

[00:00:00.170] - Lisa Qualls

Welcome to this month's Mailbag episode where we answer your questions. Our first question today is, I feel pretty confused about consequences and connected parenting. When do you give consequences in your home? I've typically not given a lot of consequences when my kids are operating in fight or flight, but I'm starting to think that maybe I should. I would love to hear if and when you give consequences in your home, and if you don't, what does it look like? How do you handle inappropriate behavior, disrespect, et cetera?

[00:00:31.210] - Melissa Corkum

I love this question. I answer this question for parents all the time in our coaching programs. It makes sense in my head, so hopefully I'll be able to say it here on the podcast in a way that makes sense. I think the first thing I would say is we have to play a little bit with the semantics because a lot of times people are using consequences and punishments interchangeably. We want to be clear that for our discussion, consequences aren't necessarily punishments. And really, I think to that end, the connected parenting model doesn't support using punishment as a way to convince our kids to change their behavior. That being said, I think connected parenting often gets a bad rap as being too permissive, that we are letting our kids get away with things because we don't use punishments as a way to correct behavior. One of my most favorite quotes from Dr. Purvis talks about this balance of structure and nurture, which I think is actually going to be a theme for today's episode. All the questions seem to be running along this theme of how do we balance structure and nurture? But she would say that if we give our kids nurture when they need structure, right? So we're too connected, not too connected, that's probably not a thing, but we're too kind, too understanding for the behavior, then we inhibit their ability to grow. But if we give structure when they really need nurture, so if we're maybe punitive when really they need us to understand what's going on in their nervous system, then we inhibit their ability to trust. And so there's this fine line of having both a structure response and a nurture response. And I would claim that you can actually find a solution to every situation that is both high structure and high nurture, that we don't have to sacrifice one for the other.

[00:02:54.150] - Lisa Qualls

I think you make a really good point, Melissa, that really so often many of us were raised in a traditional parenting model that was punitive in nature. Like, you do this and this is the punishment you get. And we have to sort of wrap our minds around the fact that what we're working toward is secure attachment for our children, and that our children are coming to us from a place of, I don't know, sort of deficit that they did not have secure attachment. And so we're not starting on a level playing field with children who've been born to their parents and have been with them always, it's different. And so we have to remember that when we are trying to move our children into more positive behavior, we want to keep that relationship at the center. So that means, like, we've talked about it, I know it's kind of basic, but we don't send our kids away for time out. We bring them close because we want them to know that we are trustworthy. And if they can't manage their behavior on their own, we're going to bring them closer so that we can help them manage their behavior.

[00:04:05.400] - Lisa Qualls

So it's really a very different way of thinking about consequences for behavior. I think I tell the story and *The Connected Parent* about our daughter one time was being very unkind to her siblings and trying to control them and kind of bullying behavior. And so for a whole day, she had to stay by my side. And when I was in the kitchen working, she had to keep her finger hooked through the belt loop of my jeans and just stay by me. And it actually, in a way, it met a deep need of her heart. I mean, let's be honest, mom's attention is pretty good. But it also, I think, reminded her that I'm actually here for her, but I'm also not going to let her hurt her siblings. So it's just really a different way of thinking about it. It was a consequence, in a sense, of her behavior that she had to stay close, but it was also a meeting of her need that she was not able to manage on her own.

[00:05:04.050] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, and I think the important part about that is the action isn't as important as how we deliver, how we talk about the consequence in this case, right? So if you had said to your daughter, well, if you're going to treat your sister that way, then I guess you can't be trusted to be left alone. And so you better get over here. And I don't want you to move one inch away from my body. You need to be with me

where you can touch me at all times, right? And I know how to do that response really well. Maybe if you noticed, but I think

[00:05:41.450] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, it just sort of rolled off your tongue there, Melissa.

