

[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.

[00:00:10.290] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:18.810] - Melissa Corkum

Happy New Year, friends and welcome to Episode 158. We are so excited to be back with you after a break for the Christmas holiday. We had so many fun things happen in 2021. I think my favorite thing that happened is that we reinstated our membership community, the Village. It has lots of changes. It looks not a whole lot like the original Village, except that we do a lot of gatherings there, so it's been really great to get to know so many of you through the Village in the last year, and then we have some fun new things coming in 2022. One is our mailbag episodes. We have been doing mentor moments for a while where we can answer one listener question, but there are more and more of you and specifically in our free Facebook group, you guys ask such good questions. As with so many of our situations, they're kind of nuanced, they have complexity, and it is difficult sometimes to answer those in a character account or in a way that conveys the nuance when you're just typing it out. So we're going to bring some of those questions here to the podcast so we can kind of chat about them in a more nuanced and give kind of a better answer for you.

[00:01:40.790] - Lisa Qualls

Yes, we are really excited about this because as always, we love hearing from you, so our first question today is from Tiffany, who asked, "I have an adopted daughter who's six and an adopted son, five. They've been home for nearly two years and spent nearly two years prior to that in another foster home. They are both in kindergarten this year, and I'm starting to wonder about attachment. They both request lots and lots of hugs from their teachers and always tell them, I love you. On our walks to school, they wave at every single person and say good morning. They hug their friends and their friends moms a lot. I watch them closely and know these are safe people, but I'm also pretty sure these kids would totally run off with someone for a piece of candy. They are so friendly and they know no stranger. I wouldn't think twice if it was my bio kids, but I also know none of my bio children would do these things. Do you have suggestions?"

[00:02:34.530] - Melissa Corkum

Well, I think that this is probably happening with a lot of our kids, a lot of our younger kids. I used to say this a lot about one of our kids that he kind of always felt a little bit like he might be family shopping and that he didn't have clear boundaries and probably would have run off with anyone with a warm smile and an invitation. So I think first of all is not to freak out too much. I think it's scary to think about the implications of what this could be, especially in terms of attachment, but I think the simple thing to do is to make really clear and concrete boundaries with our kids. A lot of times, maybe they're sensory seeking, so maybe they're seeking hugs for that reason, or maybe they just don't understand as clearly the boundaries that we understand so clearly in terms of why we would treat different people in different ways. And so I think role playing is really helpful, especially when it comes to teaching our kids how to interact with someone that they don't know, like in a stranger situation. We've also done a thing with our kids where we kind of created these concentric circles. One would be like people who live in our house, and the next one might be like neighbors and teachers, and the next one might be friendly public service workers or, like postmen and things like that people that we don't necessarily know know, but we know are kind of like they're kind of safe to interact with at a certain level, and then further out might be more like strangers, people we really don't know at all kind of create a working list of who fits in which circles and then concretely kind of name for your kids, which behaviors are appropriate for how we interact with those people. And I know typically there's a lot of nuance in this, but you just want to kind of make some clear boundaries, like maybe we hug and kiss on the cheek people in our home and other people we give high fives to and people outside the next circle we blank. And I know that seems kind of black and white, but I think our kids need some of that black and white, especially when they're young, and a visual representation and concreteness are going to be really helpful.

[00:04:44.020] - Lisa Qualls

And I think affirming their friendliness where they say good morning and wave to people. I mean, that's delightful. And so maybe trying to help them understand that that's how they should address more people in just a friendly wave. And not a hug could be helpful, too, since they already know how to do that. But I think Melissa's idea is great because within our closest circles, we definitely are more affectionate, and we just want to help our kids understand that because especially for kids who've been in foster care, they've had a lot of caregivers, and so it can be confusing to them.

