.

[00:10:51.820] - Olga Ward

Yes.

[00:10:51.820] - Melissa Corkum

But it also seems to really increase your resilience to kind of the daily challenges of raising a daughter with really high needs. And also just, you know, sometimes you mentioned, like we research and we research and we read and we go to webinars and we read more books and we get all more Facebook groups. And then at some point in time and I have a pretty high capacity for learning new information. Like your brain just starts to shut down. Like it can't even focus, it's overwhelmed, it's already stressed. We're not sure what end is up, which, you know, one thing we're going to try next? And it sounds like no feedback not only help with your regulation, but also help you kind of process information differently and then help you be in a better mental space to make a good plan for your family.

[00:11:40.700] - Olga Ward

Exactly, yeah. Because you can get a master's degree after master degree and read yet another book, but anytime something happens, you are triggered, and you'll get upset, and you get dysregulated. And so all that book knowledge just goes out the window, right. So you want to, yes, book knowledge is extremely important and staying up on top of the most recent research and information, and being educated is very crucial for sure. Keep doing that. That's what I recommend to other fellow adoptive parents. Make sure you stay educated. But sometimes it comes to a point where you know everything and yet you can't use what you know. Then you just need to kind of try something else. Definitely self care is very important to be able to stay regulated, stay calm because you're like setting the temperature in your home. Parent's regulation is extremely important for the children's mental health, and so I have to say that I had a twinge of "am I being selfish by doing that myself first? Maybe my daughter needs it because she has all these other issues and she's not sleeping well and she has nightmares, and she's got this huge startle response." I'm just a burnt out mom who was starting to get cranky. But, you know, that's pretty common probably for a lot of parents is like, my child needs it first. But I started it myself and my daughter did so much better because I was calmer, I was better regulated, and I was letting things go that we didn't need to argue over. And so it just made me happier and made her better regulated as well.

[00:13:33.530] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, so I want parents to hear that because we often are on the lookout for things to help our kids, and we often think if we can find something to help our kids and the rest of our family will be more peaceful. But ultimately, and especially if you have an older child, especially like teenagers, right, it becomes harder and harder to kind of convince them to be on board with certain things, and we can feel really powerless in those situations, and I think what you're offering parents is the knowledge that we do have some power. We do have some control in the situation, we have control of ourselves. And so even though we would really love to be for our kids to be able to access some of these healing practices, what we can do is require it of ourselves, and there's a trickle down effect there that is incredibly powerful, so don't underestimate what we have the power to do for ourselves and how that

will help our family.

[00:14:36.640] - Olga Ward

Yes, absolutely, one hundred percent. It was the hardest thing for me to do it on myself, and I forced myself to do it because I just felt like I do not want to not like my child right now because I'm starting to feel resentful. This is not who I am, this is not what I signed up for.

[00:14:59.600] - Sara

Hey, this is Sara. I'm briefly interrupting this episode to make sure you know about an upcoming support group for adoptive 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 other's adoption related questions (even the more sensitive 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.

[00:15:46.840] - Olga Ward

This is not who I am, this is not what I signed up for. I need to do something about this. And definitely by helping myself, I very much directly help my family because, you know, again, parents set the temperature in the household often and a common regulated parent will help to call and regulate their children as well.

[00:16:14.730] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, okay. So I think listeners are dying to know though. Ultimately, Olga, did you use NeuroOptimal with your daughter?

[00:16:21.860] - Olga Ward

Yes, I did. When I probably within three or four sessions on myself, I realized how magical it was and how much calmer and more regulated and happier I was starting to become. Of course I knew what the next big step was. My whole family needs to do this. What's different was, even though I started NeuroOptimal with a local provider, I also learned that NeuroOptimal neurofeedback can be rented for home use. And even though there's extensive research and the equipment is very sophisticated and very smart, but the user friendliness of it is pretty simple. I often compare it to our smartphones, right. We don't know how it's put together exactly. All we know is which buttons to push to get on Facebook and check our email and text people and look up like Google Maps, those kinds of things. But if we break it, we don't know how to fix it because it's beyond us. So with NeuroOptimal, it's very sophisticated but extremely user friendly. So what I ended up doing is I rented a system for home use with unlimited sessions, and I used it. Yes, I continued using it myself because I wanted to continue getting better. I used it, definitely use it on my daughter and the rest of my family. And then in the end, I just like, this is so cool. I wanted to own it. So I ended up purchasing the equipment as well.

