

[00:00:01.690] - Lisa Qualls

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. Welcome to this month's Mailbag episode where we answer your questions. This week's first question comes from Tiffany. Does anyone else have days they just don't want to be around their child or children because they're not in a good place themselves? Like zero patience, super irritable and just all over, not in the right headspace to be able to keep my son regulated since I'm struggling to keep myself regulated? In other words, I don't want to be around him because my chances of getting angry and/or yelling are much higher and that's not what I want to do.

[00:00:49.770] - Lisa Qualls

Oh, yes, I think everyone listening right now is thinking.

[00:00:55.590] - Melissa Corkum

The short answer is yes.

[00:00:57.930] - Lisa Qualls

We have had those days. In fact, I have been sick for almost a week. It's ridiculous. And so my patience and my window of tolerance, my ability to roll with things right now has not been very high. And so I definitely have been experiencing this myself, about not being in the right head space to be able to have the energy to help my kids, and also keep myself regulated. It's definitely hard. The first thing that comes to mind to me is that this is a lot less, and I think you're indicating this, it's a lot less about your kid than it is about you. Like you need something. What is it that you need right now in order to give yourself the ability to tolerate the challenges in a healthy way? Maybe you're really tired and you need to take good care of yourself and get more sleep, go to bed early, even though it seems so hard to do, because, gosh, it's so good to have that time when the kids are in bed and you're not. But maybe you need to really be curious about how you're feeling and ask yourself, what do you need?

[00:02:01.420] - Lisa Qualls

Because you know how we always talk about looking for the need behind our kids behaviors? What is the need that's trying to be met? Usually we can ask ourselves the same thing. What is it that I need? Do I need to say no to a bunch of things in my life? Am I too busy? Am I too tired? Am I not eating well? Am I not letting myself getting enough water? All those really basic self care. Or do you just need some quiet? Do you need to see if you can have someone stay with your child so you can get a break? What is it that you're needing in order to have the capacity to be able to tolerate? Because, frankly, this is really hard parenting. I mean, I'm sure you would agree, Melissa.

[00:02:41.750] - Melissa Corkum

We talk a lot in the different groups that we run about parents being the stable foundation or the strong foundation for our families. It doesn't sound like Tiffany is quite in blocked care. I think she probably just sounds like every parent, like a tired mom.

[00:02:59.720] - Lisa Qualls

Yes. And Tiffany, we are not downplaying, 100% not downplaying, but we get it.

[00:03:05.360] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. I just don't think there's a parent out there who doesn't have days. Right. Or a day. But we talk a lot here at The Adoption Connection about something called blocked care, which is a much more serious kind of movement of our nervous system toward really, where more days than not or all the days are like those days. When we teach about this and we train about this and we run groups about this, one of the things that we talk about is something called Points of Joy. And so that's where we just have parents think, like, brainstorm, like 50 things that make them happy. And it can be little tiny things, like the smell of something or drinking your coffee hot. So they're not things that require you to get a full day of respite or a five-hour nap, or whatever it is. But we find that challenging parents to try

to do at least seven of those things off their list every day helps them navigate a little bit more smoothly. The days that feel like "those days."

[00:04:09.870] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, they fill you up a little bit. And they help to calm, those little bits of joy really help calm our nervous system. And it really can be so simple. Like, one of mine almost every day is I put lemon oil in my water, the essential oil. It literally makes me happy. And it's such a tiny thing. Like, literally, I'm dropping three drops of an oil in my water bottle, and it makes me feel a little bit happy. And so we're talking really small things. Like, one of mine has always been just stepping out on the back porch and just taking a moment to breathe, look out. So really small, simple things. The other thing I was thinking about is a lot of times we talk about when our kids are dysregulated, that we need to bring them close so we can co-regulate our kids. Most of them do not have the capacity to regulate themselves. Their nervous systems are very fragile, and they're often on high alert. And so we are their co-regulators. If you're feeling like you don't have capacity for your kid, it might actually help to bring your child close. But do something that requires almost nothing from you, like watch a movie together. Maybe each of you get a special something to drink. If your child's little, put something in a sippy cup, whatever, and just sit down and relax together. Because just that might help your nervous system calm, which will help your child's nervous system calm. And you might find you have a little more capacity to enjoy your child again. I mean, maybe you'll laugh at something. We talk about laughter also when we're working with parents. If you're watching a movie and you actually laugh together, that's actually a really connecting thing. And so figure out what is not going to feel demanding to you, and then do something like that to try to just calm and regulate. It's also totally okay to take a break. Just take a break.

