

[00:00:00.000] - Lisa C. 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.

[00:00:09.950] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:26.460] - Lisa C. 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.

[00:00:43.350] - Robyn Gobbel

Hello, hello. Welcome back. I'm Robyn Gobbel, and this is the Parenting After Trauma podcast, where I help you take the science of being relationally, socially, and behaviorally human and make it make sense, make it useful and practical in your real life. Now, my primary background is that I have worked with families of kids who have experienced trauma, thus the name of this podcast, Parenting After Trauma. However, in the last several years, what we've come to realize is that the way I've been approaching and supporting the families of kids with a history of trauma is the way of supporting and helping families of kids, well, I think of all kids, but we speak specifically to the families of kids with vulnerable nervous systems and big baffling behaviors here on this podcast. And there are so many reasons kids and their grownups can have vulnerable nervous systems and big baffling behaviors. And the history of trauma is just one of them. So regardless of why your child is struggling and why your child maybe has what we would call a vulnerable nervous system and these big baffling behaviors, welcome. I hope that you keep listening, even if it feels like the word trauma doesn't totally apply to you and your family.

[00:02:18.190] - Robyn Gobbel

In fact, we are considering renaming the podcast so that more families will listen and check it out and get the support that they need for their family, even if their kids don't have a history of trauma. I have some mixed feelings about this because it's so important to me that families of kids with a history of trauma feel really seen here, and that they know immediately that this podcast is for them. Yet at the same time, I want the podcast to help as many families as possible. So it's something my team and I are considering. If you have any thoughts, we'd love to hear them. Feel free to reach out and let me know what you think about the possibility of coming up with a new name for the podcast that still lets families of kids with a history of trauma know this podcast is for you, but also helps to broaden our reach so that all the families that need the support can find it here.

[00:03:25.390] - Robyn Gobbel

Today, I am so thrilled to bring to you, dear friends and colleagues, Melissa Corkum and Lisa Qualls. Melissa and Lisa are the power duo behind The Adoption Connection. They offer support to adoptive families, including a podcast and a faith based community called Reclaim Compassion. Melissa is actually both an adoptive mom and an adopted person. And Lisa is an adoptive mom, former foster youth and has lost children to adoption. Both Melissa and Lisa are trained in TBRI, trust based relational intervention. And Melissa is also a safe and sound protocol provider. In fact, Melissa was on the podcast previously, back when I did a series on strengthening the foundation of the brain. I'll make sure that gets in the show notes. Melissa and Lisa have just published an important book all about helping adoptive parents who are experiencing blocked care. This is their first book together, though, Lisa previously published *The Connected Parent* with Dr. Karyn Purvis. Clearly, these two women are powerhouses in helping parents of kids with vulnerable nervous systems. And I am just so thrilled to bring to you this conversation about blocked care, what it is, what causes it, and how families can begin to recover. Now, y'all I've never done an interview with two guests before, and I wish that I'd introduced them individually so you knew immediately who was who, like which voice went with Melissa and which voice went with Lisa. So Lisa talks first, both in just the basic hellos. And then once the interview really gets started, the first voice you hear is Lisa. The second voice you hear

is Melissa. I hope this helps you distinguish between these two. And y'all, I learned something really important for the next time I have two guests on the podcast. Okay, enough for me. Let's go. Let's get into this interview about blocked care, helping adoptive parents reclaim compassion with Melissa and Lisa.

[00:05:52.620] - Robyn Gobbel

Melissa and Lisa, I am so, so happy to have you with me today for this episode and what we're going to talk about and just to help my audience to get to meet you. So welcome. Thank you for being with me today.

[00:06:09.010] - Lisa C. Qualls

Thank you for having us.

[00:06:10.520] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, it's good to be here, Robin.

