

[00:00:01.390] - 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.

[00:00:10.450] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:19.130] - Lisa Qualls

Hello, friends. Welcome to episode 154 of The Adoption Connection Podcast. In this episode, we're doing a second live Q&A that took place in our village community. It's just a live, organic conversation about my experience of being a first mom.

[00:00:37.130] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, so I think you're really going to enjoy some of the questions that parents had. We had some folks live who got to ask their questions, so you'll hear them just like we had last week. And then a couple of folks left comments in the Village for Lisa to answer, so we'll sprinkle those questions in as well. So without further ado, here's our Q&A with Lisa and her experience as a birth mom.

[00:01:09.690] - Person 1

My son recently reconnected with his birth family. He is almost 14. I guess he had no contact over the years with the birth family. We've kind of had an open adoption, but it's been more open from my husband and I and birth grandma. And so just wondering if Lisa had any advice sort of do's and don'ts. They did reconnect this summer and he visited them for a week and plans to head back out there again over Christmas. We had some contact with birth mom and birth grandma through text. All of it very positive both directions. So Luckily, I don't have like, this happened, how can I fix it? Or I wish I wouldn't have said this or they said this. Luckily, they are very supportive. First mom has said, I can't thank you enough for loving him, and I can't thank you enough for all you've done. And as well as we have basically positive affirmations both directions. That is wonderful, really, if I could have scripted a reunion, this would have been it. It couldn't have gone better and in the days of Zoom, because they're in California and we're in Michigan, so in the days of Zoom, they were able to connect over Zoom and he was able to connect with even aunts and uncles and siblings over Zoom first. And then when he and my husband flew out there, then they could connect in person. And really we felt comfortable enough with them that he stayed with them. And my husband stayed a mile away where his dad and stepmom lived and it was beautiful. But in any case, back to the question of any sort of do's and don'ts or any advice that you could from a person's perspective.

[00:03:19.510] - Lisa Qualls

I think what's really remarkable is how wonderful you've already done with managing this relationship. It's been pretty beautiful to see it unfold, and I think something about your open heartedness for them I think it's already established this trusting relationship. And I think if I'm remembering right, you've had text contact over the years with the family. So it's not like you were complete strangers to each other. You had that relationship already established, but your son is somewhat young. I mean, I think you all embraced letting him meet his family when he was younger than maybe other people would. Can you remind me how old he is?

[00:04:02.950] - Person 1

He turns 14 this week.

[00:04:05.890] - Lisa Qualls

Okay, so I think a lot of adoptive parents would say, oh, that's such an unstable time. I don't know if that's a good time to introduce this birth family, but I really love that you did, because especially in these teen years, kids have so many questions and to be able to have them answered actually by his birth family, like, as adoptive parents, we do our best. But as a birth mom, I know for sure that my son had many questions that his parents could not answer. And, of course, it was a different era, and it was a closed adoption and it was so much different. But I think at his age, there may be times when you think, wow, that was a little more complicated than it needed to be, but I think he's going to benefit a ton and to be able to be building this relationship while you're integrated in it, you know, a lot

of young people will end up connecting with birth family after they've left their parents homes, and then it becomes a very separate, like, they have one relationship with birth family and one with adopted family and it's really difficult to figure out how to bring that all together for the adoptee. So I think your timing is actually beautiful, and I can't really think of much more that you should be doing than what you already are, which is really fluid communication and letting your son really get to know his birth family and, yeah, I think you're doing a beautiful job. Of course, they're the small things, like making a photo album of when all these years growing up for the family and things like that, but the big things you're already doing fantastic.

