

[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,

[00:00:10.400] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:19.050] - Melissa Corkum

We often have opportunities to be guests on other podcasts, and we've had some great conversations. We would hate for you to miss them.

[00:00:25.810] - Lisa Qualls

Because we're taking the month of July off from recording new episodes, we thought it would be the perfect time to share some of those interviews with you right here on our podcast. This is one of our favorites. We hope you enjoy it.

[00:00:44.410] - Nick Runyon

Welcome back, friends, to Around the World with the Archibald Project. Thank you so much for taking the time to listen to our podcast. My name is Nick, and I am one of the co founders of The Archibald Project. And I am joined, as always, by our other co founder, my beautiful wife, Whitney. If you are new to our podcast, we are here to help you thrive in one of the most important jobs in the world, caring for vulnerable children. We interview all kinds of people with valuable experience so we can learn from them and be inspired in our own journeys. So with all that in mind, let's get started.

[00:01:28.750] - Nick Runyon

All right. Welcome back to around the World with the Archibald Project. I'm here with my amazing wife, Whitney.

[00:01:34.990] - Whitney Runyon

Do you really think I'm amazing, or do you just say that so people think you're so sweet?

[00:01:39.620] - Nick Runyon

Let me think about that. No, I think you are amazing. It's true. So, actually, I was thinking about this something that people don't know about you, Whitney, or maybe they do, is how much you love to paint or like home improvement projects. I kid you not. I will come home from work, and somehow she's found a way to paint almost every day.

[00:02:00.900] - Whitney Runyon

But it's not like I'm painting on a canvas. I'm painting our walls in our home.

[00:02:06.100] - Nick Runyon

But you paint lots of walls, and then you'll repaint them.

[00:02:10.410] - Whitney Runyon

I know. You just don't know what you're going to like. You got to try it.

[00:02:14.350] - Nick Runyon

Yeah. Okay. So along the home improvement lines I wanted to tell everybody about this. The other day, so we moved recently, and we were working on putting up a wood ceiling, and it's a struggle. You have two people on a ladder using a nail gun. All this stuff. I'm getting down to get another piece of wood, and Whitney is on the ladder holding the nail gun and the board trying to take a selfie video or something while she's in the air with the ladder.

[00:02:47.210] - Whitney Runyon

Do you know why I did that? Very specifically?

[00:02:49.350] - Nick Runyon

I don't know that there's a good reason.

[00:02:51.600] - Whitney Runyon

You got so mad at me, but the reason I did it is because nail guns used to intimidate me, and I feel like I want to empower other women out there who may be watching my Insta stories. And I feel like if they see me using a nail gun, they might think, I've always wanted to do this one home project, and I don't know how and nail guns intimidate me, but Whitney could figure it out and she could do it, so I can, too. So I really did it. I promise. Honest to God. I was doing it to inspire other women to pick up a nail gun and do home project.

[00:03:20.670] - Nick Runyon

Were you trying to inspire them to pick up a nail gun and their phone at the same time?

[00:03:25.070] - Whitney Runyon

No. Stop it.

[00:03:27.080] - Nick Runyon

It seemed a little outrageous.

[00:03:28.790] - Whitney Runyon

I know you got mad at me.

[00:03:30.220] - Nick Runyon

No, I never get mad at you. Well, anyway, so we have an awesome guest today.

[00:03:36.040] - Whitney Runyon

I'm so excited, I'm such a fan girl.

[00:03:38.440] - Nick Runyon

Her name is Melissa Corkum. Is that how you pronounce it? And she has a podcast called the Adoption Connection Podcast. Right. And you've been on that podcast?

[00:03:46.180] - Whitney Runyon

I have. I was on it a couple of months ago.

[00:03:48.050] - Nick Runyon

But I didn't listen to it. I'm sorry.

[00:03:50.680] - Whitney Runyon

Talk all about you and how amazing you are. I did. I actually went back to our story of how we met. But no, Melissa is amazing. She was adopted herself. She has adopted some of her children. She's had beautiful adoptions. She's had hard adoptions. She is a parent coach. She is so trained and well versed in trauma and helping parents build trust-based relationships with their children.

[00:04:21.920] - Nick Runyon

Awesome.

[00:04:22.460] - Whitney Runyon

And I just find so much hope in their podcast specifically. I remember thinking, we were in Congo when I found their podcast, and it was such a hard season, and, heck, we're still in a hard season sometimes, but their podcast specifically gave me a lot of tools, resources, and hope to help our children and our families thrive. So big fan of Melissa.

[00:04:45.400] - Nick Runyon

As I was reviewing a little bit for this podcast, I was reading some of her posts, and I felt like something she does that's really good is she just is very relatable and very honest about the hard things and encouraging people to give themselves grace and give themselves a break and not beat

yourself up for messing up that you're not alone. I feel like that's such a big part of healing and yourself and your children. I'm excited to hear what she has to say. Let's jump in. Let's talk to her.

