

[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.

[00:00:18.750] - Lisa Qualls

Welcome to this month's Mailbag episode where we answer your questions. Our first question today comes from Rebecca and she asks, "We're pretty familiar with TBRI and other really great trauma informed parenting resources, but I find that I often get stuck in that they heavily rely on the child being verbal and having typical processing. Sometimes I feel like I just love some resources that take more into account a child who has limited language and intellectual differences. Any suggestions for resources would be greatly welcomed."

[00:00:50.330] - Melissa Corkum

I love this question. I actually remember probably eleven or twelve years ago standing in the lobby at an Empowered to Connect conference and asking Amy Monroe this very question. I felt like everything had to do with choices and giving voice and we had this two year old from Korea who didn't speak English as his first language and had language delays. And I just didn't know what to do with myself. We've learned so much since then, and now I feel like so much of what I encourage parents to do is actually nonverbal. The more we learn about co-regulation and how much our nervous system is communicating with other nervous systems with all these nonverbal signals, I have realized how much, one, my own self regulation means to TBRI and parenting and child ability to feel safe and then that kind of trickles down into usually more acceptable behaviors. And then I think also if you're looking at bigger interventions, we're really big fans here at the Adoption Connection for body work type things, things that soothe and calm, that lower part of the nervous system that is nonverbal. So things like safe and sound protocol is a great example. Kind of the in between of very verbal and no language at all is as our kids, we develop gross motor skills before we develop the fine motor skills for speech. So using, we love signing time, which teaches American Sign Language. So using sign language as an intermediate way of communicating basic concepts before children have the actual ability to put words together with their mouth, they often have language, they just don't have the ability to speak it.

[00:02:51.270] - Lisa Qualls

That's such a good point, Melissa, because our children, we do communicate whether we use words or not. And so much of what we're trying to do with our kids is increase their felt safety, increase their connection with us, and that can be done nonverbally. I mean, even the giving of choices. We use our hands to demonstrate or Dr. Purvis would hold up two fingers and tap one like, do you want gum? And she touched one finger or do you want a glass of juice or whatever? And I do it by holding out my hands one hand and then the other. So the child doesn't have to use words at all to respond. And you don't even have to use many words either. So their processing time, maybe it's going to be a little bit slower, but that's okay. You can wait for them to respond. And if they can't do it, you just offer a little more support and help. And so many things that we suggest for regulation are also not necessarily, they don't require verbal skills or fast processing. Like we talk a lot about rocking in a rocking chair. We talk about the use of music and movement. And so there are so many things I think that we can do that build connection, build relationship, build attachment, and help our kids feel safe without using as much language. So it might require a little more creativity on your part, but we know you can do it. And if you have more specific questions about this, of course you can always ask us in our Facebook group.

[00:04:17.820] - Melissa Corkum

I would also say this, even if your child does have language, we will always do better, especially for kids who are struggling or dysregulated in the moment to use less words anyway. Words really stress our kids out, so we actually want to challenge ourselves. I think, in even situations where there's not a language delay to just use less words. I'm a super verbal person and I'm a lecturer, so I tend to go overboard with words, but it's always better, it always works out better if I start with choices. Four or

five words total between the two choices.

[00:04:50.080] - Lisa Qualls

Yes, I am also a talker and a verbal processor. And I remember when we were writing *The Connected Parent*, I asked Dr. Purvis, now how many words when a child is dysregulated and we're trying to not use too many words, how many words should we say parents should use? And she said, just as few as possible because we know that our children, the tone of our voice is more important than the actual words being said. So, yes, I think you're on the right track. And hopefully we've offered some suggestions that might be helpful to you. Okay, our next question comes from Emily, who asks, "How do you handle situations with kids who use the bathroom to avoid responsibility or chores? Here's an example: My daughter, age ten, was told to clean up her trash from breakfast this morning. She immediately B-lined to the bathroom and spent 20 minutes there. Her doctor has worked her up for possible constipation issues with no medical findings. It just seems to be a stalling technique. I think we've had this happen in our family. How about you, Melissa?"

[00:05:52.140] - Melissa Corkum

Well, you all know how much I love chores, so I don't know, maybe I am this kid still.