[00:18:00.060] - Melissa Corkum

And then went on to become a practitioner. So what was that decision like?

[00:18:04.580] - Olga Ward

Yeah, well, it seemed kind of seamless. I used to work a nine to five job, which didn't work out for me because, you know, my child needs were pretty high, and I received countless phone calls from school. Almost start to get my own startle reflex when I would see school number on my caller ID it's like, okay, "What did she do this time? Or do they want me to pick her up again, or do they want me to talk to her again." As if talking to her has ever helped. So I ended up quitting my day job that not only was not giving me satisfaction, but it was very distracting from my parenting. And so when I discovered NeuroOptimal neurofeedback, how cool it was, I just had great compassion and passion to want to bring it to the rest of of the community. And I realize it's kind of an underutilized modality because most people think of talk therapy, dealing with trauma, right. But neurofeedback, not very many people think about that. So I wanted to be a resource in my community and be a resource to other parents, adoptive parents or parents with special needs, just parents in general to how cool this

is and how helpful it could be. So, yes, I purchased my own equipment, I continued training my family, and I still use it regularly for myself. But I also have, I offer it professionally to others.

[00:19:49.360] - Melissa Corkum

Will you talk about the different types of neurofeedback and what makes NeuroOptimal different, other than the fact that it sounds like families can take it home and use it in the comfort of their own home, which is huge because a lot of our kids, their anxiety goes up so high when they have to go to the office of a practitioner anyway. And of course, with COVID, now, anything that we can do from the comfort of our own homes becomes even that much more valuable. So can you just speak to what makes NeuroOptimal difference than other neurofeedback experiences that families may have had.

[00:20:21.730] - Olga Ward

For those who are new to neurofeedback in general, something to know about neurofeedback, there are so many different types of equipment out there. I have not tried them all, to be honest. I have tried several others, though, besides NeuroOptimal and I have had the best success with NeuroOptimal. So I've tried Lens, unfortunately, it was not as helpful as other people found it. And it could be the practitioner, who knows. Boxmeer neurofeedback also wasn't as helpful to me and I had about 20 sessions in another practitioners office. NeuroOptimal worked like within the first three or four sessions for me. So at that point, my search was over, like, okay, this is it. This is for real. I don't need to keep looking for what's going to work, but also for listeners out there who maybe have tried maybe a version of neurofeedback that was not helpful and think, oh, it didn't work for us, know that that there's other types of equipment out there. Don't give up on neurofeedback altogether just because maybe you didn't have a successful experience with one technology.

[00:21:44.540] - Melissa Corkum

I talk about that with essential oils and supplements and lots of different things. There's so many variations of these broad categories of things that help our families and so it's easy to kind of throw the baby out with the bathwater, but sometimes we need a different chemistry or a different brand or something grown in a different region. Like essential, like you're saying for neurofeedback, different systems, different, even philosophies of how the neurofeedback is used with the brain can make a big difference in benefits.

[00:22:17.560] - Olga Ward

Not to get too technical, but what I like about NeuroOptimal, besides the fact that it worked for me out of a few that I've tried, that it's non invasive. It doesn't push or pull the brain in any direction. It does not require a brain map because I've also heard stories, including my own personal experience, some technologies require brain map, which sounds interesting and sounds cool, but if you have 20 sessions and the provider says, okay, the brain map is improved, but you feel no difference, then what's the point, right? NeuroOptimal does not require a brain map, so A, you save money doing that. B, you're not in the business of improving a piece of paper, you're in the business of improving your reactivity, your emotional regulation, your sleep. And really, that's what I'm tracking with my clients is, how are you feeling? What's happening? And so I built that questionnaire based on what's happening and that's what we're measuring. It may feel to them a bit subjective, but at the same time that's your real life. Like, if you have a good massage, you know it, you feel it. You don't need a piece of paper or report. Okay, the massage was effective, right? You just know it was a great experience and you feel differently.