[00:05:21.420] - Melissa Corkum

All right. Our next question is from Angela. "We recently reconnected with our son's paternal birth grandmother. She wants to stay connected, but sometimes the conversation suddenly goes from her asking if she might be able to meet him and know him, how she has wanted him to live with her and how she has always wanted him, but when she found out about him, he was already adopted. I'm not sure how to navigate this. She never outright said, can I have him? But had said things like he would never go without, he wouldn't have to go to daycare or after school care, and I would make sure I'm there for him. Stuff like that. I want him to know his family, but that took me off guard. Has anyone ever dealt with this?" So, Lisa, I thought as a first mom and an adaptive mom both that you might have some insight for this question.

[00:06:06.510] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, I do. Well, first of all, I do love the openness that the mom, Angela, who sent us this question is showing like, she's not letting her fear, if she's feeling some fear, just shut it down and like, oh, no, not going to have communication with his grandmother. She's opened her heart somewhat to the grandmother and this grandmother, this is a loss for her. And if she really did not even know he was going to be adopted until after it happened, you can imagine that that might have really stunned her and made her very, very sad. And she may have wondered why it happened this way. So I guess what I would recommend is she needs to understand clearly that there's no going back. Adoption is permanent, you are his parents legally and in all other ways forever. And so no, she can't actually parent him, but that doesn't mean she can't know him. But before, if you do meet with her or let them interact, whether it's over FaceTime or in person or whatever you decide to do, I would just make it really clear to her that she cannot take the conversation with him in that direction because it would be very confusing for him, but that instead she can just be another grandmother who loves him and can tell him about his dad if he wants to know about his dad and be part of his life and part of his very extended family. But I would put boundaries on conversation about him living with her or even visiting until you're ready to even think about that. I think just having compassion and not letting fear get the best of you, which I think can easily happen to a lot of us, is probably those are my most important tips.

[00:08:07.860] - Melissa Corkum

I would say when we have relationships that we want to encourage our kids to have, because as an adoptee and a first mom, we know how important those connections are. I think starting meetings in a neutral location that are obviously supervised. We're not recommending that you let him go stay with this grandma without a level of comfortability. But I think there's a lot of things that you can do where you'll still feel safe, that she can't just up and take him or disappear with him, if that's where your fears are going. And I also think shorter visits more often might be better, like something that has a beginning and an end, like a half an hour at a playground or a game of bowling and just kind of work it up so that interactions with her become normal. And maybe as she gets to know your family and she understands that you support this relationship that would help her with her grief. And then she won't maybe have the same language about like, oh, I wish I could parent him so much as like, I wish I could be just a grandmother to him, and it could develop into a healthy relationship.

[00:09:22.590] - Lisa Qualls

I would also, if you have the capacity, I would maybe make a photo album for her of the years that she's missed of his life, really acknowledge her love for him and that you understand that and that you're thankful that she loves him. So the more you can sort of affirm her as a grandmother and not a caregiver or parent, I think the better. So thanks for that question, I appreciate it. This is from Julie, "We got re-licensed to foster. We've only done respite so far. My adopted sons are ten and twelve, and

we really limit tech time with them. Now that we have older kids in the house, how do you limit technology, phone, tablets? We could go extreme and not share the password, but we hate to completely disconnect them from friends. Are there any creative ways to limit tech?" Now, this is a really kind of fun question, because Melissa and I approach this quite differently. So you'll get to hear some different opinions. But, Melissa, why don't you start?

[00:10:23.140] - Melissa Corkum

There's a lot of different ways to handle this, and I don't think there's one right option, which I think is why it is so confusing sometimes. And I think we have to start by knowing our kids and also knowing what our definition of success is. So for us, for our older teens, as that definition of success became, we wanted to stay connected with them and in relationship, us being the police around technology was hindering that. And so we chose to handle technology with a lot less limits for our older kids. Now, we also have a son who we know would kind of be a disaster with technology, and so we have really made his world very small because it's how he feels safe and how he does the best. And so he has a lot of limits on technology. But he is also kind of cocooned and protected from the peer pressure of other kids his age having technology. So we have also in the same way, kind of eliminated this push pull for technology because he's not hanging out with kids all the time who have different technology limits than him. So that's kind of two pretty extreme ways to handle that. I think in general, though, I always kind of advise parents to limit technology in a way that they aren't having to play the police all the time. So putting limits on technology that are set kind of built in to the tablet or the phone using the screen time settings or using a third party app. Or if you're techy like my husband is, and he can put limits on the router for our WiFi and things like that. I know for a long time, Disney Circle was really popular for doing things like that where there's, like, a hard limit where things turn off after a certain amount of time or they lose Internet or whatever. I mean, you're obviously controlling that, but you don't have to be the one that's trying to wrestle the tablet out of your kid's hands. It just kind of shuts off, and that becomes kind of like the quote, unquote bad guy.