[00:05:16.130] - Whitney Runyon

Melissa, we're honored to have you here. We're so excited to talk and learn from you and have all of our listeners out there learn from your wisdom. So thanks for being here.

[00:05:24.640] - Melissa Corkum

Guys, I'm so happy to be here. Thanks so much for having me.

[00:05:27.480] - Whitney Runyon

Of course.

[00:05:28.140] - Nick Runyon

Yeah. Thank you. Good grief. I feel like I have so many questions for you already.

[00:05:33.050] - Whitney Runyon

It's going to be a fun conversation.

[00:05:34.850] - Melissa Corkum

Well, you're not recording again for another, like, 3 hours. Right? So we have the three hour podcast.

[00:05:41.580] - Nick Runyon

Yes, I like it. Since a lot of the stuff we talk about is heavier, we always like to start with a question to help people get to know you or something fun. And I read in your bio, Melissa, you said that you love destressing with popcorn and Netflix. So I was wondering what's kind of your favorite or go to show right now.

[00:05:59.880] - Melissa Corkum

So we're watching Alone. It's like a survival reality TV show, but really we'll watch anything funny.

[00:06:09.950] - Whitney Runyon

Yeah, funny. I'm all about the funny and lighthearted.

[00:06:13.100] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, funny. Sometimes. Cooking shows. Yeah. And I like anything really crunchy. So I do like popcorn in general, but my favorite thing is when my kids gave me the bottom of the bowl where there's like the half popped kernels.

[00:06:27.950] - Whitney Runyon

Oh my gosh. I avoid those pieces at all cost.

[00:06:31.490] - Melissa Corkum

Okay, well, then we need to become popcorn buddies.

[00:06:34.610] - Nick Runyon

That would work out really well.

[00:06:35.970] - Whitney Runyon

I'm going to start mailing you all my leftover popcorn.

[00:06:44.850] - Nick Runyon

That's funny that you say you like funny shows, because I feel like the show we're watching right now is so stressful and not funny.

[00:06:50.810] - Whitney Runyon

But that's not like us. Okay. So my parents would never let me have a television in my room when I

was little until I think I was about to graduate high school. They gave me a TV that I could take with me to college, and it had a little DVD player and I had the Best of the Friends show. And so I started when I was 18. I started watching Friends every night before bed as I was falling asleep. And I can't now fall asleep really without having Friends on. Or we've switched to The Office or Parks and Recreation.

[00:07:23.070] - Nick Runyon
It sounds super healthy.

[00:07:24.530] - Whitney Runyon
I know. I've got a really healthy sleep life, but it helps my mind just kind of like zone out and it's always funny and lighthearted and nothing serious.

[00:07:34.290] - Melissa Corkum
Yeah, no, I get that.

[00:07:36.100] - Whitney Runyon
Yeah, she's like, you need therapy for that. Okay. Anyways, enough about me. Let's talk about you.

[00:07:43.950] - Nick Runyon
So, Melissa, I kind of wanted to start back at the beginning and get a little bit of your backstory. So you said you were adopted from Korea. Can you tell us a little bit about this and when this happened and your memories from that, if any?

[00:07:56.700] - Melissa Corkum
So I was adopted in the early 80 s. I was three or four months when I came home. And it was in this era of adoptions where I think probably the most common country at the time for international adoptions was South Korea. And the crazy thing is that we literally came by the dozens on airplanes.

[00:08:16.690] - Whitney Runyon
Yeah.

[00:08:18.390] - Melissa Corkum
Now it's so common to travel for international adoption, and it's really required in most cases. But in our case, my parents paid an escort fee and a social worker would get on a plane in Korea with, like, ten to 15 kids. Most of them were babies, and they would ask for volunteers to hold us for the trip. Like, complete strangers on the airplane. Yeah. And so we actually have pictures because those individuals would be they were, like, businessmen or whatever who were flying back and forth. They're the ones who presented the kids to the families. And so we all have these pictures of whoever held us on the plane coming off the airplane. It was like a monumental. Yeah.

[00:09:03.780] - Whitney Runyon
Wow. So you obviously have no memories of that, but do you guys have any connection to the random volunteer who held you on the plane?

[00:09:11.760] - Melissa Corkum
No, we don't. We did keep in touch with the other families. So the group of ten families that all were at the airport greeting kids that day. We used to do reunions, like, every year for a couple of years. It stopped when we were in elementary school, so we didn't all keep in touch. But I do remember some early memories of going down to the Chesapeake Bay and hanging out for the day at the beach with a bunch of other Korean adoptive families who all came on the same plane.