[00:05:46.350] - Melissa Corkum

But if I put my parent coach hat on, and I say to the parent, like, that's high structure, that is really high structure to require your child to be within arms reach of you at all times. And so if we're going to raise the structure that high, we have to raise the nurture. And so we might say something more like, man, I can tell you're having a really hard time controlling your big emotions around your sister, and it is not okay for you to treat her that way. Your behavior is telling me you need someone to help you make better decisions. And so I have a lot of things I need to do today, but I also have some really fun things that I would like to do with you. And so we're just going to stay close all day for the rest of the day today, you and me, we're going to be buddies. And I am here to help you keep your body regulated so that you don't feel like you need to treat your sister that way.

[00:06:45.730] - Lisa Qualls

Well, the truth is, when you keep a child, I mean, we call it keeping a child in hand. When you keep them that close, they're bound to be really humorous moments, like cooking in the kitchen together. Like, basically, she got an entire day by my side, which just doesn't happen very often in a big family. So I think it was very powerful and it felt like a very connected response because it was about the relationship. I was not saying she was bad. I was saying, hey, I think you need a little support and help here.

[00:07:18.740] - Melissa Corkum

And let's be clear that there are some people listening to us talk about that, who are, like, cringing inside about having to be that close with their child, who rubs them the wrong way, and who isn't maybe super fun to be around, and where the child may not be like, oh, sure, mom. I'm so excited to spend the whole day with you.

[00:07:43.410] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, that wasn't the response I got.

[00:07:46.310] - Melissa Corkum

Where you might get, I hate you. I don't want to spend all day with you. You can't make... Whatever that whole situation is. And so I think that's where there's a part on our side of the fence and we talk a lot about this, and we talk about overcoming block care and reclaiming compassion for ourselves that we have to, one, have started to or dealt with why our kids know how to push our buttons. What are we bringing to the table that makes when they say, I hate you the worst mother, all of that. And we know that they're saying it out of anger, and yet somehow, sometimes it still pierces our soul. Like, do we have unresolved doubts of whether we are worthy to be mother? I mean, there's so many things. There could be so many things. Our nervous system has to be in really good shape to be able to regulate ourselves in a moment like that and offer our regulation to our child in a way that is pro-relationship and not angry and hurt and frustrated and sarcastic, and all of those other things. So we just want to recognize that it's easy for us to say it and to tell the story, and we recognize that it's an entirely different thing to do it. And yet it's still so important because when we can do those really hard things in parenting, that's when the tide starts to turn for our relationships with our kids.

[00:09:15.730] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, I have an example of that where I had a therapist tell me I needed to spend maybe 20 or 30 minutes, I don't remember, a day rocking one of my children. And when it was imposed upon me by the therapist, I mean, it's a great idea, but my nervous system was pretty fried, and it felt extremely difficult. Because it was so difficult for me, my daughter could sense it, you know, like her nervous system could sense my nervous system. And I don't think I really had the wherewithal to do it at that time. I needed my nervous system to be more in a healthier space. All due respect for all the beautiful, wonderful professionals out there, but this is where we have to remember that as professionals, and

even for us now, as we coach parents, we have to remember that it's really easy to know the right thing to do. And yet we are not living in someone else's home, in someone else's life, in their body. And so, parents, we know that you are doing the best you can. You have to kind of take good care in order to do this kind of parenting. And Dr. Purvis called it investment parenting because it is a serious investment of pretty much every resource in your life, from time to energy to money to everything, your health, all of it. So I think that's something to remember, though, is as we're thinking about dealing with our kids challenging behavior, if we're coming to it from a place of our own incredible fatigue, our own dysregulation of our nervous system, we probably are going to need some help from people either outside of our family. It could be your parenting partner, your spouse. It could be someone else. It could be that you're going to need some help in order to do this kind of parenting. In fact, most certainly you will. This is beyond what regular parenting requires of us. So you're going to need a therapist. You're going to need a good friend. You're going to need respite. You're going to need a lot of help.

[00:11:23.950] - Lisa Qualls

Here's a similar question that we got this week as well. What do we do when the simple act of setting a boundary is a guarantee of conflict and disrespect? Oh, I can see so many parents saying yes, what do we do?