[00:05:46.510] - Person 1

Right when this all kind of happened, my son was really the one who kind of brought it up, sort of, really, it kind of came together very quickly, like he had talked to somebody who was an adult who was adopted, who had not ever met his birth family. And it just got him thinking, and then he just said, "Well, could I call my birth mom and could I call my grandma?" Like, well, I don't have their phone numbers, but then we just emailed them, and then the next day, he was able to Zoom them. God just kind of put it all together because this wouldn't have been, like, the ideal age, but I guess thankfully, it worked out well. And I think one thing that I had shared with you before Lisa, was that God really gave me this picture right about when this was all happening, that my son is not mine. He's not sort of my property, but he's also not the birth mom's property. Really, he's God's son. And really we all share him. And we all share in a relationship with him. And it made it really easy to not, I don't know, it was just so beautiful. And I could just enjoy it, and I could feel good for him. Not like, oh, no is he gonna, and I even was able to tell him, and I meant it like, you can call her mom. It's okay. I can be your mom, and you can love me, and she can be your mom and you can love her. You don't have to love me any less now that you love her. I think helped him. And I was even able to share that while he was out there with Grandma and with birth mom as well, just to kind of reassure them, like, there's not any competition. I'm super happy for this all happening. And then every few hours would send me pictures and what they were doing and so it was great. It was beautiful. I think it's good for him. Obviously, I'm white and he's black, and his birthday is black. So I think this is very important for him to especially really at this age, to develop these relationships, and they can help guide him as a young black man and as he matures.

[00:08:07.150] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, that's really a gift, especially for a transracial adoptee. I think it's even extra gift to have this relationship with his birth family.

[00:08:17.830] - Person 1

I think so. I'm really hoping that this summer, he might even be able to spend sort of an extended period of time. It's kind of my hope and we'll see what happens. But maybe even like, six weeks out there where he can just sort of immerse himself in their lives. And more than just like a one week vacation where you go do all the fun things.

[00:08:35.770] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, well, you know, in contrast, for my son, when we reunited, he never was able to truly comfortably share with his parents, like, they knew that he had a relationship with me, but they were not happy. They never wanted to have a relationship with me. I did get to meet his mom in person once, but only in a really stressful situation. Yeah, this is so much better. And so I'm really happy for your son. Well, this would take us on a little tangent, but just can you quickly tell me, how are your other kids feeling that he has this? And I don't know if any of the rest of them do?

[00:09:18.770] - Person 1

They're happy. And it's funny, because on Zoom, so this life of Zoom, right, he has an older brother, and he was able to take the tablet around and say, this older brother, this is my other brother, Darren. And then Darren, this is Dante. And then, well, not your brothers, too. So we just sort of feel like we've sort of extended our family. But I will say that three of my boys are adopted from China, and Darren, the oldest, the twelve year old of that we have since done, like, a DNA test and tried to it's not likely anytime soon, but he has expressed interest in finding his birth family. So we're starting to do what we can do for him, at least now. But I think everybody has been a happy time and yeah, both for my other

adopted children and for my biological children. It's been positive, and I think maybe too, they're following our lead, but then again, we had met them when we first adopted Jason. And I don't know, I think, it feels right. It definitely has been a good full circle.

[00:10:37.310] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, that's great.

[00:10:39.530] - Melissa Corkum

All right, does anyone else have a question?

[00:10:43.170] - Person 2

I do, Lisa, what would be, I joined a group that is about, it's more adoptee/birth mom group. Somebody recommended joining it, and it's been really interesting and sometimes can be kind of hard. But what for you would be, and it's a hard thing to say because I want to say what would be the most hurtful thing for somebody to do, but I don't want to hurt you, so I want to not do that. What would be something that would just really set you up to be very defensive and kind of just want you to close off the extended family and maybe not the adoptee, because I really like how you can blend the families, because I think that would be the best for the kids. And so what I don't want to do is, if ever possible, we're going to start looking hopefully in China, too, but I don't want to, and I realized there'll be differences from cultural and things like that, but what would be things not to do?