[00:09:41.510] - Whitney Runyon
Wow.

[00:09:42.870] - Nick Runyon
So I feel like I've heard a lot of stories of people adopted from this era traveling back to find their birth

family. Do you have any contact or knowledge of that?

[00:09:51.830] - Melissa Corkum

So I was abandoned in front of an orphanage doorstep, probably at just a couple of days old, so there's not a whole lot of information. I certainly could put a lot of time and energy into a search if I wanted to, but I think the thinking part of my brain has always just assumed that the chances of finding or connecting with birth family would be really slim. Our youngest is adopted from Korea, and so we did travel in 2009 to pick him up, and we spent extra time in the country. Just because I had never been, we actually were able to take my mom with us. Yeah, it was really fun. And we traveled south to the city where I was born and made a connection with the organization where I had been abandoned. But even that was kind of, I don't know, anti climatic, I suppose, because the actual physical building where I was abandoned doesn't exist anymore. So the organization is the same, but it's in a completely different place. Yeah. They had a record of me, but I was transferred from there to Holt's, which is a pretty prominent agency in Korea. And so they literally had one paragraph on me. They were like, Yeah, we know that you were here, and you stayed for, like, a night, and then that was it.

[00:11:06.660] - Whitney Runyon

Wow.

[00:11:07.610] - Melissa Corkum

We traveled by bus, like, 2 hours each way to go. And I don't know exactly what I was expecting, but we kind of laugh about it now because we got all the way there and the agency director gave us what she knew, which was kind of exactly what I knew. And then we're all like, Okay.

[00:11:23.020] - Whitney Runyon

Now, it's kind of crazy, though, that they still had that on file because I can't imagine back in the 80s they had stuff in computers.

[00:11:32.430] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, well, in Korea, they have a foster system that is similar to the one in the States, so their record keeping is pretty good. I think if there had been any information that had been left with me, I probably could get it. And I have two siblings who are also adopted from Korea. Different stories. And I think in each of their stories, there's probably more information available. And it was well documented because the country, for the most part, at least in the city areas, is pretty developed.

[00:12:02.690] - Whitney Runyon

Wow, that's really cool. I didn't know that. Okay, so you have six children, some biological and some adopted. Do you think that your own adoption has influenced the way that you've raised your adopted children?

[00:12:20.010] - Melissa Corkum

So I think it does now. I did not hugely identify as an adoptee. It's not that I didn't know I was adopted. It just didn't register as, like, this huge part of my story. So I know you're an Enneagram fan, Whitney I'm an Enneagram 7. And we're kind of, like, very forward thinking. We are thinkers rather than feelers. And so I knew I was adopted. I had no problem talking about it. In fact, I thought it was pretty cool. I kind of talked it up a lot as a kid. Like, ha ha. I get not just a birthday, but an airplane day. I get, like, double the presents and I would play up all these things. Sometimes I would play my adoptee card and be like, I can't do that assignment. I don't know those things. So it wasn't really, like, traumatic for me so much as just like an extra thing. But I didn't ever really think about how it had impacted my identity or all of the other things, grief and loss, the way that it has impacted a couple of our kids who are adopted. But I think now that we know about trauma and attachment and all the things that no one taught us before we adopted our first son for adoption, I think I have a softer place in my heart for thinking about behaviors through this kind of neurobehavioral lens and this trauma lens, because I do remember it made me think about my childhood and some of the times that I had been misunderstood. And so I think there's this piece that allows me to more fully empathize with their situation, even though it wasn't my complete experience of it growing up.

[00:13:57.120] - Whitney Runyon
Yeah, that makes sense.

[00:13:58.500] - Nick Runyon
Well, I think that's really interesting too, just to hear your side of that, because we have talked to quite a few people that were adopted and are now adults. And you're saying how different personalities and personality types process that and deal with it can be very different. And it's important to not assume that people all feel the same way about it just because they were adopted.

[00:14:19.290] - Melissa Corkum
Yeah, I talk a lot about and I work with a lot of adoptive families, and we talk a lot about kind of following your child's lead. I never want to discount the experience of an adoptee, and I certainly know a lot who feel that sense of loss and that sense of grief really intensely. But it's not everybody's experience. My best friend growing up also was a Korean adoptee, and I have a couple of cousins who are adopted and a couple of friends who are adopted, and that I have my siblings. And we all just had such vastly different experiences. And so I also think that there's an entire population of adoptees who probably were more like me. I had no idea that there was this kind of adoptee conversation even going on before I was an adoptive parent. And that's what kind of thrust me into this world. And so I think there's a whole population of adoptees out there who kind of don't have this innate need to have their story heard and to advocate for this loss and grief piece because it's never occurred to them, because they've just never thought twice about it kind of like I hadn't growing up.