[00:23:46.540] - Melissa Corkum

Can you talk just a little bit about the practicalities? How many sessions a week do you do? How long do they take? What's the time commitment for family who's looking to invest not just in the parents, right, for our own self care and self regulation, but also for our kids. And then what does that even look like? Is it a hat? Are there lots of tiny wires? What are the nitty gritty's?

[00:24:13.910] - Olga Ward

Yeah. So there's no hat. It's very simple. There's a couple of clips in on each ear, two on the right, one on the left, and then a couple of little sensors on the head. It's not as messy as like wearing a big hat. Very easy, for one. In terms of how many sessions, that number varies. I have seen, in my personal

experience, I knew it was working in the first three or four sessions when all of a sudden I became just kind of, I was letting things go. Not that I didn't care that my daughter would lie to me, but it just didn't anger me or upset me, and I was able to engage logically with her and not, you know, not so sad. Like I was able to stay regulated. Having said that, NeuroOptimal is, because it's gentle and because it's not invasive, some people continue using it for maintenance, even after they have achieved the desired result. Similar to you can have, if you get in a car accident and you hurt your back, you're going to need X number of chiropractic adjustments and massage therapy, physical therapy to get better. But once you are better, whatever that might be, it's different for everyone, it doesn't mean you are done with making adjustments or wanting another massage because we're living, breathing organisms and so is our brain. Stressors are coming at us all the time. So, for example, because I own the machine anytime I feel off or tired or a little bit starting to get so burned out, stressed out, I just give myself a session and I love it. It's like yoga from my brain. It says sometimes I compare it to meditating. Can you meditate too much? Probably not. You could do it every day if you wish, it feels good and use a good practice. But in terms of somebody like therapeutic value begin there's, in my practice, I see clients who come from my in office sessions will start noticing a shift in the first three sessions. And that doesn't mean that it's going to wipe out their PTSD or severe insomnia or all of the panic attacks are gone or 50 year depression is gone, but they will definitely start feeling differently and then they get excited and then they want more. And in that case, I just recommend if they're not local or if they have another family member that they would like to share this amazing experience with, home rentals are really a cost effective way to train the entire family. And some people end up wanting to buy their own machine and just they feel like they need it as bad as they need a fridge in the house.

[00:27:15.350] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I can relate to that. Who are good candidates? What are the things that we might see in our kids or in ourselves that would make us think maybe I should give us a try and then, conversely, are there any kind of counter reasons not to? Are there any people who, you know, after, like a quick consultation probably aren't great candidates?

[00:27:38.120] - Olga Ward

In my own opinion, anyone can use it. Again, it's very gentle, it's non invasive. Just like anybody could use a good mindfulness practice, people could use NeuroOptimal neurofeedback. Generally, in my office, I see people who come with symptoms of inattention or lack of focus. Whether or not they've been diagnosed with ADD or ADHD is less important, but some people have, and some people don't want to carry that label, but they feel like my brain is just not. I have this squirrel brain, here's a squirrel, get easily distracted. So I found NeuroOptimal very helpful for that. I know that in general, neurofeedback, there was an article recently in the Attitude magazines that it's an effective modality for helping ADD/ADHD in lieu of medication. The other thing I see, great successes with anxiety and depression. I had one client who said who was referred to me by a naturopathic doctor because she was really close to needing to take something strong for the panic attack. She was having up to four panic attacks a day, and certainly did not want to go the pharmaceutical route, but there was no other option. Things were getting really bad. And even after two sessions, she went from four panic attacks a day to one a week, which was tremendously helpful. Again, everyone's different. Sleep difficulties, a lot of our kids with trauma have sleep difficulties, including my own daughter. So that's one thing that I've seen. It helped a lot. She would not be able to shut off her brain at night and then, of course, it was really hard for her to function during the day, so it helped reduce nightmares and improve quality of sleep. And we all know that sleep is incredibly important. If we don't sleep well, we don't function well during the day. So sometimes just by simply improving sleep, we can improve emotional regulation, our attitude, our focus and attention during the day as well.