[00:11:37.260] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. And we need to set boundaries, right? We are the parents. We are not advocating that the act of understanding the impact of trauma and early adversity on our kids nervous system excuses their behavior or allows it. Again, I'm always thinking about high structure, high nurture, and so I think the really short answer is it's okay to keep the boundary, even if our kids have really big feelings about it. And the high nurture piece is validating that it might be really hard. Whereas high structure high structure, which is where I tend to land, we tend to be like, you know, this is the boundary. I don't know why we're having this discussion again and again and again or why you can't seem to get on board with it. I think we have two main paths that we take parents down to reclaim compassion for themselves, which we just covered a lot on how hard this journey can be on our own nervous systems, but also to reclaim compassion for our kids. And so I think it's easy when our nervous system is already on edge and then it's like death by a thousand cuts. Like we've had this boundary that it's the same every day and our kids constantly fight us on it, that it's easy to tell us ourselves the story that they're just trying to be a pain. Or why do we have to have the same conversation again and again and again? And so I think the other piece of that, the reclaimed compassion for your child, is really understanding how challenging boundaries are for a nervous system that has come from early adversity. Every time I read a new book about this, I'm just finishing up a book by Dan Hughes about the, like, neurobiology of attachment focused therapy or something like that, right? And I'm reading through and it's stuff that I know, even just the science of how our kids nervous systems are shaped by their early experiences gives me renewed compassion for these behaviors that it's tempting to call annoying, obnoxious, defiant.

[00:14:01.280] - Lisa Qualls

Defiant. Right.

[00:14:02.510] - Melissa Corkum

All those things.

[00:14:03.790] - Lisa Qualls

Well, and I think the high nurture part of that is that when we give the boundary, and we know it's really hard for them, is to have empathy and say, yeah, I know this is really hard. It's hard for you to have to take your bath after dinner. And I know that you really don't want to, but hey, why don't we get these toys? We're going to put them in the tub. Whatever it is, try to have empathy for their response. Because what we really want is for them to stop complaining, right, and just do it. Because every night you have your bath after dinner, whatever it is. But our kids need our empathy, because, again, it's about the relationship. It's about connection. But that doesn't mean we say, oh, you're really unhappy. Okay, you don't have to take a bath. No, you're really unhappy. I know it's hard and let me help you take that bath.

[00:14:51.810] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I think the other piece, especially for older kids, but I think really for kids of all ages, is sometimes because it's uncomfortable for us to manage that reaction again and again and again, we may overcompensate and maybe escalate the situation either by being overly empathetic or overly dismissive. So there's like this fine line where you can empathize and say, I know it's really hard, and then maybe back off for a little bit or do something connecting or distracting. Like if we're trying to convince our kid that we empathize but still push them towards the thing, especially if it's an action we need them to take, then they're likely to dig their heels in deeper and deeper. I know when we were dealing with this with one of our kids, and it was like more of like a teenager perpetual, like, asking for the same thing over and over, like, can I have this? Can I have this? Can I have this? Can I have this? Can I have this? Our therapist would say simple answers. At that point, they're trying to engage you. Their nervous system is looking for a dopamine hit, a fight, an argument, right? And so you want to do the best that you can to acknowledge, but with adding the least amount of fuel to the fire.

[00:16:25.550] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah, well, Dr. Purvis talked about that using as few words as possible. Because also, when your child is activated like that, again, their brain isn't processing auditory input very well. So really few words, just and I think as much as possible, maintaining our calm. One of the things as parents, especially if we're dealing with kids who are really volatile, our nervous systems get really pretty activated and we really don't want them to blow up, right? I know, honestly, and myself, there have been many times where I would rather not hold my child to the boundary because I don't know if I have it in me to deal with their big, big emotions. And so, again, this is about taking good care of ourselves so that we can tolerate our children's displeasure. And we're all wired differently. Like Melissa, you're more naturally high structure. I'm more naturally high nurture. I'm a deep, deep feeler. You're a deep, deep thinker. So we're different. But it is hard for me to handle my children's anger and their unhappiness. And I have to work really hard to keep myself regulated in order to have the capacity to deal with their displeasure. Because with my original crew of kids, their unhappiness was within a relatively normal range. The displeasure that my kids, who came from a lot of adversity, some of them, it was very big. We talk about these big, big rages. You got to be able - we, I - have to be able to tolerate it in order to hold that boundary. And so that is the work I have to do on my side of the fence. It's not about my kid. It's about me.

