

[00:00:00.370] - Lisa Qualls

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[00:00:20.090] - Melissa Corkum

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[00:00:53.390] - 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.

[00:01:02.510] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:01:11.010] - Lisa Qualls

Hello, friends. Welcome to Episode 177. Long before I was a podcaster, I was a blogger and I want to share a post with you today that I wrote back in 2010. I wrote it after returning from a week long intensive therapy that we did with our daughter Kalkidan. And Russ and I both traveled with her, so it was a really special time. So this is what I wrote when I got back and the title was Wanting Those Loving Feelings.

[00:01:39.750] - Lisa Qualls

In addition to the benefits of therapy, last week gave us something very special. With so much undivided attention, Kalkidan blossomed. She relaxed, smiled more, and was affectionate. Best of all, she was fun to be with. We enjoyed her and she enjoyed us. Do you know how wonderful that was? We don't love our kids based on feelings, but I've got to tell you, it is awfully nice when the sweet, loving feelings show up, especially when the relationship is generally so challenging. On our very first flight, Kalkidan curled up in her seat, put her head in my lap, and fell asleep. Remember holding your babies as they slept, feeling their weight in your arms and the warmth against your chest? This was nearly that good. During the week, she reached for our hands, snuggled up on the sofa, shared her special foods, and even slept by my side when she had a bad dream. That's not to say that every moment was warm and fuzzy, especially when working hard in therapy, but there was a general feeling of connection, and this is what made the difference. One, she didn't have to share us with her siblings. Two, we were able to say yes over and over to her request because we didn't have to take other children's needs into account, and we had very few distractions. Three, since food triggers are a huge challenge, we were able to increase her sense of safety by letting her choose special snacks to carry with her all day long. When she was afraid they would run out, we assured her that we would buy more and we did. Four, we were able to give her huge amounts of attention. Russ didn't go to work. I wasn't homeschooling. There were no appointments other than her daily therapy appointments, no errands, and few distractions. Our host even cooked dinner every night, which made the end of each day easy. Of course, that was not real life. We returned home to a house overflowing with children, meals to be made, an intense schedule packed with appointments, volleyball games, errands work and more. Coming home has not been easy for any of us. While it's gone reasonably well, it is sad to see that special time with Kalkidan end. While the unique aspects of last week are gone, how can we maintain the benefits of that time? What elements of the week are still realistic for us? We've had therapists tell us to devote certain amounts of time each day to a child, and while that is wonderful, it's tough to maintain over the long haul when you have a large family. So if that's not practical, what is? Here's my plan. One, take a moment each day to really connect with Kalkidan, especially after school. She may have ten siblings, but she needs to know that she is precious to me. This will not likely mean going off into another room where we can be alone. It may simply be taking a moment to sit down next to her and ask her about her day. So often I'm cooking or doing dishes or talking with

another child at the same time, but she needs a moment of my full attention. Two say yes whenever I possibly can. There are many times when I can't say yes to a request, but how often do I say no? Simply because it's easier for me. To be perfectly honest, how often do I say no because I feel like this child has taken every bit of my patience and I honestly don't have one more thing to give? Three, keep a few special foods in her backpack. I love the idea of increasing felt safety by having foods available to a child. However, I honestly get really irritated trying to protect one child's special food from the rest of the family. I don't have the energy to repeat over and over. Those chips are only for Kalkidan. Besides, it builds resentment with the other children, which in turn builds resentment in me. By keeping the snacks with her all day, Kalkidan has the assurance that she can access her special foods, and my stress is reduced. Since there's no worry about the treats being eaten by someone else, she won't need to rush and eat them herself. Four, create moments of undivided attention. Moms of big families, you're probably rolling your eyes at this, and I completely understand. After more than five years of therapeutic parenting, the thought of having individual dates with each one of my challenging kids every single week gives me a knot in my stomach. We are just trying to keep our heads above water. However, with a little creativity, we can build this into our lives in a way that doesn't burn us out and still meets the needs of Kalkidan's heart. For example, once a week Russ can leave just a little early in the morning and stop for tea with her on the way to school or pick her up for lunch on occasion. This would add no more than 30 minutes to his week and reap some big benefits. I can take her along with me when I need to run an errand or even let her cook dinner by my side. Last night I sat down and edited a paper with her for school and she went to bed feeling connected. It can be that simple. When we make an ambitious plan that is unrealistic, we only feel like greater failures. We may be setting the bar low, but I'm pretty sure Russ and I can make it over this one. Make a simple plan, perhaps add one thing to the week or one tiny thing to each day to try to begin building that important bond of attachment and meeting the needs of your child. So I ask you, how can you increase loving feelings with your kids from trauma and early adversity? Do you struggle with this and find yourself in a negative cycle of thoughts and feelings? And when you've had those sweet moments, what was the key element? Take a moment to reflect on that. It will be worth it.

[00:07:49.770] - Melissa Corkum

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[00:08:04.770] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:08:13.050] - Melissa Corkum

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