[00:30:00.480] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I think that you've definitely piqued my curiosity. We've tried a lot of things in our family and a lot have been helpful, some haven't been, but my wheels are always spinning for new resources. So, Olga, you've already alluded to some different portions of your practice, but just get folks who are listening a really clear rundown of the ways that you do work with families and then how they can get in touch with you if they're interested in learning more.

[00:30:29.300] - Olga Ward

So I work with families in three different ways. I live in Beaverton, Oregon, so I have an office in Beaverton, Oregon. Some clients come and see me in person. Right now it's during the pandemic. I want to make sure they're screened for Covid symptoms and mask wearing is required, so some people prefer starting that way. However, clients who are not local can take advantage of home rentals. I can ship anywhere in the country, and it's pretty easy, and I can help teach people how to set up the hardware by Zoom, virtually and support them virtually. And then the third way is people, they're like, we have a lot of difficulties, this is really helpful, but we want to keep training for months, if not years, and have that be available in our home anytime. I can also support people in who want to purchase their own device. So in office, home rentals, as well as purchase program.

[00:31:36.080] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, that's amazing. I love that because you normally think about neurofeedback being something that has to be done in person in an office. So it's fantastic to know that there's a resource that's a little bit more flexible.

[00:31:49.140] - Olga Ward

Well, you know, with the brain science and the technology continue to evolve, so are the different offerings. And I am so glad to support a company that's so evolved that we can bring a very complex research, a sophisticated piece of equipment home and be able to use it effortlessly.

[00:32:13.280] - Melissa Corkum

Thank you so much, Olga, for your time and for serving our adoptive community so well.

[00:32:18.220] - Olga Ward

Absolutely, thanks so much, Melissa.

[00:32:25.300] - Lisa Qualls

Well, Melissa, that was a great conversation. I learned a lot, and I just enjoyed hearing more about neurofeedback. I think what I love is just practically speaking, being able to do a therapy in your home is just very, very valuable. I mean, we are all so busy, and many of us are pursuing all kinds of help for our kids. And we're running to different appointments and schools and all kinds of stuff. And I just really love the practicality of doing it at home.

[00:32:56.380] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I actually did a little trade with Olga after we recorded this interview. So she was able to do safe and sound with her family and she sent us a NeuroOptimal unit to use for a month. And especially if you have a big family, there's no extra cost really to do sessions with more than one person. So I was able to do some, I was able to do some, my mom did a couple. Ty loved it. He said it helped them feel so relaxed, and there is still a little bit of NeuroOptimal, you know, like brain paste. And so it's a little bit of a thing to set up, but it's not nearly as crazy as, you know, having to drive somewhere and get a whole head full of neuroactive gel, which we've done in the past. So anyway, I think there's just a lot to be said for this type of neurofeedback. I think we might have talked about this an interview, but I think the thing that helps me conceptualize how it's different than other types of neurofeedback is this type of neurofeedback kind of shows your brain like a mirror of itself. And so one of my favorite ways to work out is like dance or barre, and so I think about, like, if I see myself, I can see where I might need to make a correction to get in better alignment. And so same thing with the brain when it sees itself, it might notice that it needs to find another place to have more balance and things like that. So it's a more gentler way to do neurofeedback than the type that starts with brain mapping, so one's not better than the other, they're just completely different. So I just wanted to bring you another option, like Lisa said at the beginning, it's just so great to have options and have multiple tools in the toolbox.

[00:34:48.170] - Lisa Qualls

Well, and you know different things work for different kids. We can continue to explore new things and see what's going to work.

[00:34:55.340] - Melissa Corkum

100%. So if you'd like to explore this or pick Olga's brain about it, you can find her at

beavertonneurofeedback.com. We'll have links to her social media channels and her website at the show notes for this episode, you can find those at theadoptionconnection.com/145. Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. You can find us on Instagram as @theadoptionconnection, or better yet, join our free Facebook community at theadoptionconnection.com/facebook.

[00:35:30.240] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:35:38.410] - Melissa Corkum

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