[00:15:27.480] - Whitney Runyon
Yeah.

[00:15:28.590] - Melissa Corkum
So I try to represent that way to see the story. And again, even folks who have more of my perspective have their own nuances. But I think following our kids lead towards any experience they could have is great because I heard adoptees say, like, well, all adoptees always are thinking about their birth moms and their birthdays. And that's not been my experience. And so I think it's wise to consider that that might be the experience of your child, but also not to maybe project certain feelings and big things if that's not the way they're experiencing them.

[00:16:01.800] - Nick Runyon
No, that's such good advice and something to think about.

[00:16:05.320] - Whitney Runyon
Especially if you have multiple adopted children. All of our kids, they have so many similarities, but they also are very different in the way they process things. And so the way one child responds to talking about birth family or Congo is very different than the way the other two view it. And I think that's really interesting that I want to make sure that I don't push his feelings on the other two.

[00:16:30.060] - Nick Runyon
Yeah, absolutely.

[00:16:31.530] - Whitney Runyon
Okay, so I'd love to jump in and talk about something that's kind of hard, but it's kind of floating around the Internet right now for a few reasons. But I think the adoption world right now is really trying to figure out and understand what adoption dissolution and adoption disruption are. And I'd love to have you kind of explain just in general what adoption dissolution is for our audience and then we're going to talk a little bit about that.

[00:16:59.100] - Melissa Corkum
So adoption dissolution is when a family decides that they can no longer provide the care that a child needs and they decide to basically place that child for adoption again. And then that child goes to another family and it's a legal process and there's a lot that goes into that. That's different than

finding an out of home treatment or out of home placement for a child. Either a long term respite situation or something where the parents still retain rights. Nothing legal in terms of who the parents are changes, but the parents are bringing more people on board providing higher levels of care for a child. And so I think it's important to distinguish those two things.

[00:17:46.440] - Whitney Runyon

Yeah, okay. Absolutely. And in your job of helping parents, I would imagine that you hear a lot of pain and struggles from adoptive and foster parents who might be considering dissolution. How do you help them? I know that's a really good question.

[00:18:01.360] - Melissa Corkum

Well, it's a great question. It's a really important question. And I always say we'll do better to reach out for help before we feel like we want to give up that much. But also, again, knowing that there are solutions and they're not as readily available as they should be for families who feel like they need a higher level of care. And the fact of the matter is that we can't always provide the level of care that some of our kids need and it's not anybody's fault other than traumas. Right. And I think one of the things I spend a lot of time with families talking about, one of the first exercises we always go through is defining success for your family. And a lot of times it means redefining success. What does that look like? Success can't be defined by outcome. It can't be defined by our kids and their behaviors or even what their needs are. It really has to be defined by something we as parents or individuals can control. And that's normally not how we define success with parents. We usually define it as whether or not we can take our kids to the grocery store without a meltdown. Or in my case, I thought success was being able to care for all the kids in my home under my roof and without extra help. I had defined failure as needing to call in extra levels of care that might look like our daughter staying somewhere else other than here. And so I really try to help families see that finding the level of care that's going to ultimately help our kids on their journey towards wholeness is never a failure. So if it means a higher level of care, then that's what it means. I really wish the world and the adoption community would stop shaming families for looking for those higher levels of care.

[00:19:44.880] - Whitney Runyon

Yeah, absolutely.

[00:19:46.040] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. I think the other piece that I didn't understand when we were walking through kind of our lowest point as a family is just like we understand how broken relationships and trauma, complex trauma, relational trauma, physical abuse, neglect, all of those things impacts our children's nervous systems and their ability to trust other people to take care of them. That when we are caring for a child who has such protective walls up for good reason, our nervous system also puts protective walls up because that relationship is not the kind of reciprocal relationship that we were designed for. And so something happens in parents and caregivers, sometimes called blocked care. And it's subconscious and it's our own body's protective mechanism. It's the way we were designed, working. It doesn't discriminate between protecting us from an actual threat and protecting us from someone who we're supposed to love unconditionally and take care of. And so I think also when I work with parents who really feel like they're at the end of their rope, we start there because I can throw every parenting tool and every book at you. But if you're in blocked care and you're exhausted and your own nervous system is fried and traumatized, you're not available and ready to take on any more tools, help suggestions. And in fact, a lot of the parents I work with have a lot of the tools, they already know a lot of the things, but they were missing the piece where they take care of their own nervous system in order that they can continue to take care of the fragile nervous system of a child from a hard place.

[00:21:25.030] - Whitney Runyon

Yeah, absolutely. And I took one of the courses you guys did on your Facebook group working with blocked care because I think I guess out there, putting it out there for the whole world but I feel like I've experienced that and it was really helpful. But something that I also have noticed even after walking through that and then continuing to do and put in place some of the practices that you guys suggest. I've noticed in a good season with our family that if something triggers a child, it can also retrigger me. And I feel like my blocked care goes back up. Is that a thing? Can parents or caregivers

subconsciously go back into blocked care after they've kind of walked out of that?