[00:11:55.290] - Lisa Qualls

If we go into the relationship with fear and with feeling like as the adopted parents we have to control it, I think the birth parents are already in the weakest, most vulnerable position. Because as a birth mom, we have zero power. We can't choose to have a relationship with the adoptive family, we can't choose to have a relationship with our child, we only get what we're given. And so knowing that there's this openness to actually want to connect and want to know us and know our story and let our child, their child/our child really be able to sort of relax into the relationship, I think that's the best gift you can give. And then, of course, with my son. Really, it wasn't like his mom mailed me pictures. Basically, all I could do was sort of like scavenge them off of Facebook or things like that. He sent me pictures at times over the years, but mostly I felt a bit like a beggar who just got the crumbs, whatever I was allowed to have. So I think just being open hearted and generous is the best thing and then just remember that for the birth mom, losing her child was probably extremely traumatic, no matter the circumstances, so when this possibility of having a relationship with their child presents itself, the fear of losing them again, I think, could be substantial. And so a lot of reassurance, like, even with my son, originally, my hope was actually to have a relationship with his mom. Because I knew he was young and I didn't know how much he'd care about having a relationship with me at first, but if I'd had a relationship with her, I would have known I would never lose him again. And instead, my relationship was built with a very young adult, and he could disappear for long periods of time and I didn't have another adult to connect with to know, hey, is he doing okay? Is there anything I can do to help, things like that. So building the relationship between the moms is really important for the parents, I should say, not just moms.

[00:14:28.350] - Person 3

I apologize for coming in late, so I hope I don't kind of back up and repeat, I'm so thankful that you guys are doing this today. So you may remember our son just turned 15. He's kind of at the height of really being confused about his identity and where he fits in. And over the last month, he told me that he went on to Ancestry.com and started kind of filling in some information. And I thought, okay, here's the clue, he's ready for more information. So because he was adopted from Guatemala, we have a decent amount of bio information and including a picture. So he had read the information before, it didn't really mean that much to him, but he now has this picture, which we started off is kind of real low key. But then I offered him a little frame, and now it's framed next to his bed. And so because of his age, I guess I'm curious about I know you just answered, Sandy in terms of the time frame, age wise, but because he was born in another country, and I feel like we have enough information that if he wanted to search, we could probably find them, but part of me is also afraid because of everything that's happened at the border over the last few years. That will that end up being potentially much more complicated for him, because maybe he has some family members that are here and are in dire

circumstances? And then I don't know, I want to follow his lead, but I'm also nervous about it becoming even more of an identity crisis because he knows he has one biological brother that's still in the home country that has some developmental difficulties that would not be able to come on his own, but he also has a brother that's just two years older. And so there's a chance that that boy is here and we don't know it. And so he's not asked to do, like, a DNA test, but I'm trying to prepare myself for that because my dream would be what you just said, Lisa. So my dream would be to meet his biological mother and have a relationship with her. And I just think it would be wonderful. And I'm learning Spanish or trying to learn Spanish, so that in preparation for that day to come at some point, but I don't want to put my desire for that to happen someday on him, either. I want him to be able to kind of lead, so I don't know. Anything you guys can speak to regarding that circumstance would be great.

[00:16:59.250] - Lisa Qualls

I'd be interested to hear Melissa's thoughts about that as an adoptee. I do think it's important to let him lead. And then I guess in terms of fears of what could happen and if you're opening up this can of worms, it could either happen while he's still with you, again, like I said to Sandy, or it can happen when he's gone to College or moved out on his own. And I think seeing your parents' willingness to support you, even if it gets messy and complicated is actually a really, it builds a lot of trust. And yeah, things could turn out really super messy, but again, better to be dealing with hard, messy stuff when you've got a mom and dad to help you than when you don't. I would let him lead, though. I wouldn't push ahead of him. I think there'd be a temptation on my part, like, okay, I'm going to check it all out first. I'm going to find them, and I'm going to do this, and I'm going to do that. I guess I can't tell other people what to do, but I think doing it side by side, is probably better, even if it might mean there are some hard things, some sad things. I still think there's something really good about letting him take the lead. I was just telling Melissa earlier that I have a very good friend who is a woman now, she's a grown up and she has children. And in her case, her birth mom contacted her in a very sudden, unexpected way, and it really spun her into a tough place. And I think maybe it could have gone differently if it had happened where she was able to take the lead a little more and have the support. And her parents were totally supportive. But because she wasn't prepared for it, she wasn't prepared to process it. So I think it's taken years for her to kind of get there. So anyhow, yeah, I think if he's interested, I would probably step into it, just take small steps. And then if he gets to a point where he's like, I don't know if I want to do more, you can say, well, would you like me to go ahead and find out more? Even if you don't want to have contact or something like that.