[00:06:00.810] - Lisa Qualls

Wait, are you saying you hide in the bathroom after dinner, Melissa?

[00:06:05.310] - Melissa Corkum

Uhhh, maybe. You can talk to my husband about what happens when there's some kind of like household chore that needs to happen. We just got a new refrigerator last month and, we had to reschedule it because of covid, but it turns out that it was delivered at a time when I was actually out of town and I was such a happy camper because you can bet that when it was time to clean out the old fridge and pick through what needs to be thrown out and load the new fridge, I was probably not going to be anywhere to be found friends.

[00:06:34.800] - Lisa Qualls

Okay, that's funny because I'd be just the opposite. Like no way a new fridge is coming, I have to be there to arrange it exactly the way I want it and all of that. So yes, once again, we are vastly different.

[00:06:46.440] - Melissa Corkum

I know, I think I would be all in for rearranging or the new, but cleaning out the old, I don't know, it just feels so tedious and terrible.

[00:06:57.570] - Lisa Qualls

All right, back to the question.

[00:06:59.550] - Melissa Corkum

I know, so I always have such a special place in my heart for kids who hate chores. I feel an immense more amount of compassion for the child in these situations than I do for the parents. I think a couple of things. First of all, if you didn't catch our episode 161 on chores that Greg did last month or the month before, you for sure should catch that. But I think the other thing is I know it can be incredibly frustrating as a parent when this happens, but you don't want to give chores to your kids that hold up the family functioning is what I will say, I've said a lot. So her breakfast dishes, if they stay on the table, presumably, the day could continue to go on with those there until she was finished in the bathroom and in our house, they would still be waiting for her when she came out. And I wouldn't make a big deal out of it. It would just be like, oh great, now you can, you know, glad you're finished. Now you can clean up these breakfast dishes without a lot of, I think if we can take our frustration out of it, then we can keep it deescalated in that situation. But I think just understanding how hard some chores can feel the kids can help explain why. I think if you see it as a continuing pattern, then what we want to do is help our kids learn how to give voice, use words instead of using their behavior. So providing an environment where she has permission to say something like, I'm too overwhelmed to do X, Y or Z chore right now. Could I get some help? Or may I take a break? Rather than just disappearing to use the bathroom. And then I think that will help, that self advocacy goes so much further in life as

a life skill later on.

[00:08:55.130] - Lisa Qualls

Right, and I always like to communicate to my kids that I'm completely confident they can do whatever it is I'm asking them to do. So I try to use when then statements like, you know, say to your daughter, these breakfast things need to be cleaned up. I know you may want to use the bathroom first. That's fine. But when you've cleaned up your breakfast, then we can and give them something that they want to do. Like maybe the breakfast dishes are going to sit there for a little while while they do they're in the bathroom or whatever it is they're doing. But then when they want to move on to the next thing that's enjoyable to them, like playing outside or watching a show or whatever, you can give a yes and say yes, when this is done, then you can do that. So as frustrating as it is, I would try to diffuse it, remove as much power from it as you can. Whatever it is, whether she's avoiding the chore because she doesn't want to do it or she's feeling overwhelmed and anxious and she's going into the bathroom because she's kind of calming herself. Whatever it is, I would make it as little of a deal as possible.

[00:09:59.910] - Melissa Corkum

Two other random tidbits that came to mind as, Lisa, as you were talking. One is Dr. Purvis used to talk about levels of engagement that we want to meet our kids behaviors at the level that it is. And so as frustrating as this is, it really is a level one behavior. She's not hurting, it's kind of an avoidant behavior. It's not hurting anyone. If it is towards the breakfast dishes, it's aggravating to us, but it's not actually like a safety concern. We have a tendency, when we're frustrated, to kind of level that up, respond to it like it's more like a level two or level three behavior. So I think if we can keep level one engagement around that like kind of playful and light, then that will be helpful. And two, relieving ourselves in the bathroom is actually a really great way to reset the nervous system. So she might be using that as a self soothing technique without even really realizing it. And she may come back to the tour after that and be able to do it.