[00:22:07.900] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, if you think about it more like a journey or a cycle, if we think about our nervous system kind of on this ladder where at the very top we're able to socially engage and be open and receptive and vulnerable and it's where we kind of feel our bravest. Think about the kind of bravery you would have to feel if you are just like standing at the top of a ladder. And then as things happen, our nervous system is constantly changing and moving. It's dynamic because we're people and we're in and out of relationships and in and out of situations and something might happen and it might even be a split second. Our nervous system can kind of fall down the ladder a little bit into what we call like fight or flight, which most people are familiar with. And there's something that happens in the nervous system that puts us there. And then based on our past experiences, our nervous system can be resilient and kind of climb back up that ladder and sometimes that can take a couple of minutes or a couple of seconds. And sometimes we get stuck there and then sometimes if we feel like we can't fight a situation or run away from it, our nervous system continues to collapse down the ladder and eventually we hit like that dissociative freeze state where we really can't access the resources that we have and that's an obvious much longer climb back up to safety. But that's happening for our kids and us dynamically all the time and how much time we get stuck kind of on the lower rungs of the ladders is the important thing to look at, like our resilience to be able to climb back up to the top.

[00:23:37.220] - Whitney Runyon

Yeah.

[00:23:38.000] - Nick Runyon

So how then when parents come to you who are maybe feeling like they need outside care or they're feeling like they can't go on anymore, how do you balance showing people that they can keep going and encouraging them to versus when they need to look for outside care?

[00:23:56.210] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, well, this is something I wish agencies would work with parents on before they were in the midst of it. When you're already feeling like you're drowning, it's so hard to make these decisions because our nervous systems aren't in our thinking brain. Like we're not using our logic. We're on alert. And so I really encourage parents if they have ever a downtime, sometimes we just look for short term respite right away just so everyone can get a breather and then get a break and everyone can put their thinking brain back in play for a little bit and then be really objective about kind of what your boundaries are as a family. And it's different for every family, but I think it's important to know what they are because otherwise we become kind of like frogs in boiling water, right? Where if you put a frog in boiling water, they immediately will know that's not right, we shouldn't be here. But I think in most of our cases we all are frogs in room temperature water and the heat is being turned up and the behaviors are escalating and we're slowly adjusting to our new normal again and again and again and then before we know it, we're cooked.

[00:24:59.430] - Melissa Corkum

So we kind of have to have some markers, like some really objective ones towards at what point in our family and like I said, it's different for all families will we look for outside help and that could be short term outside help, like calling a neighbor to come over and help be a pattern interrupt. So a really big behavior. It could be a mental health evaluation at your local emergency department. It could be looking for higher levels of care, like residential or something like that. So you have to kind of just know where your boundaries are. And a lot of that has to do with the parents and resilience if there are other children in the family. Safety, I think, is always trumps everything. But safety, physical safety is a little bit easier to define, but emotional safety is a little bit more of a moving target for each family. And so we'll just work together to kind of figure out what those markers are for each family.

[00:25:54.060] - Whitney Runyon

That's good. That's really good.

[00:25:56.910] - Shelby Brown

I've been following the Archibald Project for a few months now. Storytelling is so simple and so profound and can reveal how there are so many avenues of support and roles to be played by each one of us in the service of families, children, and youth and hard places. I myself, being a foster care case worker for almost two years now, have been so inspired and encouraged by the work Archibald Project is doing. And I'm honored to support. My name is Shelby Brown. I live in Nashville, Tennessee, and I'm a proud supporter of the Archibald Project. You can help inspire more people like me by donating at www.thearchballproject.com.

[00:26:33.150] - Nick Runyon

So, Melissa, you actually have, I think, some personal experience with us. You've had some rough times, it seems like, with a couple of your adopted kids. Are you willing to share a little bit about that and kind of maybe some of the mistakes you made and things that you learned through those experiences?

[00:26:48.430] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. So the great thing about having a bunch of kids is that I can talk in generalities without breaching anybody's privacy.

[00:26:56.020] - Whitney Runyon

Yeah.

[00:26:57.990] - Melissa Corkum

And I think, Nick, what you said and how you ask the question is brilliant, because really it wasn't so much about our kids so much as it was about how we, as parents experienced that. And we didn't understand what was happening. We didn't understand what was happening to ourselves. It just blindsided the whole family. And we were way more reactive than we were responsive. And we take full responsibility for some of the things that went wrong in those, like, three to five years where things were really ugly. And so we have learned a lot. It did take getting some out of home respite for one of our kids. We had a couple of other kids who are a little bit older who are like, peace out. I didn't really want a family anyway. I don't like the way this family feels. And they left for Job Corps. And when we finally had some breathing room, we did have a decision to make. Like, were we just going to kind of shut down, be really protective and kind of like, put that season behind us because our kids were telling us we don't want to be a part of the family anymore. We reject you. And quite frankly, they had really good reasons to feel that way about us.