[00:06:12.150] - Robyn Gobbel

This is the first time I've had two guests at the same time. So that's really fun. And also, maybe it's going to be clunky at times. I don't know how this is going to go. So we're just going to figure this out as we go along. I've known you both, obviously, for a long time, although Lisa and I are just meeting for the very first time. We said in a synchronous way, we met. But of course, Lisa, I've known who you are and what you do for, I don't know, probably a decade. Same with Melissa and love the work that you're doing, love how you're supporting families, struggling families, families who have these big, hard behaviors and really want to talk with you about this topic of blocked care and helping parents reclaim compassion. I wanted to start us off with a quick little story of that you asked me. You gave me this advanced copy and asked me to read it and offer an endorsement. And so I did. And I wrote my endorsement. And before I sent it to you, I ran it by my husband. And he was like, You can't say that. So the endorsement that I wrote, because I'm also in the middle of writing a book and I was gathering endorsements. And so I felt like, Okay, I've got some ideas here about how to write a good endorsement that'd be helpful. And so the endorsement I wrote was, a must read for the Christian adoptive parent who is struggling to like their kid and doesn't know what to do. And I thought that was so clear and so succinct and so honest. And my husband was horrified. You're really going to say for the parent who doesn't like their kid? So I said, okay, let me make sure that this is an endorsement that they that they are okay with. And you said, yes. So tell me, did an endorsement that said for the parent who's struggling to like their kid, what did that feel like?

[00:08:11.780] - Lisa C. Qualls

I actually laughed when I read your email because I thought, oh, yeah, this is perfect. So the fact that your husband was like, Whoa. But honestly, way back in the beginning, people were so afraid to say that. And that's how all of this even started was way back in 2006, I was blogging, and I used to do these Tuesday topics. And somebody sent in a question, what do I do if I don't like my child? And I remember reading that question and thinking, oh, I'm not putting that on my blog. But the more I thought about it, the more I thought, you know what? This is a real and honest question. And so I shared it. And truly, that blog post, the responses just... That's how we had community back in the day. We did it in the blog, in the comments, and the responses just flowed and flowed and flowed in. I think that post might have been from 2010, and it still is one of my most read blog posts. When I had my blog, my blog is not I don't have it public anymore.

[00:09:15.720] - Robyn Gobbel

It retired.

[00:09:16.830] - Lisa C. Qualls

It retired. But I thought I better read through it again one more time before I leave hanging out there. But I think we went to a place of honesty that people really, really needed before we even knew what it was, before we knew it had a name, any of that.

[00:09:36.480] - Melissa Corkum

Well, and Lisa told me just that part of the story, Robyn, before she sent me your endorsement. And so I was like bracing myself. I was like, oh, is it going to be a little spicy? What's going to be in it? And I read it and I was like, Huh. That's the thing is it has turned into this thing where it has touched so many people's lives. And this is the majority of how we serve parents is walking alongside of them through this journey of overcoming blocked care. We're like, what's it like the curse of knowledge? Talking about parents struggling to like their kids is now what we do every day. I was like, oh, well, we hear that all the time. It's not a laughable matter, but...

[00:10:22.780] - Lisa C. Qualls

And now when I hear that question, I actually feel hope because the parent is asking because they want help. They don't like how this feels. They don't want to feel this way. And so I think in a sense, it's a hopeful and honest question.

[00:10:35.760] - Robyn Gobbel

I obviously completely agree, or I wouldn't have written that. After working in the trenches with these parents in my office for decades and hearing this very honest, I don't like my child, but also they were in my office. So they were, by definition, coming and asking for help. And I felt the same way. There's so much hope here. And we don't do anybody any favors by not talking about what absolutely needs to be talked about. And I can hardly think of something that needs to be talked about more than what do we do when we don't like our kid? Because we want to. It feels way better for us. Parenting is really a bum job. I mean, it's like made good because of the relational enjoyment that we have. And so if we are parenting and also not enjoying it at all, I mean, that is just such a hard, hard, hard journey. And then, of course, with 100 %, our kids deserve to be parented by people who look at them with eyes of, I adore you. And as that being this core piece here is how do we help both parents and kids get what they deserve because of the core of their humanity. But yeah, I had the same thought that Melissa did. Well, it's not even that provocative, really. But I guess for somebody a little removed from the work that we do, it felt big. And yeah, I guess a similar moment. They're like, oh, that's right. For some people, this does feel that way. And I think what a relief for somebody to hear somebody else talk about it. And I want to use this blase way. I don't mean that we're not taking it very seriously. Obviously, we're taking it very seriously, but that it's just it's common. It's not something we have to be afraid of or ashamed of. And we can talk about it like that. So I'm just so grateful for this book and the work that you're doing and know that so many of the folks listening to the podcast are absolutely experiencing blocked care, but they don't even know it. They've maybe never heard of it. They don't know what it is. So let's start there. Tell us how you define what blocked care is.