[00:10:58.490] - Lisa Qualls

Okay. Now we keep thinking we're bouncing off each other. The other thing that I think would be so tempting for a lot of us parents to say, if you don't come out of there in three minutes, this is going to be the consequence. You know, the last thing you want to do is give your child that much power. If you're at all inclined to do that, which I know I might have been, I would just let it be. Let it not affect you in a way that is going to turn it into a useful tactic in her relationship with you. So do you have more to say about that, Melissa?

[00:11:31.010] - Melissa Corkum

No, but it's why I love these mailbag episodes. Because if I had just sat down in the Facebook group and typed an answer, it would not have been this good. But the talking it out, super verbal processor.

[00:11:41.190] - Lisa Qualls

Yes, we could go on and on. Can you imagine? Okay, our last question today is from Kami. She said, "Why can't my adopted son, age eight, learn after what seems like thousands of discussions about it, that if he hides his destruction from us and then we find it, we will be upset. But if he would just tell us when it happens, we won't be upset. My toddler has learned this concept, but he can't, and I just don't understand it."

[00:12:05.790] - Melissa Corkum

Well, I can feel that frustration. We have both neurotypical kids who came with all the healthy attachment because they were ours from womb to now, and kids who came to us with lots of early adversity. And I was just watching a workshop on attachment and just being reminded how much is different chemically in our kids brains, like our kids by birth, were flooded in their early days with all this oxytocin, which is what happens when we have these positive relational moments with a primary attachment figure or another safe person in our life. Oxytocin works in the brain to help make us curious and help us learn new things and helps us feel safety and executive functioning. But cortisol has like the opposite effect, right? It's the stress hormone. It causes all kinds of physical changes in the body, and it absolutely shuts off the ability to learn and replaces all what should be oxytocin with

inflammation and all these other things. So I think there's a couple of things to remember is that our kids that have early adversity do not learn vicariously, which is they have to kind of be taught the same lesson over and over and over again, very specifically. They don't just learn by osmosis and by observing. And that second of all, the sneaking and the hiding on top of all of that other oxytocin versus cortisol situation, a lot of times just comes from this nervous system bias of "I'm not safe." And so it doesn't matter when we're sneaking and hiding, those behaviors are coming from a part of the brain that's downstairs lower part of the brain, the survival part. And it doesn't matter if the upstairs part knows that that's not the right thing to do when you're feeling triggered or like you're not safe. And our kids have false positives to that I'm not safe all the time. They're often feeling they're not safe even when they actually are, then they're going to have downstairs brain behavior, even if their upstairs brain knows that it's not the, quote, unquote right thing to do.

[00:14:27.570] - Lisa Qualls

Right, and because our kids are so wired to be fearful and to be hyper vigilant when they do something they know they're not supposed to do and they break something or whatever it is, their instinctive response is to be afraid and to kind of somehow hope that magically we're not going to find out. But of course we do. So it's tricky because it is a fear response and I know it's so frustrating that he doesn't seem to be able to learn it. But again, like Melissa said, our kids just don't learn the way other children learn. And I don't know anything about your toddler but maybe your toddler has more secure attachment or is more neurotypical than your adopted son and so has learned it in a different way and doesn't have the fear response. They break something and they're not afraid. It's not taking them way back in their history and into the more primitive part of their brain saying, danger, danger, danger where your son, who's eight, goes to that danger response. So anyhow, I think it's just going to require a lot of patience, a lot of repetition, and really remember that even when we act calm on the outside, if we are not truly regulated internally, our kids can feel it. So we may think we're not giving off big feelings or giving off anger, but if we are not truly calm, they will know. So I would say anytime you have to interact on something like this, take whatever time you need to completely regulate and calm yourself before you approach your child about it.

[00:16:07.730] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, good words. Well, if you have a question that you'd like us to chat about here in a mailbag episode, we invite you to head to the show notes for this episode. You'll find links there both to our Facebook group which is a place where you can type a question in or to our speak pipe widget which allows you with just the touch of a button to just talk to us and tell us your question because sometimes it's easier than typing it out. So we invite you to participate in that way. Thank you so much, as always for all of your questions.

[00:16:38.070] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:16:53.080] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:17:01.350] - Melissa Corkum

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