[00:06:01.870] - Melissa Corkum

I know you're talking about that, Lisa. And I'm getting prickly in my skin thinking about it. If I'm having one of those days. My go to when my kids were little and I couldn't stand them anymore is we would go to a playground because it made them so happy. And usually there was someone else there that they could interact with, just like a random kid who was about their age. And I could just kind of like sit back and kind of watch what was going on. But they were happy because I took them. Find a new playground you've never been to. I don't know. And then we would kind of all come home, just more reset.

[00:06:33.660] - Lisa Qualls

Okay, I just have to say that's so funny because the very thought of when I'm feeling irritable and I don't have much capacity, the very thought of loading up my kids to go somewhere... No, that would not, that would just sound like too dang much, especially when they were younger. That would sound hard to me. But look, that is a great example of how we have to find what works for us. You, my friend, are on enneagram seven. So going and doing and adventure. And where I'm like, I need to calm it down. When I feel like this, I need to calm it down. The best I could probably do is maybe go out for a walk, loading up and going where there are other people and stuff. Although I could totally see my kids loving it. It might be what my kids need, but I don't know if I could make myself do it.

[00:07:19.070] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I think playgrounds are like a total coping mechanism. That was totally my coping mechanism when I was a young girl.

[00:07:25.110] - Lisa Qualls

That's so amazing. Mine would probably be putting my kids in their car seats and driving around and hoping they'll fall asleep.

[00:07:31.900] - Melissa Corkum

Okay, I have a funny story about that. Did I ever tell you? Okay, so you know, I can sleep anywhere and I'm also a sleepy driver.

[00:07:44.830] - Sara Odicio

Hey, this is Sara. I'm briefly interrupting this episode to make sure you know about an upcoming

support group for adopted teens that I'm facilitating. As an adoptee, I'm passionate about supporting adopted teens because I wish I had had a group like this when I was younger. During this eight-week session, teens will explore the seven core issues of adoption, learn better ways to respond to others adoption related questions (even the more insensitive ones), have an opportunity to process their personal adoption journey, and hear from one another in a supportive and collaborative way. For more information or to sign your teen up, head to the [adoptionconnection.com/teen](http://adoptionconnection.com/teen). Now back to the episode.

[00:08:29.090] - Melissa Corkum

Okay, so you know, I can sleep anywhere and I'm also a sleepy driver. I would usually hit my wall around 3:00 p.m., and that was right around like, preschool or after school pick up time. Before we started homeschooling, our kids were at a small private school and it was only like 15 minutes from the school to my house, which is pretty impressive because I live pretty much in the middle of nowhere. I would get real sleepy on the way home from pickup. And so I would pull over onto this little tiny side street about halfway between the school and our house and I would tell the kids, mom needs to take a little bit of a nap. And they were buckled in and I could trust that they would stay buckled in. And I would be like, don't move. And I would put on a story or some kind of music that I knew that they would enjoy listening to, and I would pull over and take a nap because that was the only time I knew I could nap that they weren't going to like, die. And I used to tell my friends, if you ever see me pulled over on the side of the road sleeping, like I'm not dead or having a heart attack, it's just part of our regular routine. It's how I get through the day.

[00:09:28.440] - Lisa Qualls

That's really funny. Now, was this before you adopted your kids or after? You had your youngest?

[00:09:36.490] - Melissa Corkum

We probably had Ty. I definitely did it before Ty. Yeah. And Ty came home at two and a half and he never stopped moving. I mean, I used to have to put a backpack leash on that kid just to get him from our van to our front door. I'm pretty sure I did it after he came home because we were still at that little school and so it was not unusual for me to be driving home from some adventure. And at like around 03:00, if we were still on the road, I would get real sleepy and I'd be like, guys, it's mom's nap time. And I would take like a ten minute nap in the car.