[00:13:08.360] - Melissa Corkum

Well, first of all, I think where we should start is, we didn't name Blocked Care. We read about it in work done by Jonathan Baylin and Dan Hughes, and it pops up in multiple of their books. But we were immediately drawn to it because it named, like you were saying, something that we were very familiar with but hadn't had an actual name for until we heard Blocked Care. It is a self protective mechanism in our nervous systems when stress is really high. And we can talk a little bit more about what causes that stress and all the things. But that overwhelming stress in a parent's nervous system can create this subconscious, not on purpose, self protective mechanism that makes it so that some of the parts in our brain and nervous system that bring us the joy and the compassion into parenting shut down. And so we see a lot of parents who are doing a lot of the actions of parenting. So they're still making therapy appointments, they're still packing lunches, they're driving kids, all those things. But it's like you said, all the reward of parenting, that reciprocal relationship, the enjoyment, the satisfaction, a lot of that has left, and it leaves parents feeling this sense of apathy towards parenting, which then I think cycles into a lot of guilt and shame.

[00:14:51.840] - Robyn Gobbel

Yeah. When I think about one of the most important parts of parenting for me are these moments of delight. These moments of, I mean, he's 17 now, so I don't necessarily get the like, Oh, he's so cute. But still, though, he's so amazing. Wow. Just these spontaneous moments of delight and certainly know that parents who have been on this road a long time of parenting kids with these really intense needs and behaviors, that those moments of delight are few and far between. And I think to give people a name for this is the first step towards uncoupling, like you said, most of the shame from it.

This isn't just about being a bad parent. There's a name for this. And then I really appreciated how, of course, I appreciated how you explored the neurobiological underpinnings of blocked care. I just did a podcast series about toxic shame, and a big component of that was understanding the neurobiological underpinnings of it because I think that goes to uncoupling it from shame. So do you want to talk about that just a little bit, maybe the neurobiology of blocked care?

[00:16:17.080] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, it starts with what Hughes and Baylin termed as blocked trust, or it can. So sometimes the overwhelming stress in a parent's nervous system is not child related. But I think within the audiences that we both serve, often it starts with big baffling behaviors, right? And a lot of that starts with these early adverse experiences that a lot of our kids come to us with. Our audience is primarily foster and adoptive parents. And so that by default has these early adverse experience. Even changing primary caregivers is really hard on the nervous system. And so you have a child whose nervous system is already in defensive mode, is unsure, not sure if it wants to attach. And I think a lot of us have heard that part. When we think about trauma informed parenting, we're understanding that our kids are struggling, they're having a hard time. We talk about that all the time. And I think what's interesting about blocked care is it's like the parallel experience in the parents is that when we're overwhelmed or we've had adverse experiences, whether in our own lives personally or having to do with relationships with our kids, then our nervous system starts to be defensive and protective because we're wired for survival. So there's lots of parallels, I think. If we already understand what's going on in the neurobiology of our kids and their window of tolerance and all of those things, then we can also overlay that into our own experiences. And then the parallels continue. We'll get there. But what our kids need is what we need. Nervous systems are nervous systems, the world around.

[00:18:11.230] - Robyn Gobbel

Yeah. Well, that's actually one of my favorite parts of doing this work, is parents often do come for help with their kids. And there's this moment where they realize it all applies to them, that they are as deserving of this lens, right? This way of looking at behavior and the ways that we are trying so hard to care for our kids with these compassion, safety, connection based ways of being in relationship that, oh, actually, we all deserve that as well. I love that piece of this work. Beyond I don't like my kid, what are people experiencing when they're going through blocked care?

[00:19:00.640] - Lisa C. Qualls

Is your adoption journey turning out differently than you imagined? You had so much love to give, but now you feel ashamed and bewildered by your lack of compassion. You may be experiencing blocked care, a self protective mechanism in your nervous system that makes it difficult to connect with your child and maintain compassion. When this happens, it's like your heart seems to have left the relationship. But the good news is you are not a bad parent. You can heal from blocked care and compassion can be rekindled in your heart.

[00:19:33.530] - Melissa Corkum

This episode is sponsored by our book *Reclaim Compassion: the Adoptive Parents' Guide to Overcoming Blocked Care with Neuroscience and Faith*. This practical and powerful guide offers a simple step-by-step process for reclaiming compassion for your child and yourself. Included in the book is a blocked care assessment which is now free to you, our listeners. You can take the assessment at reclaimcompassion.com/assessment.