[00:18:23.590] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. I think the other thing, just to add here, every time I share this, someone has a light bulb movement. So our kids need us to, even though they're not going to say it explicitly, need us to be in-charge, like a calming, kind in-charge. And I think sometimes when their really big behaviors cause us to go, oh, maybe I should over compromise or raise the nurture too high without that structure, then we are non-verbally communicating that we aren't strong enough and big enough to handle their big feelings. And then all of a sudden in this narrative, their big feelings, which it seems like they're in control of them, but most of the time they're not. Their out of control feelings now are driving the ship. And even though we may be giving them what it sounds like they're asking for, that is signaling to them, your big feelings are what are really in control here. And we know that their big feelings feel a little bit out of control. And so that whole situation can actually help them cause them to feel even more unsafe and more out of control, than if you kind of can hold this container, of I know this is really hard, and you can rage, you can kick walls, but we have a safety plan. And I'm holding to this thing that I thought about ahead of time and feel strongly about. And again, we don't want to create unnecessarily control battles and so we have to be really sure before we set a boundary. So we should have said that first, right?

[00:20:14.920] - Lisa Qualls

Yeah. Be smart. Don't set ridiculous things like choose the important things, right?

[00:20:20.710] - Melissa Corkum

But once you set it, you really want to communicate to your child, I'm strong enough, stable enough, I'm the anchor in your storm or the lighthouse in your storm, or whatever metaphor works for you, to hold space for whatever your reaction is. And I'm here to co-regulate you and we'll get out of this

together.

[00:20:44.130] - Lisa Qualls

One thing we talk about in our book, *Reclaim Compassion* is choosing a scripture or a quote that is very calming to you, that helps you remember your sure foundation of Christ. And sometimes when you might be inclined to want to avoid the conflict because you're not sure you can face the storm that is going to hit, it might help to have that anchored really firmly in your mind so that you can speak it to yourself just in your mind. When I think of it like my kid, it's going to become like this huge tumultuous storm, just remember that when the disciples were in the boat and the huge storm came, Jesus said to them, peace, be still. So maybe you want to repeat to yourself and just picture in your mind, peace, be still. Or maybe saying something simple like I am deeply loved or I'm a good parent doing good work. Whatever it is that reminds you of who you are, and is calming to you. Really work on getting that anchor deeply in yourself so that it can be a calming phrase to remind you. Because when you are stressed and dysregulated, you're probably not going to remember really long complex Bible verses that you've memorized. So keep it really simple. Have something that you can call to mind some truth that is going to help you. Do you have one, Melissa, that you turn to when things are rough?

[00:22:20.490] - Melissa Corkum

I was just thinking, like, even things that we can say to our kids, like, you are deeply loved, or even I think sometimes we need to just remind ourselves, this too shall pass, or we're going to be okay. Or we are going to be okay. Saying it out loud so you can hear your kid, can hear you say, like, we're okay. We're going to be okay.

[00:22:41.880] - Lisa Qualls

I've got you. We're going to be all right.

[00:22:44.050] - Melissa Corkum

Our next question is our four year old daughter has been with us for nine months. So far, I haven't been able to leave her anywhere other than with my husband, which she doesn't even like. If I step out of the room, she goes into full meltdown if I don't return within a minute or two. We would like to get away as a couple for a weekend in August. How can I start facilitating a healthier attachment?