[00:10:06.020] - Lisa Qualls

Okay, well, no, I've never heard that story before. I think it's really, really funny and I just think it all goes to show we have to figure out what we need in order to give our bodies what we need, and our minds what we need to fill ourselves enough that we have the capacity to be regulated with our kids, because it makes all the difference. We talk so much about felt safety, and in order for our kids to feel truly, deeply safe with us, we have to be calm, we have to be regulated. So Tiffany, I hope that helps just a little bit. I know there are a lot of different ideas here, but really just be curious about yourself and what you can do for yourself to give you the capacity, because you're doing really hard work. And I know we'll see this at the end, but you're a good mom doing good work, and so take some time for yourself and spend a lot of time thinking about it.

[00:11:03.900] - Lisa Qualls

Okay, I'm going to read our next question, which comes from Wendy. How do I handle my child withholding hugs from me, when they hug everybody else? They say they love me and get along with me, and everything else seems normal.

[00:11:17.190] - Melissa Corkum

A couple of years ago, this would have just eaten me up inside. And so I think the good news is that we can do work as parents to get to the point where we can kind of separate a little bit the experience from taking it too personally to trying to understand and stay curious about the behavior. But just, I guess, first of all, hugs, because it's just tricky. It's all just tricky.

[00:11:48.250] - Lisa Qualls

And the physical touch is tricky.

[00:11:50.750] - Melissa Corkum

It's just hard. I think so often we talk about, what is ours to do or what do we actually have control over and what don't we have control over? I think it might be easy to want to handle this by asking the question, like, how do I make my kid hug me, too? And really, we don't have control over that. And probably trying to get physical affection out of our kids might not be the best way to handle this. But what we do have control over is our experience and what we do with how we experience it. And so I think it gives us an opportunity. I think so much of our kids behaviors just shine spotlights on places that we could continue to do our own work, as awful as that is, right? Yeah.

[00:12:40.490] - Lisa Qualls

It's so true.

[00:12:43.550] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. So if ever you're wondering, what else could I be doing to be a better person, just think about the behavior that irritates you the most about and think, what about that behavior? Like, what is that shedding a spotlight on? And what can I do about that? And there's coaches, there's therapists, there's friends, there's all types of ways to kind of stay curious, ask other people's opinions, look for patterns. But I think this does give us an opportunity after we kind of lick our wounds and had our little pity party, too, to say, what is really hard about this and what can I learn from it?

[00:13:22.120] - Lisa Qualls

Well, and I think you talked about this a little bit. We have to ask ourselves, what is it about this that's bothering me so much? And it actually could go to some kind of deep wounding from early childhood or from a past relationship, that somebody withheld affection from you or you felt rejected. I mean, sometimes these things take us way back and if we can think about it, and then just really be kind to ourselves about it and just be able to say to myself, like, if it's me and I was experiencing this exact same thing, I think I would just acknowledge, gosh, this is really hurtful to me. I would not say this to my child, but I would acknowledge it within myself. This is really hurtful to me, but I'm going to be okay. It's going to be okay. And if I were a single mom and what I needed was physical touch and go get a massage, do what you need to do to meet your need for touch. But the minute we give it power, we're in a bad place. Because if we make it about, oh, gosh, how do I want to say this? If we make the hugs the big deal, then some of our kids, and not because they are bad kids in any way, but because of their woundedness, they will then see it as a tool that they can use to meet their needs in a maladaptive way, right? Really, we want to give it zero power. And so I definitely would not ask your child for hugs if this is the situation you're in. I would not initiate hugs that then they can push away, especially because we're talking physical touch. I would be very respectful of their desire not to be touched. Because obviously we don't want to teach our children that they have to give physical affection when they're not comfortable. They don't want to. I mean, that's definitely not what we want to teach our kids, because we don't want them to grow up thinking they have to accept physical touch that makes them uncomfortable and just allow it anyhow. We do not want our children to feel that or believe that. So I would strip away all the power from it. I would accept it, and just let it be okay. Find how you can make it okay for yourself.