[00:28:06.780] - Nick Runyon

Well, in your defense, mechanisms probably were heightened because you felt like you failed. And it's hard to admit that at times.

[00:28:14.690] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I mean, there were so many things. Yeah, a lot of hurt feelings, a lot of hurt all the way around. But God was super gracious, and I feel like we've gotten the ultimate, what I call like, the ultimate redo. And so we had this opportunity to kind of just reposture ourselves towards our kids and kind of face them with open arms, and some of them were more willing to kind of revisit that than others. It took years for one of them, but we've really come to a healthier place. We all have a lot to go, but we are in a connected, communicative place with all of our kids now, and that just feels really special. I just don't want to take that for granted.

[00:29:04.110] - Whitney Runyon

That's helpful. Thank you for sharing that. That's really cool.

[00:29:07.710] - Nick Runyon

Can you share maybe some of the specific things that you guys did to work on yourselves and kind of get that second chance and or deal with those feelings of rejection or failure? Because I know that there's a lot of people out there who have adopted children who, when they're older, they're like, I'm done. And they probably don't know what to do with those feelings or how to maybe even get that

second chance, if possible.

[00:29:32.140] - Melissa Corkum

So I think all adoptive families need a really good therapist to understand attachment, trauma, all the things. I'm a really huge fan of, like understanding how our body and mind work together and understanding how the body really stores a lot of these experiences as stress and trauma in our bodies. And so besides having a really good trauma therapist who can help you verbally process, I think it's really great to access other therapies, like the safe and sound protocol, EMDR, trauma release exercise. And maybe it's my personality, but those things have been the things that have helped me move the needle towards my own journey and forgiveness and having my nervous system continue to stay open even through rejection. And then from the practical piece, like, we just swallowed our pride on a lot of things. And one of the things I did just because I have a really intense personality and what was happening was even my questions that were meant to be, like, I want to get to know you better, and I'm curious about what you're up to in your life, were being experienced by my kids as interrogation.

[00:30:39.810] - Nick Runyon

That's fascinating.

[00:30:41.910] - Melissa Corkum

Again, like, personality differences, all the things. And so this was actually a challenge set to me by my therapist, and she said, now this was for an older child who actually wasn't living with us anymore. But she said you're not allowed to ask him any questions for at least six months, maybe a year. And so being intentional about reframing our conversations to be there and be available, but never asking a question, radically changed our relationship. And I know it sounds crazy, but it worked.

[00:31:14.610] - Nick Runyon

That's fascinating.

[00:31:15.650] - Whitney Runyon

That is very fascinating. Our kids are younger, but we've kind of just got into this really cool rhythm almost, of if something hard is going on, Nick goes in and speaks with them and is able to ask them questions and how are you feeling in this specific moment? And they're just starting to get, I think, maybe comfortable or safe enough to be able to express how when somebody caregiver guardian says something to me, it makes me feel like this. And then Nick and I are able to be like, okay, it's really important for us to not speak to them that way or say questions like that, or ask them to do things two times in a row or I think it's really interesting to really know your kid and how they receive love and respect because you're saying that your child didn't need all the questions. But we weren't even thinking about asking our kid questions necessarily on how they were feeling in the moment. And I feel like that's kind of really helped an open dialogue for us to be able to start working towards a healthier relationship overall.

[00:32:23.700] - Nick Runyon

Yeah.

[00:32:24.200] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I think that's great. And just for the backstory, too, our kids came to us, our last three at 11, 13 and 14. So we really were at a huge relationship deficit coming into this.

[00:32:37.810] - Nick Runyon

There's a lot that happens in those years.

[00:32:39.870] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. And didn't really honor kind of that deficit coming in. So we had a lot of ground to make up on the back end once we realized all the things we were doing wrong and realizing that we really wanted to be a safe place for them to be at. Which is a scary thing as a parent, because it means that there are a lot of life lessons that they've kind of had to learn the hard way. But also realizing that because

our relationship and our attachment relationship started so late in life and really at a time when developmentally, if they had been with a consistent caregiver, they would have been detaching from the caregiver, not attaching. Because that's what you want to do at 13 and 14.

[00:33:20.350] - Nick Runyon
That's so true.