[00:23:05.440] - Lisa Qualls

Well, this is a really great question. I think I want to begin I want to say two important things. One, nine months is a very short time in terms of building attachment. I know it probably doesn't feel like a short time, but in some ways you're still very early in the process of building secure attachment with a child who came to you at four. So not knowing anything of her story, I think we can assume that there has been there have been attachment wounds. Whatever happened in those four years, there's a lot of work that has to be done to truly build secure attachment, and it's going to take a lot of time. The other thing that is equally true is that your marriage matters and your well being matters. And so it's like we have to find this balance of meeting her need for continual growth in attachment, building healthy attachment with you, and you don't want to do anything really to jeopardize that. And at the same time, you have got to maintain your marriage because it's also so deeply important. So I think in the full question okay, you said you want to go away in August. Well, we know it's February. Yes, it's about February now. So you've got some months to work toward this goal, and you probably have to start at the very lowest level possible, which is to practice with her, leaving her with your husband first. Let's start really small, and maybe you're going to start with really short amounts of time, and you're going to extend those times so that she can begin to tolerate being out of your presence and with another safe, trusting, loving parent. So you have to start there. And then over these next however many months you have, you want to continue to work toward this in a gentle, kind of systematic way, helping her to build up her tolerance of being away from you. Honestly, it could be that a weekend is going to be more than she can handle even by next August. It may need to be shorter than that because you definitely don't want to push her so far outside of her tolerance and have her increase her anxiety so high that you actually have to start back further than where you left her in terms of her attachment growth. So I think you've got some time to plan this carefully and think through what it's going to require in order for you to leave her, even just overnight.

[00:25:46.070] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I mean, I think about all things and structure and nurture. And so I think the nurture, right, is you being available to comfort her, and the structure is creating enough space for you to get respite for yourself and then also for your marriage. Even small things like going to shower when your husband gets home from work, even if she has really big feelings, screams the whole time, you know, that she's safe. She might not feel safe by that, but that's a small amount of time for the nervous system to be in distress. But in a situation where all the other things are as safe as they can be, right, in a familiar place in her home with a familiar person, her dad, where maybe you even go out to the grocery store, or you just run up the street for a Starbucks and come back. And so start small, 5-10 minutes, maybe you go on a walk by yourself or you walk around the house and you come back. Right? And what we're doing is creating neuropathways and experiences where she's realizing mom can leave and can come back. And then you're going to grow and stretch that, right? Then maybe you can go out for a whole evening for a mom's night out. Or I would encourage you sometime this summer before August, maybe go away for an overnight so that even the bedtime routine is done by somebody different. We know that in order to help our kids grow, sometimes they need to be stretched. And sometimes creating so much rigidity in their routine and schedule actually creates more fragility, right. Because we need to learn how to be a little bit flexible. I even remember someone talking about rotating where everyone sits at the dinner table. Right. Our kids need stability and routine, but if we make sure that they always have the same fork in the same plate and they sit in the same place or they eat the same food, then what we create is a lot of inflexibility. And so we want to build flexibility into her nervous system in small ways. Maybe you drive a different way to school or to church or to the park, or you even switch which way her pillow is on her bed, like, sleep at the head of the foot, like if she's in a bed that doesn't really matter, and then build up to you and your husband leaving her with someone safe.

[00:28:19.560] - Melissa Corkum

I think we talked about this on another episode at some point. But what we did with our kids is we brought people in to do life with us, and build friendship where our kids were being exposed to other people in close. Like, we would have people over for dinner, the same people over for dinner every week, and we didn't leave. But these people played games with our kids, interacted with them. Our kids began to experience them as safe and familiar people. And so those are the people when we started leaving them, that's who we left. It wasn't like, oh, here's this babysitter that you've never met before, and we're leaving you, right? We have to do all the steps and these micro changes. So maybe you start hanging out with the family or the grandparent or the neighbor or whoever it is, start having them into your house, just be around. And then one day they're around and you run out to get your Starbucks and come back, right? You just have to do it in these, like, small, incremental steps. But it's totally possible.