[00:19:22.590] - Person 3

I think that's a good point because usually I make control. I want to know all this information, but in this case, I feel like I don't. I think I would want to find it out at the same time as him because I wouldn't want to have a preconceived notion on what my reaction would be, and I wouldn't want to be the one responsible for telling it to him. I would want him to find it out like you said with me, kind of walking alongside him.

[00:19:45.330] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, I think that'd be great.

[00:19:48.930] - Person 3

What do you think, Melissa?

[00:19:54.150] - Melissa Corkum

I'll preface it by saying our family motto for Patrick and me, and the way we've raised our kids has always been like the truth and being upfront with our kids has always been better, like than trying to avoid the hard. And I don't know how we landed there, we kind of both agreed to that kind of unspokenly as we stepped into these crazy waters, and ten years ago, we weren't really forward thinking about this. We were just putting 1ft in front of the other, and we didn't think about what would we do if we could be in touch with birth family or what would happen if my birth parents found me all of a sudden. But I think just in general, we don't want to parent in a way that just is out to protect our kids because we want to kind of have life be the way life is. And like Lisa was mentioning, walk through it with them. We've never protected our kids from funerals or people dying or hard

conversations about what's going on in the world. We've wanted to present it in a way that they feel resilient towards kind of navigating tricky things. And so I think that kind of applies to the situation. And I think, communicating with your son, these are some things that I'm kind of worried about. I don't know that they're going to come to fruition, but this could be tricky waters. And so maybe just setting that up and maybe having a plan. If this gets too tricky, let's be an open communication, like, you have the power to put the brakes on or to ask me to help you process. I would also say if you have a trusted mental health person, You know, now's not the time to be like, I think we're good on therapy. You don't have to be on weekly, but if you're going to enter into these waters, I think it's always great to have a third party who's knowledgeable and caring and objective, a little bit more objective, right, to help all of you manage whatever big emotions come from, whatever, and even the things that we're kind of surmising might happen. Probably none of those things will happen and 100 things that we never thought possible might.

[00:22:22.110] - Person 3

Yeah, I totally get that. I love that perspective. I appreciate you guys framing it that way for me. It helps take away my fear because like you just said, I can't control one or the other, it could be wonderful.

[00:22:36.850] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, I think I always say probably the worst parenting decisions I've ever made are the ones I've made in fear, where I was trying to control something, or I held one of my kids back in some way or just a lot of things. And so I think, especially as people of faith, if we can release that fear and trust God that he loves our kids even more than we do. And it's really sad to me that my son didn't get to have that with me and with his parents because I would have loved it. But I think they had too much fear and so they couldn't give up that control. So even as an adult, he did not share with them about our relationship, and that's not what I want. I've got adult kids now, and I don't want them to have secrets that they feel they can't trust me to hold. So how much better for us to be able to be open and interestingly, even as a birth mom, before I ever knew that I'd have a relationship with my son again, we were open with our children that I'd had a son before I'd met their dad. Of course, we didn't have to explain a lot of details when they were really little, and not that we ever explained a ton, but we just thought we don't want to have a big secret that someday comes out like some cousin saying, well, did you know that your mom got sent away and she had a baby? There's no way I wanted that to happen. So we were just open from the time that they were little. And I'm really glad for that.