[00:33:21.610] - Melissa Corkum
Yeah. So we need to be really clear about our roles and realize that our relationship at its fragile stage could not handle us to be anything else but like the safe place to land. So we couldn't be the pastor or the teacher, or we pawned off a lot of things to our village that we couldn't make suggestions about exercise or eating right or praying if something was hard, or all of these things that those had to come from other voice. Because our relationship just couldn't handle all those different roles, which is foreign to me, because we started with two kids by birth and a son who was adopted as a toddler. And not that he hasn't had his challenges, but the attachment relationship is different, and our relationship can handle those things. And so to be a mom who wasn't a teacher and a health care provider and all those things was a different role to step into.

[00:34:14.860] - Whitney Runyon
Wow. Yeah, that's really funny.

[00:34:16.870] - Nick Runyon
It's really good to recognize that. And I feel like we identify with that some because of this whole pandemic stuff, we're forced to be teachers right now, and we're not sure that that is the healthiest thing. Well, you are mostly right now.

[00:34:32.400] - Whitney Runyon
Yeah. I've realized that I can't be a teacher right now to one of my children because it's just not healthy for our connection and bond. And so I've had to try to figure out how we're going to outsource that once school starts up again. But I know his education is so important, and I don't want that to weaken. But I also know that our bond and his trust in me is so important, and so I don't want that to be traded in for him learning how to read.

[00:35:01.370] - Melissa Corkum
Yeah, well, and you know what? Formal education is kind of new to the world, but relationships aren't. And so it's okay to prioritize a relationship. And honestly, if our kids feel safe in the relationships that they're in, even if they never go to a day of formal school, they will learn everything they need in life.

[00:35:17.670] - Whitney Runyon
That's really good to hear. Thank you for saying that, because I beat myself up so much about how far behind this child is in traditional learning.

[00:35:26.480] - Nick Runyon
Well, and on that, Melissa, I feel like something I really appreciate about the things that you write is how much you really try to hone in on giving yourself grace, and parents really cutting themselves some slack. And so one of the things that you say is, it's better to mess up than be a perfect parent. Can you expand on that a little bit?

[00:35:45.110] - Melissa Corkum
Yeah, well, I mean, the thing is, none of us are perfect. Our kids aren't perfect. We're not perfect. And we need to know, it's a life skill to know how to not be perfect. And so if we set this bar that we have to be the perfect parents, then we're not modeling to our kids how to not be perfect well, And so Robin Gobbel talks about, like, we only have to get it right a third of the time. And to someone who's a perfectionist and did really well in school, a 33% is failing. It's hard to get my mind around, but she talks about only getting it right a third of the time. That we'll probably mess up a third of the time. And then the other third, we use to repair the third that we messed up. And I think that that's really true, and I think it's not so much the failure so much as what we do on the back end of that failure. And our

kids, especially those who came to us from hard places, already feel this immense burden, I think, to be right or be good. And some of that is dictated by personality style, but they make up stories in their heads about why they were in an adoption situation to begin with, and there's lots of reasons that happen. But if we have the standard of perfection for ourselves as parents, then that also reflects our expectations for our kids. And they're already struggling a lot against that. And so I think our ability to not be perfect gives them the space to feel safe to not be perfect.

[00:37:15.150] - Nick Runyon

That's really a good word. And convicting even, because I feel like sometimes we try to hold our kids to a level that is maybe a little bit too high because we feel like they've got to make up for lost time. So I think it's important for us to have that grace for ourselves and for our kids as well.

[00:37:33.330] - Whitney Runyon

What's some great advice that you would give somebody who is preparing to adopt?

[00:37:39.090] - Melissa Corkum

Oh, goodness.

[00:37:40.900] - Nick Runyon

It'd better be great. So don't slack on this one.

[00:37:44.350] - Melissa Corkum

I know. From a really practical perspective, I think parents or families should have \$10,000 to \$20,000 per child they are adopting, like set aside for all the extra services and therapy everyone needs to do this well.

[00:38:02.170] - Whitney Runyon

Yeah, that's so true, man.

[00:38:04.360] - Melissa Corkum

And we don't talk about it. We talk a lot about the fees and the expenses and the red tape to adopt. And I know that especially in international adoption, that feels insurmountable sometimes. And so I can't imagine what it would feel like to go into an adoption information meeting and get the lowdown on all the things and then also be like, well, besides your home study fee and your travel fees and all the other things, we also want you to have, like a reserve fund of 15k per kid,

[00:38:37.380] - Whitney Runyon

No, that's actually genius.

[00:38:41.030] - Melissa Corkum

Well, the thing is, finances were such a big part of the decisions of how we cared for our kids when everything was chaotic because money didn't grow on trees and we had the willingness to do a lot of resources, but we didn't have the cash to throw at all the different things that maybe could have helped. And it really limited and it was like an extra layer of stress. And I just thought, well, if we had just planned for this better, it would have just been one less stressful thing. And there's so much we can't control in this journey in terms of how trauma impacts our kids and how it impacts us and how it impacts the siblings and all of the things. It feels like one area where we could control something that could lessen the impact it had on our families.