[00:15:34.190] - Melissa Corkum

It's so easy to decide that it's about us and to be hurt by it, right? As a person who loves logic, I find that I am able to do this. And I know that this is easier said than done for many, many people. But just setting that aside for a minute, I think the what if question, what if this isn't personal? What else could it be? Exercising our skill of cognitive flexibility and think, well, maybe it's a sensory thing. Maybe they really don't love hugs, but they're feeling obligated in public. So they feel obligated to, they don't feel like they can stand up and look at a stranger and say, don't hug me, right? But they can say it to you, which also means that they feel that kind of safety and comfort with you, which might be its own consolation, maybe not. We also know that relationships with primary caregivers are trickier and scarier for our kids. And so it could be that they see a hug to us as a commitment to closeness or intimacy that they don't want to commit to, but they're able to hug mostly stranger at church and know that that's not coming with any strings attached.

[00:16:55.340] - Lisa Qualls

Okay, that's a really, really good point. Very smart of you, Melissa. I like that because you're right, it means a whole lot more with a child who doesn't have secure attachment toward us to hug, than it does to just meet a casual expectation of a friend or something like that.

[00:17:12.330] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, not all hugs are created equal, right. The hug they're giving to the person in church is not the hug that they're potentially withholding from you at home.

[00:17:21.620] - Lisa Qualls

And I will say I have actually this exact situation in my family with a child who has significant sensory challenges. Does not want hugs. Which makes me honestly sad. But I have to deal with my own sadness about that because it's not my kid's problem that I'm sad about that. But will accept them in casual ways and I remember feeling really bad about that. Like wow, this kid will let their adult sibling hug but not me. But I've just had to accept it. I think there's more desire to accept affection from other people, because this kid can tolerate it to a degree but doesn't have to at home with me. Just be a little more honest at home with me, like, no, don't hug me.

[00:18:12.410] - Lisa Qualls

All right, I'm going to read the last one. This is a long one, but it's really good. My adopted daughter is 13. She is a runner, not for exercise, but to get away from us because we are such bad parents.

[00:18:23.930] - Melissa Corkum

Caveat, like not an athlete, but like a clear right?

[00:18:31.780] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah. Okay. How do you know when to call the police? Now she's going to give us an example, but that's the core question right there. Yesterday she was berating me for picking her up from a friend's house early. I tried calling and texting her but she never replied and they were having fun. So I pulled the car over and said, please stop yelling at me. I was afraid she was going to run, so I called my husband and asked him to come pick her up because I didn't like how she was treating me. Lots of other details in here, but I'm tired of being the verbal punching bag. Dad was a few blocks away, but she got out of the car and started walking in a direction I couldn't drive with my van. In the past we've used her phone to find her, but she must have turned it off because we couldn't find her. I finally got a text back from her after half an hour. So the question is, how do you know when to call the police and report a runaway? And by the way, this is maybe the 6th or 8th time she has gone off without telling us where she's going. Other times, she has packed a backpack with stuff, intending not to come home.

[00:19:28.580] - Melissa Corkum

So we've got a personal experience with this. I think knowing that your daughter's 13 is helpful because I think our answer might be different if your child was six or seven and running away or running down the highway.

[00:19:40.490] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, 100%.

[00:19:44.590] - Melissa Corkum

I think the blanket simple answer is every jurisdiction is going to have different guidelines. Every community is different. You could be in an urban big city, you could be in a small town. And I think the answer changes depending on some of the circumstances. And so I think the best universal answer is, especially if this is a repeated pattern, like she mentioned six or seven, eight times, not like the first time it's happened is, I would call your local police jurisdiction precinct and just explain that you have a child, a teenager, who tends to use running away as a coping mechanism. And you'd want just like to introduce yourself, because you have a feeling you might be getting to know them more. And ask them, at what point should we call? How long should we wait? Are there any other caveats to that? Because I think it's just a little different in every situation. We know from personal experience in our

family that for older teens, in terms of, like, a true missing person's report, a lot of times that can't be actually filed until the child's been missing for 24 hours. But we also in our area have had situations where the police have been willing to move to action sooner than 24 hours.

[00:21:18.510] - Melissa Corkum

You know, we had a situation where one of our kids, we were pretty sure they went to the state park about a mile from our house, and we're in the woods, and I don't remember exactly how long we waited. I'm pretty sure we waited hours before we called the police.