[00:24:14.710] - Melissa Corkum

Lisa, I have a question. I'm imagining there are people listening, thinking, well, this is all fine and well, like if Lisa had been our children's birth mom and we had known and we could trust or Sandy, you guys obviously have a certain amount of trust with your son's birth family, and they're obviously stable enough for your young teenage son to go and spend time, even an extended amount of time. What would you say, Lisa, to families where birth mom or birth family are like, there is a lot of fear around either stability or safety or some other, like, how do we not let fear crowd in to these conversations and our thoughts and feelings about birth family and as much openness as possible, because that's obviously what we're promoting through this. If there's these stability or safety issues.

[00:25:18.490] - Lisa Qualls

Well, first of all, I would not assume that if there were those safety issues back when your child was born, that they're still exactly the same. I would definitely explore a lot more because people do change and people do heal and people do grow up and all kinds of other things. So I would definitely try to get as much information as you can to determine really the level of concern that you need to have. And then I would say, unless someone is definitely harmful, I would still try to build those bridges if my child wanted it. And if my child is young, like living in my home, I would put boundaries around it like I would not let. If I were concerned about addiction or severe mental health problems, I wouldn't just send my child off to meet their birth family on their own. So I think we are responsible for our children as adoptive parents. And so it is up to us to keep them safe when there is a true potential threat. So I'd say do our research and maybe in that case, parents need to connect with each other first before you let your child meet them, but allow as much openness as you possibly can within the boundaries of what is actually safe.

[00:26:45.370] - Person 2

I think it is a little bit different when you have a different country you have to go to and you want to look into it. And I also think that our circumstances, since we have a Chinese adoption that chances are they may not have willingly given up their child. I think that's very probable. So I think the circumstances will be interesting. I think the only fear I have is that one kid will find their parents and the other one won't. That's probably my biggest fear. I would like for both of them to be able to have a relationship with their family. It's why I sent them to an immersion school to learn Mandarin, and I need to start myself. But what advice would you give? I think I've kind of used as my compass is just looking at the lives of a lot of my adult adoptee friends, and all of them have looked for their birth families. All of them. Not one has not looked. So that kind of helped me think that I think there's always the curiosity and the question of just wanting to know who's like you and where you came from. And I want to be supportive of that. And so the question of let them lead, my daughter has always been very actively saying she wants to find them. And just the other day, she came out and said, I don't want to find them anymore. And I'm not sure what changed. And I was just getting ready to start searching with a group that is doing some active, active searching things. So should I or should I just ask her and say, were you really serious? I have no problem doing that. Do you really not want to start or do you really want me to start because it's not probably going to happen instantaneously?

[00:28:55.670] - Lisa Qualls

Well, first of all, when you were talking before you said that about your daughter's, maybe change of heart, I was thinking I would really do them separately, totally separately. Like, do one of them, the one who's most interested and don't do any searching for the other. Let that one unfold.

[00:29:12.470] - Person 2

They're both interested.

[00:29:14.150] - Lisa Qualls

I wonder, though, I don't know, I'd like to get other people's thoughts, but I think it could be a lot to support two kids at the same time through reunion. It could be a very emotional ride, but you could also do the searching and the connecting if you find both and then do the meeting at the same time. If that's where everybody lands. But it's a very emotional thing. It can be. There are always adopted like Melissa. I don't know how emotional she would be because she's just wired differently, I'm all about feelings. So, for me, it was very intensely emotional for me and Russ and I look back now and think, man, I needed some professional help and support through that, and I didn't have it. And I needed it, especially because my son contacted me without telling his parents. And then it just all blew up in a very big way. So anyhow I would ask your daughter, I would say, I think this is about how long it's going to take. You'll probably be this old, maybe before we even, I mean, nobody knows, right? Do you really not want me to search right now, or would you like me to just take some little steps and just let her, but if she says, don't do it, I don't think I would.

[00:30:37.050] - Person 2

Okay, well, and it's interesting because she said, don't search. And then she said, in the next breath, can we go to China next summer? She's twelve, but yeah.