[00:12:40.620] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, I would first of all, agree with that. The more it can be automated so that you aren't the one going and saying, okay, time to get off here. And they're like, Wait, I'm almost done. I've almost finished this game or I've almost done this. So the more it's just you're not even dealing with it, the better. And interestingly, Melissa and I do handle tech a little differently, but we have some similarities in that we both have kids, I have two sons now in high school, and we have more than that, but those two, the way they manage technology is very different and so they need different things from us. So one of my kids, he really values sleep, and he likes people, but only for so long, and so he naturally will turn off devices and go to bed, believe it or not. And then I have another child who, given the opportunity, would probably stay up all night playing video games, chatting with his friends, and so he needs more help with limiting his technology. And so we do that. And I've had to learn a lot because honestly, I have kids, and my age range of my kids is 20 years. So my older kids, we didn't have things like an Xbox or they didn't have phones or anything like that, so sometimes I still feel like I'm catching up, but it is important to figure out what your child can manage on their own and what they need help with. And I think part of this question is, what do we do if we have a foster placement of a teen who's coming with their phone? And when our teen daughter foster daughter came, really, we just applied all the exact same restrictions that we did for our other kids. And we did not limit her in any different way. And so that was a little hard for me because I knew that she was in touch with her family, and that scared me a little bit, especially at first. But I also knew that if I tried to control her contact with her family, and this was not anybody who was like, court ordered she wasn't allowed to have contact that I would have been concerned about, but her extended family. I just felt like the best thing I could do was support those relationships, and I let her have as much contact with them as she wanted. So I would just try to really just explain, this is how our family does it. Maybe make it really clear, like if we don't have phones at the dinner table, we have a basket sitting on the kitchen counter, and everybody in the family sets their phone in it or everybody, their phone goes off at 09:00 p.m, or whatever it is.

[00:15:26.610] - Melissa Corkum

I'll say that this technology conversation comes up and even the nuance between how do we have different kind of rules with different kids? This comes up at our Q&As in the Village almost every month. There's a couple of recorded conversations we've had around this topic. And then, of course,

whatever your nuance in your situation is, you're welcome to come to a Q&A in the Village to do that. I think that's one of the beauties of the conversations in the Village is because is that folks get to bring whatever their current situation is, and sometimes it's different from month to month and get help navigating that in real time.

[00:16:08.370] - Lisa Qualls

I love that when we're having conversations in the Village, you and I are not like "The Experts." There are other parents also speaking and sharing their experiences and what they've learned so that everybody is supporting each other, and that's probably my favorite thing about the Village. Okay, the next question, Melissa, is from Terra. "I have three bio kids and two adopted kids, both adopted at birth. The adopted kids constantly tell me I treat them differently than our bio kids. This is true to the extent that my adopted kids both have learning disabilities and need extra help in monitoring with school. How do I help all my kids understand that treating everyone fairly doesn't mean the same. And that just because the bio kids do well in school, I don't love them more." And then she said, "Thanks. I really love the podcast." Well, thank you for saying that, Tara. We love it, too, and we're really glad you like it. Melissa, you want to tackle that one?