[00:39:23.250] - Nick Runyon

Yeah, well, and that even makes me just think, practically speaking, it's probably not an option for a lot of families, but people are always looking for ways to help in this space that are not necessarily adopting or fostering. And so if you could somehow help a family by providing money for therapy and things like that, because it's somewhat easy sometimes to raise money for an adoption, but the stuff after is not so common. So yeah, that could just be such a huge practical way of helping families heal and really pouring into this space.

[00:39:57.400] - Whitney Runyon

Yes. If you're listening out there and you want to help an adoptive or foster family start a Go Fund me page for some therapy sessions, that would be an awesome. Our community did that for us when we came home from Congo. We had about \$2,000 that somebody just then venmo'd us, and they said we raised money for clothing, therapy, date nights, like, whatever you guys need for your family now. And it was such a blessing. It was such a blessing to receive that money.

[00:40:25.520] - Nick Runyon

Yeah. Because so much focus is on the beginning of the journey, when really the journey starts once your child comes home.

[00:40:31.460] - Whitney Runyon

Yeah. And keeps going. I feel silly. We're two and a half years in. I'm like, I feel like I shouldn't need therapy anymore. I feel like we should be good to go, and people just want to hear that things are going really well and we should be in this perfect place as a normal, quote unquote normal family. And it sets me back as a mom to feel like I'm struggling still or failing and like, oh, I need therapy still, or my kids still need therapy. And that's not true, but sometimes how you feel.

[00:41:02.340] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, well, and you're experiencing Whitney things every day that we all probably need a therapist in our back pocket. Right. So it's not like the journey isn't just about when they entered your family. There's things that happen every single day in adoptive families that we need to process with the therapist. So we're on this, like, rolling thing. It's not just like, two and a half years from the time they came home. We should be doing better. But you've had that and then you're that initial, like, big transition, and then you've also accumulated two and a half years of experiences you still need to process.

[00:41:33.510] - Whitney Runyon

Yeah, definitely.

[00:41:34.960] - Nick Runyon

For sure. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us and all your wonderful advice.

[00:41:41.550] - Whitney Runyon

We're just really grateful, thankful for your wisdom. And we'll put your personal website and the Adoption Connection podcast up on our podcast page, which is www.thearchipeldproject.com podcast. And this is going to be our episode with Melissa Corkum. I know people are going to just if they don't already listen to your podcast, they're going to love it, and I know they're going to find lots of wisdom from your website. And if anybody out there wants to contact Melissa as a parenting coach, we cannot recommend her enough. I mean, you're not my parenting coach, but I kind of want to start doing sessions with you now. Yeah, you're awesome, and we're really thankful for you.

[00:42:20.110] - Melissa Corkum

Well, thank you so much for having me. I also want to throw out Whitney, you mentioned something called the Compassion Challenge that you did with the Adoption Connection around Blocked Care. We've kind of condensed it into, like, a 20 minutes quick course. It used to be, like, a three day challenge, but I'd love to offer that to Archibald Project listeners. So you guys can grab that or your listeners can grab that at the adoptionconnection.com/Tap for The Archibald Project.

[00:42:47.620] - Nick Runyon

Awesome. Thank you so much.

[00:42:49.330] - Whitney Runyon

So awesome. Okay, we'll get that link out, too.

[00:42:51.800] - Nick Runyon

And to say thank you for doing that, we're going to post your mailing address and have everyone send

you half popped popcorn kernels, unlimited supply.

[00:43:02.430] - Whitney Runyon

Oh, my gosh. Awesome. Well, we're really thankful for you, Melissa, and loved our conversation. Hopefully, we'll talk to you soon.

[00:43:09.620] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. Thanks, guys.

[00:43:10.690] - Nick Runyon

Thanks.

[00:43:12.630] - Nick Runyon

Thank you guys so much for taking the time to listen. Everything the Archibald Project produces, including this podcast, is made possible by our incredible supporters. If our work has ever made an impact in your life or maybe you are just feeling generous, please consider donating at theArchibaldproject.com so we can continue to help people thrive at caring for orphan and vulnerable children.

[00:43:37.030] - Melissa Corkum

We hope you enjoyed that conversation as much as we did. Even though the podcast is on summer break for July, we are still meeting at least weekly in The Village, and we'd love to have you join us. To find out more information, visit theadoptionconnection.com/VILLAGE. As a valued podcast listener, we'd like to offer you half off of your first month. Just use the Code podcast when you check out. 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.

[00:44:17.350] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:44:25.570] - Melissa Corkum

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