[00:20:05.850] - Lisa C. Qualls

Well, we spend a lot of time really looking at that, and we have talked with and worked with so many parents. And so we developed what we consider the 10 signs of blocked care. And we provide parents with an assessment where they can go through it and evaluate, do I have this sign and how severe is it or how mild is it? But these are all signs that come from within the parent. And so I'll just give you an example of two of the 10. One of them is, I'm too caught up in coping with my child's behavior to be curious about the meaning behind it. And then we ask parents to say, Is that a little bit of a problem or is that pretty extreme for me? Another one is, I feel resentment toward one or more of my children or my situation as a whole, and I may even regret adopting or fostering. We really try to help parents see the range of things that they may be experiencing it, but in a completely, like, there's

no judgment. This is we tell parents over and over this is not about your character. This is not about you choosing any of this.

[00:21:21.830] - Lisa C. Qualls

This is about your brain and your nervous system trying to protect itself from something that feels very, very confusing. And, you know, Melissa was talking about the children who come to us with a lot of early adverse experiences and trauma. And, you know, as parents, we are wired to provide care and nurture and connection. And what we see happen a lot is parents go into this with their hearts wide open, and they're doing all the instinctive, normal bits for attachment. They're meeting their child's needs. They're connecting. They're trying to offer safe touch and gentle eyes. They get very initially confused when their child does not seem to receive this. When you try to use gentle words and come close to your child, and instead you get a very defensive response, we now know that that's a defensive response. It truly confuses the brain and the nervous system. And eventually, the parent does become defensive and stops wanting to try to stop those orators for attachment and connection because it feels dangerous. So the receiving of it feels dangerous to the child, and eventually the parent begins to feel the same.

[00:22:43.880] - Robyn Gobbel

That's so remarkable to me how the brain knows and wants to know. It's quite preoccupied with knowing what's about to happen next. And how this starts with this child's expectation about relationship and how safe it is, and then eventually shifts the parent's expectations about the relationship and how safe it is. And it's so easy for us to say, Well, they're the grown up, they should be able to whatever, whatever, whatever. But it's just how you're saying, the nervous system is not really terribly concerned with how old you are, whether you're a grown up or you're a kid. These experiences of making a bid for connection and having it essentially rejected is very painful. And it makes perfect sense that parents' nervous systems are adapting in this way. I love this compassionate way that you're looking at it. I wanted to highlight something you said, Lisa, which was about... You talked about these two, you just picked out two symptoms and about one of them being a parent who's having a hard time looking essentially beneath behavior, or caring. I hear that a lot. Yeah, I know it's beneath their behavior, but at this point, I couldn't care less. I just want them to knock it off, essentially. Actually, the reason I wanted to highlight you saying that and just put a little pin in it is actually for our professionals that are listening because I have a lot of helpers and therapists who listen to the podcast. And it is easy as a professional because if you want to talk about the way kids and their parents are so similar in their nervous systems, well, then we add in this layer of the professionals who are helping this population as well. It's all the same thing. It's this big parallel process. And so to meet a parent who is like, I don't care what's underneath the behavior, I just want it to stop, can bring up a lot of feelings in the professionals. And I think to look at that behavior out of a parent the same way that we work so hard to see beneath kids behaviors is just crucial for working successfully with these families. So I just really wanted professionals to hear that piece and recommend, if you're listening to the podcast as a professional, learn everything you can about blocked care so that you can recognize it in the parents who come in. Because, again, it's so easy as a professional to just feel frustrated with parents. And until we can take this theory and apply it to the parents as well, we're not going to have any traction with what our end goals are.

[00:25:49.270] - Lisa C. Qualls

Right. Because as soon as a parent senses judgment, it takes them to shame, and their ability to learn from the professional is gone.

[00:25:59.520] - Robyn Gobbel

Gone.

[00:25:59.810] - Lisa C. Qualls

What parents need so desperately from professionals is empathy and like, Wow, this is really hard. This is probably not what you imagined. I imagine sometimes you feel like you hardly recognize yourself. It's like if we can have that empathy, then that shame can start to melt away. And I think parents can be receptive to learning. But in my own experience, I can tell you, the minute I feel a professional is thinking, Well, actually, you're the problem. Or, If you would just do this, I distance

myself and protect myself from the professional because I'm already in so much pain, right?