[00:30:53.170] - Melissa Corkum

Susan, do you think she doesn't understand that if you search, it doesn't mean she has to meet? Like, maybe.

[00:31:01.090] - Person 2

No, I probably have not explained that well. I mean, the one thing I have told them, I said, if we find them, it's going to take and especially with Covid, I've said if we find them during Covid, we can't go till Covid is over anyway. But yeah, she probably doesn't have any idea, so we should probably talk through.

[00:31:25.150] - Melissa Corkum

Maybe explain to her how much control she would have over the situation and that you would check with her every step of the way and that you could hold the information. And even if you knew it, she wouldn't have to know it all. But there's also like a window of opportunity, right.

[00:31:44.770] - Person 2

Well, and I really believe, and I could be wrong because I'm not an adoptee, but I really believe the younger we find them, the longer it's going to be normal. And I think they're going to be able to process it more and differently and they're going to be able to have a better opportunity to be able to build the relationship that they want and what they want may not be the same relationship that their birth parents want, which I think is heartbreaking for everybody. It's just something I'm really thinking about is what is going to be easiest, and it's not going to be easy, no matter how we look at it, it's going to be complicated and there'll be lots of feelings.

[00:32:40.270] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, lots of feelings. But I think you're on the right track. You're open to it. I mean, I think the openness and the willingness is just so important.

[00:32:50.650] - Person 2

Well, and I've just seen how important it was to my friends, and I can't imagine not letting my kids have the same opportunity. I mean, I guess since I've known about it, my boys wanted to see if we could find a birth parents, and I probably was more interested than they were when they were younger. But now they both have expressed that they do want to find.

[00:33:14.830] - Lisa Qualls

Well, I think it's a very rare birth parent who wouldn't want to know that their child was loved and that their child was doing well. That's all I wanted for years and years and years until my son came back into my life. I didn't even know if he was alive. You have to imagine these parents know nothing. And it's a horrible, unresolvable grief, in my opinion. So, yeah, I'm glad you're looking into it.

[00:33:45.790] - Person 2

I like the idea of creating them a book.

[00:33:49.330] - Lisa Qualls

Absolutely.

[00:33:50.230] - Person 2

Of the kids. That's a great idea.

[00:33:58.370] - Person 3

I wonder, Lisa, if it's not too personal, how old was your son? I think you said young adult, how old was he when he found you?

[00:34:06.170] - Lisa Qualls

He contacted me when he was 16.

[00:34:08.750] - Person 3

Okay.

[00:34:12.450] - Lisa Qualls

It was a long time ago, and it was a big surprise. I don't know that he realized quite what he was opening up when he reached out to me. And because he wasn't able to communicate with his parents about it, he just sort of did it without, he kept it a secret. And then it just got really dark and difficult. But he said he'd always wanted to know and he always had questions he never knew. Like when he found out he was Irish, he was like, wow, I'm Irish. His family is very Italian and so finding out he was Irish was the thing. He really wanted to know what I had named him and finding out what I named him kind of, it was this really amazing thing because he and his sister when they used to play, I had named him Christopher. That was not his name that his parents gave him when they used to play the name

he would choose for his makeup name was Chris.

[00:35:12.270] - Person 3  
Wow.

[00:35:12.570] - Lisa Qualls  
And so there were all these things that were really, and finding out where he got his height, all kinds of stuff. It really meant so so much to him. But then navigating the real life relationship, that was hard.

[00:35:25.830] - Person 3  
Again, I think maybe we know more information, certainly more than a closed adoption and probably more than a China adoption, because we have a decent amount of information. I mean, not only does he know what his name was, but he knows his siblings, names and address and so forth. But I often wonder just because it's kind of come up over the years whether meeting her at a teenage age would make him feel, and I wonder if your son felt this way, like he now had to prove something to you? Do you think? Does an adoptee feel this pressure to prove to their birth parents look how great I am? You made the right decision by giving me this opportunity. Does it add a level of pressure?