[00:21:32.220] - Lisa Qualls

Your child was how old?

[00:21:34.030] - Melissa Corkum

A teenager, older than 13. Teenager and kind of had a history of a lot of dysregulation, but they mobilized a canine team and a helicopter.

[00:21:45.130] - Lisa Qualls

Which can't even believe that.

[00:21:46.660] - Melissa Corkum

No. Crazy, right? And they found her. But we've had other situations where we've really waited it out until it was dark. A couple of our kids are pretty terrified of the dark, and so we thought, well, if they don't come home by dark, then we'll know we need to call the police. Yeah. And the police have been, thankfully, kind and supportive. But as I'm sitting here rehearsing this, I actually am kind of embarrassed at how many stories I have to add to this question.

[00:22:18.030] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, no, I get it. I live in a smallish community where a lot of people know each other because we have one high school, one middle school, things like that. And a friend of mine, her kid took off. She wasn't sure what to do. She didn't know at first that he was gone, and she wasn't sure what to do. She had a friend who knew a police officer who knew the kids in our town because they all went to school together and stuff. And so she was able to reach him through her friend and just say, I don't think this is an emergency, but my kid took off and I don't know where he is. And it's 2:00 in the morning and I'm a little worried. So just sort of unofficially, he let the patrol officers, the officers who were on duty know, so they could just kind of keep an eye out. And you know what? That officer brought her kid home, or not that one, but one of them did. And so I think it does like you're saying, it depends a lot on where you live, how big the city is, if you're in a town like mine. I wanted to comment too, and this is not really what she was saying, but I do want to share one other thing. We had a child. We talked about Fight Flight Freeze and I know there's fawn and all that. But just talking about the basics, kids who are fleers kids when they get just regulated and they take off running, or maybe they don't run, but they take off. I had a child like that who was actually a fighter, until the dysregulation got so big and then became a runner. And I learned really quickly never to chase a dysregulated child because it can be really dangerous. Like, I know we're afraid they're going to run out into traffic or something, but I think it's more likely to happen if they feel like they're being chased. And I know everything in us wants to go after them unless there's a really specific reason, like if they're little and you can pick them up or whatever. But when we're talking about little older kids, if there's not a reason to immediately grab them, I would give them a little distance, and not try to catch them because you may create an even more dangerous situation. Because if they're already stressed to the point that they're running, if you go after them, they're going to go through the roof and it could get really dangerous. I know that wasn't really the question, but as to where my brain went.

[00:24:37.770] - Melissa Corkum

All the running away advice, the other thing I'll say is if you do call the police, they're going to ask, where have you looked? Have you called any of their friends? Where do you think they might have gone? Right? And so I would also say with a 13 year old, I would probably wait longer than a couple of minutes or half an hour. Like I would probably wait in terms of hours, not minutes, before checking in with the police. I would perhaps do a wide loop around the block and just see if you can get eyes and

just maybe not chase, but just kind of like watch from a distance, see if you can just kind of keep an eye on which direction. And that would be one way. Check in with. In this case, the friend that you would just picked her up from because she was obviously having fun there. And maybe she's not there, but just check in with a friend. Say, hey, if she shows up could you let us know, those types of things, because the police are going to probably have you do all of those things first before they move to an action state.

[00:25:42.630] - Melissa Corkum

The other thing in terms of pre planned running away, I might have shared this before on the podcast, but one of the things that worked fairly well for us more than once, we had a daughter that often told us that she was leaving. She would pack her stuff. And I think whenever we try to move against our kids, we're kind of creating escalation. And so oftentimes I'll talk to parents without leaning into behaviors. And so we would kind of lean into this, and kind of talk to her. Instead of saying, you can't run away or you're not old enough, we just say, oh, you're running away. That's a bummer. What kind of things do you think you would have to pack? We would kind of ask her questions that almost made her feel like we were on her team, but also required her to use her thinking brain. And the one that we would kind of inevitably land on was, well, you know, you're going to need money if you run away. I wonder how much you have. Can I help you count what's in your wallet or your bank or whatever? And because this need to run away is often this lower brain survival thing, which can't coexist with upstairs sinking brain stuff, right? This act of executive functioning to pack and count money and make a plan to run away, often by the time it was time to execute said plan or go spend said money to run away, by the time we finished counting the money. And I would say, okay, so what's the next thing? It would kind of be like, well, I don't know if I really want to. Maybe not tonight. Or maybe there would be de-escalation and then we could kind of really get to the root of what was going on.