[00:29:21.300] - Lisa Qualls

For some kids I think it helps to have sort of a parting ritual or symbol of connection. Like, maybe you draw a little heart with a marker on her hand, maybe on the back of her hand so she can see it and say, okay, here's a heart on your hand. I'm going to draw a heart on my hand because even when we're not together, your mommy loves you. And it's not a bad idea, too, to create sort of a coming together little ritual. Maybe you do a kiss on both cheeks, or maybe you do, high five and a hug. Whatever it is. I think kids, they like the predictability. Of course, now, Melissa was just saying we don't want to let them be too rigid. But I think giving kids a reminder that they can see and then sort of a happy coming together ritual can be really helpful for them.

[00:30:10.290] - Melissa Corkum

Our last question is from Leah.

[00:30:12.670] - Leah

Hi, I need advice about my teenage son who has been sneaking behind our backs to see his birth parents. They happen to live within a mile of our home. When we tried to have a relationship where we could get together under supervision at times, they violated a lot of our trust by sneaking behind our backs in some different ways. And so we're on a break from contact with them, but now our son is sneaking behind our backs. Any advice on how to handle a situation like this?

[00:30:53.810] - Lisa Qualls

Well, this question, I think, sort of taps into a lot of things with Melissa and me. We're both adoptive moms. Melissa is an adoptee. I'm a birth or first mom. And so this is sort of touching us in all the places, in terms of our relationships in the adoption world. I wish we knew more about why the restrictions have been put in place. It sounds like there was an attempt to have a relationship with your son's birth family, and something happened that shook that up, and the decision was made to sort of cut off contact for now. As you know, and as all of us listening know, the thing about teenagers is that they are big enough and strong enough, they can ride their bike a mile, they can leave school and go places. So it is really hard to impose these restrictions on your son. Not only that, I think we cannot forget how deep the bond is between the first parent and your son. And so I don't know how long he was with them before he came to you. I don't know what the relationship was like, but clearly something happened that they were no longer able to care for him for whatever reason.

[00:32:21.790] - Lisa Qualls

But also clearly he seems to have a need to want to connect with them like we talked about with our kids and with boundaries. You've set a boundary and it's being violated. And I think in this case, perhaps the best thing to do is to try to bring everybody close. Because your son is not able to be with his birth family within his relationship with you, he's kind of going outside of that and creating this relationship with them independent of you. And really the best thing for everyone is to have this be sort of a completely connected relationship between all the parents and your son. What we don't know is what your son is telling them. Maybe he's saying things to them that are leading them to feel very loyal to him and not at all to you. It's just impossible to know. But I think truly the best thing would be if all the parents were communicating. So even though you want to have this boundary in place to limit, or eliminate for a time, this contact, I think the reality is you've got to open up relationship with them because you're not going to be able to control what happens between them and your son. So the best thing you can do is try to have some connected influence with them.

[00:33:46.950] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I mean, we have similar advice. It's a little bit different, but we have young adults now and some of them have been in relationships that we didn't particularly feel have really warm and fuzzies about. Our therapists said similar things. Like, my instinct was to say you can't do that, or we don't advise it, or these are all the reasons why it's a terrible idea, this is what's going to happen, you're going to get hurt, blah, blah, blah. And she said, that's probably not going to go the way that you actually want it. Because my definition of success at that point was really about manipulating behavior, that our child would behave differently in a relationship or towards another person. And she was like, bring them all close, is really what she said. The things that you're the most afraid of will happen regardless. And some of the things that you're worried about, what's being shared, what kind of relationship they have, and what she's telling them about you and all of that, like that can't happen when you're all so close. It's like almost like potential triangulation around what your child might be saying to another family or birth family, and what they're saying about that family, to all of that stuff. You can eliminate a lot of that if you cut out the middleman. And maybe the communication with the birth family, or maybe they don't communicate in the way that you would like, or maybe that's where the trust was broken was in that communication, but I think, speaking as an adoptee and Lisa you as a birth parent, I think we always encourage families that as long as it's safe, the definition of success is that there's contact in some way, shape or form. And but kind of the most that you can, you know, in this situation where you're so close, right, that unless it's not safe. And then if it's not safe, then, you know I know this sounds really extreme, but, like, then I would involve the police. If you're worried that they're doing something, like if your boundary is because of a safety thing or an illegal thing, then you're going to need something more than your parental requirement that your child not go there. You're going to want something more in place. But outside of those big things, I think the definition of success would be how can we make this work for everyone? And it's going to take some energy, and it's going to be messy, and it's going to be uncomfortable, and you might have to compromise some. But I think sitting on two parts of the triad, it gives us a lot of compassion for all the people in the story and how we can make it work for everyone.