[00:36:15.330] - Lisa Qualls  
I can probably answer that a little bit from my son. I think for him, he never expressed that kind of pressure. I think he felt tremendous relief. He just felt relieved that it wasn't the story he'd always imagined of who I was or why I gave him up. He didn't have those answers, and so he was very relieved, I think, to meet me and know the true story and later to meet his birth father, too, because I was able to connect them. I think he felt more pressure to live up to what his parents wanted than maybe I did.

[00:36:57.610] - Person 3  
Yeah, maybe I'm putting that on him. I'm just thinking there's a different level of pressure because we know, at least in the home study that the birth mother says she wants him to have an opportunity in the United States that she knew that she could not provide in terms of education and so forth. And he's at a stage right now where he is, I don't want to go to College, I don't really care about school. We think this is a temporary thing that he's going through, and we're just trying to embrace it, but I wonder, would that be an added level of pressure? That pressure is already there because he's read that report. He knows that that's what she at least told the social worker in terms of kind of the rationale.

[00:37:42.610] - Melissa Corkum  
It might relieve the pressure because it would give, instead of just this paper where, like Lisa was mentioning making up all these pieces of the story and making up all this pressure. And I'm sure his birth mom probably didn't mean it to be pressure like that. And so a dynamic back and forth between them might help him realize, oh, she doesn't really actually care what I do in my adult life as long as I'm happy and safe and she might be able to affirm him in whatever that is. And then I think a lot we obviously talk a lot about the Enneagram here at the Adoption Connection, and I think a lot has to do with what your motivations are. I have never felt a ton of pressure from the exterior from anyone, my parents, teachers, like a ton, like, a little bit here and there, but that hasn't been my driving motivation. But I think that's not necessarily true of some other types on the Enneagram that I think are a little bit more focused on their effect on other people and what other people are thinking about them. I think personality also plays a piece into that. Where do I feel my pressure from?

[00:39:02.170] - Lisa Qualls  
Well, and I think you could be pretty sure that she's going to be very proud of him no matter what. And my guess is she's going to think he's quite amazing. And so he might actually feel really good, like a high school education in the United States that has nothing to think is not enough. That's a big deal for a lot of people.

[00:39:29.030] - Melissa Corkum  
Okay, Lisa. So Holly asked this question in the village. I would love to get your perspective on us

seeking out information about bio dad, we have a very open adoption. I would really like to ask the birth mom for information and to try to even contact birth dad's parents to see if we can find out more, but it feels like a line I can't cross. What's your perspective on asking for more information that only the birth mom has.

[00:39:55.010] - Lisa Qualls

Okay, well, I happen to know a little bit about Holly's story. They do have a very open adoption. It's really beautiful with their son's first mom. They see her every week, they have a relationship with her extended family, and so I think this question comes actually from a place of deep respect for her son's first mom, and she wants to be sensitive to this relationship and sensitive to the mom and kind of protect the relationship. I think that unless there's a dramatic reason why your son's first mom would not want you to talk to her about this, I would talk to her about it because you already have this beautiful relationship built upon a lot of trust and a lot of kindness. And so I would approach her with explaining why it matters why it matters that your son, even your joint son, her son, your son should know about his history and who he is and who he comes from. And if she's really nervous about the dad himself, maybe she would be open to sharing something about his parents. And we just don't know what could possibly open up and what could be gained from the conversation and the contact. I was talking with Melissa right before we recorded this and I was saying that when my son first came back into my life, he was 16 years old and he wanted to know some things about his birth father and I was really nervous, and I was really uncomfortable about it because he hadn't been in my life in decades. Oh, wait, I should back up and say he came into my life at 16. It wasn't until quite many years later that he was asking for information or contact with his birth dad. And so originally, I was sort of the go between, like the birth father sent a letter to my son and me and all this stuff. Well, they had an instant connection. And so very quickly I realized I could not control this relationship, and I had to just let it be what it was. So I did have fears, and maybe your son's mom, Holly, will have some fears as well. But I still think going to her first and letting her speak into this decision and contribute whatever she wants is important. And if she is totally opposed, then you're going to have to consider how important it is to you at this time, because her feelings may change and maybe wait a year and revisit it. And eventually you'll have to do what you need to do for your son. But anyhow that was a very long answer, but I'm processing it with you.