[00:27:30.250] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, that's a good point. Pull them up into their prefrontal cortex. Also because that's not the way my brain would go. What I would probably do is say, hey, I really don't want you to run away. I love you very much and it's my job to keep you safe, but obviously I can't keep you. I'm not going to tie you to a chair. But I'd really like to give you something to eat and just let you kind of have a little space. I'll fix some food for you, or something like that. And why don't you eat something and see how you feel? And I would probably go more to nurture because that's just my nature. That's how I am. I think the trick with what you're talking about, Melissa, I know you, so I know how you do it. The trick for a lot of parents is to not become dismissive like, oh, you want to run away? Well, hope you have enough money. Let's see, you could go very dismissive and that's going to be wounding. But what you're talking about is just pulling them up into their thinking brain. And I totally see the value in that.

[00:28:35.650] - Lisa Qualls

There are a lot of things and you know your kids, you know your daughter and you know yourself. It sounds like you handled it great. I think overall, the question that you ask is when do we call the police? And going back to the very beginning, I think Melissa's thought on that is contact your local police, talk to them. If your child is in public school and they're in middle school or high school, there may be a community officer who is associated with the school that you could talk to and just say, okay, so obviously this happens for a lot of parents. What do you recommend? And see what they have to say. Anyhow, these were go ahead. Were you going to say more, Melissa?

[00:29:13.250] - Melissa Corkum

Well, I was going to say another thing that's helpful if this is a pattern is maybe plan like a runaway spot for a kid. Oh, yeah, give them a chance to run away to somewhere safe that you've pre planned that still gives them the distance that they need. It could be their bedroom. It could be a common area in your neighborhood. It could be, and I think if it's like the bedroom, if you need to run away, "run away" to your bedroom, just let me know that that's what you're doing and that you need to do that. And we promise not to bug you until you're ready to come out. Right. Like, our kids are not going to starve or wither away to nothing, even if they go in for 48 hours. Trust me, we've had kids do it and they're fine. It'll be okay. I think the other thing is, especially for older teens who kind of stay out past curfew or go away with a friend and decide not to come home for a day or two is maybe an agreement of, we know sometimes you need some space. And so the deal is you need to respond to

a text message that's just a check in. I need to know you're alive. It could be even a game. Like you text Marco, they text Polo back. It does not have to be like, are you okay? Where are you? It's just let me know you're alive text. And as long as they respond back to those within 3 hours or something like that, then you're good. Or otherwise you're going to need to call the police because you're concerned for their safety. Okay.

[00:30:46.310] - Lisa Qualls

3 hours would kill me. I was listening to you and thinking you're going to say 1 hour. But yeah, I like that idea. And I think also communicating to them, if at any point you want my help, I will be there. I will come pick you up no matter where you are, and I will bring you home, and I won't even ask you a question. You can decide later. Are we going to ask questions later when we're calm, like the next day? But what we want to do is we want our kids to know that home and parents, that we are a safe haven, they can always come home. We had a whole lot to say about that, but I hope that there are some helpful thoughts in there. Every family is different. Every kid is different. Take what we have offered and put it all in a bowl. Blow across the top and blow out all the chaff and keep what works for you and hopefully there'll be something there for you.

[00:31:38.920] - Melissa Corkum

Yes. So if you would like us to answer your question on a future mailbag episode, we often pull questions from our Facebook group. We would love for you to join it. It's free. You can head over to the [Adoptionconnection.com/Facebook](https://www.adoptionconnection.com/Facebook) to join.

[00:31:53.770] - Melissa Corkum

Before you go we'd love to connect with you on social media. Our new Instagram handle is @ [postadoptionresources](https://www.postadoptionresources.com). Or better yet, join our free Facebook community at [theadoptionconnection.com/facebook](https://www.theadoptionconnection.com/facebook).

[00:32:08.770] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:32:17.050] - Melissa Corkum

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