[00:36:44.370] - Lisa Qualls

Well, and it's much too long of a story to go into right now, but my son found me when he was 16. His parents responded with a ton of anger, which I was stunned by because I had held them in the highest esteem. I had prayed and prayed and prayed for them over the years and I had no idea that they felt toward me the way they did. And knowing everything I know now, I think what I was really seeing was fear that came out as a lot of anger. And what I wanted more than anything was to have a relationship with them because I respected them as my son's parents. And I would have loved to have had a relationship with them but that wasn't something that they were open to having, and it never did happen. And so my son's relationship with me was completely independent from his parents. And that was very sad and very difficult for him even as an adult, it was very, very difficult for him. And so I would just, as far as it is possible with you, I think of that scripture, you know, as far as it's possible for me, be at peace with all men. So I would do everything in your power to cultivate a relationship with his family so that he has the freedom to move between. And again, I know safety is an issue, and I don't think you're wrong to have concerns. Nothing. I get that as an adoptive mom, I mean, I try to put myself in your place and I would have fear, I get that. But try as much of it as possible. I can't even say that. As far as it's possible for you. Reach out to these parents, form a relationship with them. It is the best thing you can do for your son. It's the best thing you can do for your relationship with your son. It's the best thing you can do for them. So if possible, that is the direction I would go. And it will be messy and it will be hard, and I think it'll still be worth it. Otherwise, I think you run the risk of your son feeling like he has to choose. And that's just not a position we ever want our kids to be in. But it also may not go the way you want it to go if he has to choose.

[00:39:07.950] - Lisa Qualls

Leah, I know this is really hard and I'm sorry. And I think if you're a person of faith, I would just pour it out before the Lord. I really, really would. And put all your fears and all your worries in his hands and trust Him to show you a clear path of what you need to do.

[00:39:28.580] - Melissa Corkum

Well, thank you for everyone who sent in questions for this month's mailbag. I wanted to close with two things. One is we answer these questions with a lot of words and a lot of advice, but without a lot of detail. When we work with parents and we give advice in a coaching environment, we ask a lot of questions and we really then tailor our response to their particular situation. And we realize that in this, then you were missing that opportunity and missing a lot of the details. So if you ask a question and our answer is way off the mark for what you were hoping for, or if you'd like to be able to dialogue on a more personal basis and get coaching around all of these things, we would invite you to join us inside of Reclaim Compassion, which is our new group coaching program. One of the things that we're super excited about this program is that the coaching and the community aspect of it is on a messenger app called Volley, which allows us to video chat with people and also voice and text chat if maybe you feel like you're a hot mess, but we kind of video pretty authentic in the Volley app.

[00:40:47.620] - Melissa Corkum

And what we love about that is that it doesn't matter where you are, what time of day it is, that you can hop on there and get support. We have people all over the world in all different time zones, and it allows us to meet them where they are. Now, we might not volley you at 03:00 a.m. Back, but there are so many people in the community who are willing to support you. You won't have to wait more than a day for sure to get some encouragement and get advice and get guidance for your particular situation. And then there's also an entire content library that really walks you through some of the foundations of the things that we've built our answers on.

[00:41:28.200] - Melissa Corkum

And then lastly, if you would like to submit a question for our next mailbag episode, we would invite you to do that. Our last question, where we got to hear Leah's voice, that's our favorite to answer questions, where you ask it with your own personality and you to explain it to us. So we would invite you to do that. There's a really quick little recording widget at the show notes for today's episode, and you can find that at [theadoptionconnection.com/211](http://theadoptionconnection.com/211).