[00:42:40.070] - Melissa Corkum

Okay. Joey, also a member of the village, has two young children, and they have an open relationship with both first mom and grandparents on that side of the family. Because they live in different States, there's not a lot of in person contact, and there seems to be a lot of insecurity on both birth mom and grandparents side that communication might be cut off or there might be less communication. She also mentioned in the question that her kids struggle to connect with folks, not just first mom and grandparents, but anyone over things like Zoom or FaceTime. They do much better in person. And so she was just wondering from you, Lisa, as a birth mom, is there anything or was there anything that you think she could do to just help relieve some of that insecurity about communication? I think it sounds like she's already verbally saying we want you guys in our kids lives, but there seems to be some insecurity.

[00:43:44.750] - Lisa Qualls

Okay, well, let me first speak to the really simple question about the fact that a five and six year old don't really like being on FaceTime and don't really care very much about it. I would say that's 100% normal. I can only handle so much FaceTime, and I am an older adult. So I have a friend who's very brilliant at this. She's a grandma. And so what she does is she gets on FaceTime and she actually plays games with her grandkids. So simple things like go fish crazy, crazy eights, whatever. And they'll have matching card decks or matching board games in front of them. And so it's something they can actually do together because kids are only going to sit and chat for so long when they're five. So first of all, I would recognize that the kids aren't going to want to hang out on FaceTime and that that's okay. And maybe try to build in maybe the grandparent or the parent would want to read a book to them or something. So try to do some things that would get them there for more than maybe 15 seconds. Secondly, in terms of reassuring the birth family that you are committed to a relationship with them, I think I said earlier in response to a question that the truth is that the birth family has quite literally zero power. Zero. They are in the weakest position in the whole triad. And so their fears are

completely understandable. And you, at this point, have the most power as the adoptive parent. And so I think all you can do is continually reassure them that you value them and that they're a really important part of your kid's lives. And year by year as you faithfully stay committed to that relationship, hopefully their fears will begin to diminish. I don't know that there's much you can do because it is such a deep, primal fear. Like losing a child is just so devastating and it's just not meant to happen. And so that wound is not just going to magically heal up. And so the fear of losing them again is very real. I would just be faithful and just keep reassuring them and keep connecting with them. And hopefully over time, some of those fears will diminish.

[00:46:04.190] - Melissa Corkum

Thanks. I mean, that's kind of the story of our kids, right, too. They come to us with so many insecurities about whether it's safe to attach to us or trust us. And there's only so much we can do, but a lot of it happens over time, repeated interactions and experiences that show we can be trusted and we're safe people.

[00:46:23.210] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah.

[00:46:29.550] - Melissa Corkum

Well, we're really glad you were able to join us to listen to that Q&A. If you were listening and you're thinking, man, I have a question for Lisa or I have a follow up question based on the conversation they had, we would love for you to join us in the village. These are the types of great conversations we get to have every single week, sometimes multiple times a week with folks we gather as just moms, Greg hosts groups for just Dads. We do things that are behavior focus, sometimes we have special trainings and guest speakers where you all get to hear the content and then interact with the presenter and get answers that are really relevant to your family. So it's such a great group. I know folks, they feel really supportive. They've made a lot of great connections. We love our time. We love spending time with you guys in the village. So if you'd like to find out more about joining the village, you can go to [theadoptionconnection.com/village](https://theadoptionconnection.com/village). Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. Our new Instagram handle is [@postadoptionresources](https://www.instagram.com/postadoptionresources) or better yet, join our free Facebook community at the [theadoptionconnection.com/facebook](https://theadoptionconnection.com/facebook).

[00:47:52.290] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:48:00.570] - Melissa Corkum

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