[00:26:40.160] - Robyn Gobbel
Of course you do.

[00:26:42.490] - Melissa Corkum

Actually, one of the signs, Lisa, is being cynical about helpful ideas. And I think back to when I was first helping parents, I knew nothing about blocked care. And it was even so early in our journey that I hadn't personally experienced it yet. And I was so flippant with like, just try this. Have you looked at the need behind the behavior? Have you tried to comfort? With these parents that were in the trenches and I think back and I think, Oh, goodness. And for the ones who are like, Yeah, that won't work. I already tried that. And we see that now and I think, Oh, that's a sign that their nervous system is struggling and they're headed towards or they're already smack dab in the middle of blocked care. Is that, That won't work for my family, or I've already tried that, or I already heard that, or I don't even care.

[00:27:29.050] - Robyn Gobbel

I just taught a workshop and it was about working with resistant, in quotes, parents. And as part of the workshop, we made a list. We brainstormed all the things parents say that we interpret as resistant. And basically all the things that Melissa just said were on that list about, I've already tried that, that doesn't work. The cynical feelings about somebody helping. And man, do we need professionals to see that. When a parent comes to the office, whether it be they're coming for parent help or they're coming for help for their kids, and they have those thoughts or statements. If we can use...I talk about X ray vision goggles on the parents... that we can use on their kids to see those statements as just information about where they are in their nervous system. And then give that information to the parents, so that they can have the same understanding and compassion about their behaviors and thoughts. The thoughts that parents have that they feel like nobody else probably has these thoughts. And if I say them out loud, something really bad is going to happen. So to give language to all of those things is so crucially important the way that you did here in this book. So what do we do if we feel like, okay, this is me? I've got this experience of blocked care. What do I do? And how do I possibly do that? While also the fact that things in my family are out of control. How could we do both at the same time?

[00:29:32.780] - Melissa Corkum

I think it has to be really small things. Change is already a stressor in our nervous system. So asking ourselves to make huge overhauls in our lives or our kids lives is hard. But the big answer to that question, I think, is how can we, as parents, make small little changes to care for our nervous systems in such a way that we can learn how to anchor so strongly in our own regulation, that we can stay anchored even when there are a lot of stressors and or big behaviors circling around us. And so that's like the here I am to like the end point. And it doesn't happen quickly. It doesn't happen overnight. And for parents that are continuing to parent, it's a little bit cyclical. It's not like we put on our blocked care armor and we're good to go forever. And so I think hopefully parents hear that as hope and not hopelessness, like, oh, it's never going to end. But hope in the sense that we can always still continue to come back around to the hope and that we expect it to be cyclical. So when it doesn't go linearly the way that we would like to, we realize that's the way it is. Like all healing and all things are because if we're thinking like, oh, I'll just do steps one, two, and three and be out on the other side, and that's our expectation, and then that doesn't happen, then I think that compounds the problem.

[00:31:26.080] - Robyn Gobbel

I think the honesty, though, also is just so important. Parents know that there's no roadmap, essentially. There's no way anybody's coming to them to say, If you just do this, you'll feel better and then you'll feel better forever. I think if we approached it in that way, it would impact the trust so substantially. I think parents are so relieved, honestly, by the truth of like, this is a lifelong journey. It's never going to be done. You're going to be working to strengthen your nervous system from now until forever, and I'll help you. I think that's such a breath of just honest, fresh air for the parents that we work with.

[00:32:12.830] - Lisa C. Qualls

And I think a lot of that, too. And we have to help parents, we always say shed the shame, because parents who are in blocked care, they feel like they're in a dark place and they feel like they can't tell anybody. And they're having thoughts they never imagined they'd have. And I just remember thinking, I do not feel like the mom I always thought I was. And then I went from like, I don't feel like the mom I've always been to, maybe I never was the mom that I thought I was. I mean, I was losing faith in myself and in my image of myself as a good mother. And I'd always thought I was a good mother, but I didn't feel like one. I felt like maybe that was behind me. And I think when we help parents get really honest with themselves and they have the support of other parents and community together, and they hear other people give words to things that they've experienced, they begin to realize, Oh, it is not just me. I'm not alone. And there actually is hope that I can get through this to the other side.