[00:17:05.270] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, so we actually were having a similar conversation in our house. Our kids are not young anymore, but this is a conversation that happened actually between one of our older teens and one of our adult daughters. I think it is tempting when these things happen for us to address the words and respond with something that sounds like logic to us. In the past, I would be guilty of defending myself around how I was treating everyone and how it wasn't unfair and how different wasn't the same as fair, etcetera etcetera, or how life wasn't fair. And I think now that I know a little bit more about the brain and have hopefully grown and become a better parent, is that understanding that these comments come from a lower part of the brain and it's kind of the brain saying, like, do you love me? Am I accepted? And so to kind of respond in our kids in that way where we validate what they're saying? Yeah, it must be really hard to feel like you're always being treated differently and not using that logic. And then just take a note like it seems like one of these this child seems to be struggling with something because if they weren't struggling, they wouldn't be kind of harping on the nuances and fairness in the family. And so I think taking note of that, and I think just being able to take a step back either with a counselor, a parent coach, a mentor or a friend and honestly evaluate how we're doing with all the kids. And if we can say we're doing the things that we think are best for all the kids, and that's what we have to go with, and we don't have to explain ourselves or logic with the kids. We just have to validate that their experience is whatever it is and keep doing the things that we know are the best for our families.

[00:19:12.090] - Lisa Qualls

When our kids were kind of in the first couple of years of being home with us being adoptive parents, we were working with a therapist. And I remember him saying, you have a culture of fairness in your family that really is not working for you. And I had never thought of it. It really was thought provoking, and I realized I think I was trying so hard to treat everybody the same because I wanted my kids to know that I love them all the same, and I wanted outsiders to know I love them all the same, and so I was trying to treat them all the same. And that comment and then some support and help you gave us really helped us to change that and realize that fairness is not actually always in our kids best interests. So this is a great question, and Melissa, thanks for your answer.

[00:20:06.270] - Melissa Corkum

All right, our last and final question for this week's mailbag episode comes from Melissa in our Facebook group, and she asks, "How do you find local adoption and trauma based counseling or mentoring and support?"

[00:20:19.650] - Lisa Qualls

Okay, so first of all, I think what it's important to define the difference between counseling and therapy versus mentoring and coaching. Counseling and therapy is more focused on the past and how it's impacting your present. And so processing things that are impacting your life from your past and now and in the way, maybe your parenting or for your kids the same thing. Things that happened to them

before coaching is very much focused on the present and the future. So parent coaching, like what we do, is more about what is happening in your family right now? Where do you want to go in the future, and how can we help you get there? So that's an important distinction to make. In terms of finding a therapist, what we would recommend is that you go on the website. Just search "TBRI practitioner list," I think is what you can search, yes, it's a directory, maybe. And it'll give you all the trust based, relational intervention trained practitioners. And that's a good way to find a therapist. Another good directory would be the DDP directory, which is Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy, Dr. Daniel Hughes. And that would be another great place to find a therapist. We will have both of those directories in our show notes or how to find them. And then Secondly, in terms of mentoring and coaching, we both do both private coaching as well as Greg, our colleague at the Adoption Connection. We all do private one on one coaching, but a lot of mentoring and coaching also takes place in our community, the Village. So if you are looking more for that, I would strongly recommend you consider joining the Village. It's only a month to month fee of \$27, and you can try it for a month or two and see if it meets some of that need for mentoring support.

[00:22:24.270] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, we also have a really intensive 60 day program called The Regulation Rescue, so if you feel like your family is kind of on the brink of crisis, that's a great program to check out as well. We'll put a link to that in the show notes. And then lastly, if you have a question that you'd like us to tackle here on a future mailbag episode, we invite you to our free Facebook group. You can find that at theadoptionconnection.com/facebook or you can email us at email@theadoptionconnection.com. You can find the links for the resources we just mentioned at today's show notes at theadoptionconnection.com/158.

[00:23:06.750] - Melissa Corkum

Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. Our new Instagram handle is @p
ostadoptionresources, or better yet, join our free Facebook community at the
theadoptionconnection.com/facebook.

[00:23:21.750] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:23:29.970] - Melissa Corkum

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