[00:33:30.740] - Lisa C. Qualls

And like Melissa was saying, of course, we have to do this work. This is not work that's going to just, oh, I'm cured, I'm done, the end. I still have two teenage boys at home, my two youngest, and I feel like I'm in a really good place with my nervous system. I'm in a really good place with overcoming blocked care. But I have to be mindful of how I need to care for myself. Because you know what? Every day, starting out something will happen that in the past would have made me feel protective, maybe want to step back from one of my kids. But I'm in a place where I can step forward and I can have perspective because my nervous system isn't so much in high alert. I'm not in that state anymore. But it's a conscious amount of work.

[00:34:22.140] - Robyn Gobbel

Yeah. And the idea of connection and connecting with others I'm hearing in this thread that you're talking about is so crucial. To know you're not alone, to know that there's other people, to see other people further ahead on the journey than you are, sounds like such a critical component for folks who are noticing, Okay, I think I'm identifying with this idea of blocked care. Yeah?

[00:34:55.850] - Lisa C. Qualls

Definitely.

[00:34:56.570] - Melissa Corkum

I also think the community part, like, Robin, also that you've created in the club, we need... It's not like a substitute for the reciprocal relationship that we're not getting from our kid, but parents tend to isolate when they're in these situations. And so then the input, the only input they're getting is input from their kid about how they're a terrible parent and they wish they were being parented by Joey's mom down the street because Joey's mom lets him, blah, blah, blah, and all these things. And like Lisa said, then you start second guessing, Wait, was I ever good at this? We get all up in our heads and there's no other input saying, No, that was a reasonable parenting response. And your child had a really big reaction, but you didn't do anything wrong. Or, Hey, have you ever thought about trying it this way? That wasn't wrong necessarily, but maybe, Did you think about these things? And so to be able to have other relational input, whether that's in person from another supportive spouse or co-parent, whether it's a neighbor, whether it's a therapist, a counselor, we just art of this care for ourselves is we have to have other input, relational and co-regulatory input into ourselves to combat some of what our nervous systems are telling us about being in relationship with tricky people.

[00:36:35.160] - Robyn Gobbel

Yeah. I mean, if we come to know who we are because of how other people are looking at us, and say we come to know who we are through the eyes of the other, that's not just true about our kids. That's true about us, too. And like all humans, the more stressed we get, the more we self isolate, like you said. And so eventually, we're looking at a family who's not.. A parent, who isn't seeing anybody look at them, except for their kids, who have all these ways that they're projecting their own defensive, projective state onto them. And so I have found that as well to just be such a crucial piece of this is getting people in contact with other kinds of eyes, eyes who see them as like, you're great. You're really struggling. And you are a precious human in the same way that our kids are. So this community piece, I think, is just so integral. So integral. You talked, too, I think, in your book about just basic physiological care. Do you want to say a little bit about some of those things that can be helpful?

[00:37:57.900] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah. We really help parents begin healing their nervous systems by looking at three different aspects of them and their lives. We look at their internal world. So what's happening in their nervous system, what's happening in their mindset, those sorts of things. We look at what's happening in their external world, like their sensory environment, and what is healing to the nervous system and what is not. Then we look at their relational world, too. People, safe people, life giving people, how to even make room for that. If they're a person of faith, we talk about that relationship. So we really try to look at the whole person and help parents take a journey through a pathway of healing.

[00:38:46.310] - Robyn Gobbel

I love that you also just gave something that feels so doable, right? These three paths. And if one feels a little shaky, so often people feel like they don't have anyone to turn to from a connection standpoint, that there's other paths that can be emphasized while also then looking for ways to build increased opportunities for connection. It just feels more possible in a way. Do you find that that's how parents are responding to that?

[00:39:26.310] - Lisa C. Qualls

I think parents are pleasantly surprised that we are talking about small, simple steps. So in our book, each chapter ends with a series of what we call simple practices. And we give them, on day one, do this small thing. On day two, do this small thing. So we're trying to give little gentle steps toward healing because the last thing parents need is... And here is the big project for you to take on to heal your nervous system. They're going to close the book, the end. And so we really are giving gentle, simple things for people to do to begin this process of overcoming blocked care.

[00:40:09.780] - Melissa Corkum

I think so often I see this in behaviors, and so I think we do it for ourselves as parents, too. We look at the behavior and then we just dive bomb. If our kid's not doing chores, it's like... The solutions are at that particular behavior. So that's like chore charts and whatever. It's very inoculus to that one thing. And so with parents and blocked care, I think it's easy for us to immediately... Or for parents to ask, So how do I fix the relationship with my child? I don't even want to do that. Do I have to spend more time with them to fix blocked care? And we're saying, yes, eventually, part of overcoming blocked care is repairing or looking at that relationship differently. And you don't start anywhere near that. So let's start by just thinking, what have you been eating lately? When we get stressed, we're not feeding our bodies well. It's not rocket science that we all know that we should eat better. We're hearing it from a bagillion different channels. But what I think made the difference for me was I realized how that was impacting the ecosystem of my nervous system and then therefore, my relationships. So when I could say, man, I really should take the extra 30 seconds to throw a bunch of things in the blender and make a smoothie rather than eating a handful of chips because this is going to help me be a better parent to the people, better person to the people I love. And this is going to help me have more margin to do the things that I wish I had energy and time for, like something fun, like learning how to Lindy Hop or hand letters, those kinds of things. When I realized that they all stack up and they're all contributing to these end things, that they're not separate things, like I should eat better, and I should also have a better relationship with my kids. But when I understood how integrated that all was, and on days when I don't so much want to be around my kids and I'm struggling with blocked care, I don't have to go to them to work on it first. I can go towards something that feels a little less threatening, like just make one better food choice or drink some more water today.

[00:42:38.480] - Lisa C. Qualls

I think my...

[00:42:39.720] - Robyn Gobbel

No, go ahead.

[00:42:41.600] - Lisa C. Qualls

I think my big one was sleep. And these are just little tiny parts of this whole plan we have. But prioritizing sleep, I think, so often as parents, the days are so darn hard that when we finally get a

break from the kids, the last thing we want to do is go to bed because we want time for ourselves. And it makes all the sense in the world. And yet sleep is vitally important to our nervous systems. I'm a big fan of working hard to get enough sleep. And those are just a couple of the physical parts of our internal world. There are so many things in the book. But as we were talking, I was thinking, when we take people through this process of overcoming blocked care, connecting with your child is the final step. Everything else comes before because we are helping parents heal to give them the capacity to connect with their child. And even when we get to the connect with your child part, even that's gentle. We're not asking parents to do deep, hard things. We're doing things like give your child an unexpected yes. That is one of my favorites because the stories we get from parents are so funny and so delightful. And there's something beautiful when you shock your kid by saying yes to one of their requests, and they are so surprised and their response can be so funny. And it's this wonderful wash of connection that happens in our bodies and it feels really good. Now, sometimes we give our kids an unexpected yes, and it doesn't work the way we hope. But anyhow, the reconnecting with the child comes at the end of all the other work.

[00:44:29.120] - Robyn Gobbel

I think that's so important for people to hear that it is a piece of it, both of you have said, but it's really not the emphasis because the truth is that as the rest of the body and the nervous system begins to experience some repair, our just biological drive for connection begins to reawaken and emerge again. And then we also have a little bit more capacity, tolerance, maybe inside our window of stress tolerance to be okay when our offerings for connection maybe aren't reciprocated in the way that we wish. When you all are talking, I recently hired somebody to help me do some things that I certainly know how to do with regards to food and nutrition, because I've seen this as the missing link in caring for my own self and the things that are happening in my life and the stress in our family as well as the stress of just getting older. And seeing this piece, it's like, I really could use some help here. And talking with my husband about it. And the reality that all the information I'm getting from working with this individual is information I could get anywhere for free, essentially. And none of it's remarkably new. But that's not really the point. If information was all we needed, we would not even be listening to this podcast. And I want to just emphasize that for folks who... I know once we fall down these paths of blocked care and compassion fatigue, things start to feel very helpless and hopeless. It's just a piece of the neurobiology of it. And it can feel, I think, I don't need somebody to tell me how to look for moments of delight in my life. I can do that myself. I don't need... And the truth is, we actually do need people to tell us those things. Even if we know them, the support of what could feel like this coaching community is a key integral part of this. So just for anybody listening who's like, Again, I already know how to do all these things. It's like, That's not the point. We know you know how to do all those things. We know you know that if you ate better or slept more, you would feel better. This is not new information. And we all still need the support in implementing those things in our lives, especially once our nervous system has crashed to the point of experiencing blocked care.

[00:47:37.090] - Melissa Corkum

Well, when we're in blocked care, we're not using our best thinking brains. We have a lot of knowledge and access, and sometimes there's too much knowledge, and we don't know what to pick out. And so it can be helpful to have someone who's still in their thinking brain from the outside looking in saying, Hey, have you thought about this? Or just, Let me pull this piece of information to your attention. Can you work on that? And so many parents will go, Oh, yeah, I forgot about that. In this moment, I had forgotten that I should probably be doing that. Yes, and that feels doable. I'm going to hop off here now and go do that thing, and then I'll come back and report how it's going.

[00:48:21.380] - Lisa C. Qualls

I think sometimes parents get to a place of hopelessness and despair, and then they don't have the wherewithal to do the things they know. They need someone to take them by the hand and say, Okay, step one, this is all we're going to do today. This is the one small thing we're going to do. And tomorrow, we're going to do something different. And the book I mean, we hope that small groups will read this book together and do the journey together. We do it also with our own community. But sometimes we just need someone to take us by the hand and be that kind and compassionate voice that tells us, hey, you're worth it. And I believe that I can help you on this journey because you can heal. You can heal.

[00:49:12.750] - Robyn Gobbel

I mean, if you're listening here, anything else, it is okay to need that help. I think many of us have lived in such a bootstraps-ish mentality, culturally and how we were raised. And then it only gets amplified the further and further our nervous system shifts into this defensive, protective mode. And so if you're listening can just hear that piece that it makes perfect sense. And it's exactly what we need is for somebody to take us by the hand and not give us this brand new information that's Earth shattering, like, Oh, my gosh. Now let's fix everything! Because that doesn't exist. But to take us by the hand and say, Have you had a snack lately? Or, How much sleep are you getting? Or, when was the last time you saw the sunshine? And how important those really small steps really are. So you mentioned you have this blocked care quiz. Where can people find that?

[00:50:22.520] - Melissa Corkum

So we have made it available on a special website just for your people, Robyn, so they can go to theadoptionconnection.com/parentingaftertrauma.

[00:50:35.960] - Robyn Gobbel

Awesome. That's easy. Okay. So you said a 10 question quiz?

[00:50:42.860] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. It should take under three minutes.

[00:50:47.230] - Robyn Gobbel

Awesome. And should they decide? Yes, I think I am experiencing blocked care. You have this book, so tell us about the book and just all the other resources that you're offering for parents.

[00:50:58.630] - Lisa C. Qualls

Well, the title of the book is *Reclaim Compassion: the Adoptive Parents Guide to Overcoming Blocked Care with Neuroscience and Faith*. While we did write it, it is faith based, it's rooted in our faith, but it is for everyone. You do not have to be a believer in any particular religion or anything to benefit from what is in the book. You also don't really need to be an adoptive or foster parent to benefit. We're trying to make it really accessible for our main audience, but really it's for all caregivers who are parenting children and find that they're really struggling. So the book is available on Amazon, soon to be available other places as well.

[00:51:45.500] - Robyn Gobbel

And you have a community, right? Tell me about that.

[00:51:48.350] - Melissa Corkum

We do. So at the same name as the book, Reclaim Compassion. So if you go to reclaimcompassion.com, we have a community where folks are learning how to reclaim compassion for themselves, which we talked a lot about here, and reclaim compassion for their kids. And we do that through a video messaging app called Volley, which I think has worked really well for our audience who has trouble having large blocks of time, but it still has that video aspect. So you still get that rich experience of hearing someone's voice. We're a completely virtual company, so this is as this is as connected as we can offer people. And then, Robyn, we've talked about this on the podcast before, we do Safe and Sound with folks because safe and sound is all about coregulation and relationship. When we learned about that, and as we started putting all the pieces together with blocked care and all the things that we just talked about, it seemed like such a valuable tool to help families if they're really feeling stuck to get unstuck. And so that is part of what we offer too. It's just been a really, it's been an honor to be able to have something like that that matches so well with what we're trying to help families do.

[00:53:24.210] - Robyn Gobbel

Awesome. Yeah, you all are... The way that you have put... I like to integrate different parts of things together as well. And so I love that piece of how you're supporting families, how you have taken these different pieces that usually exist by themselves and integrated them into their own unique

experience. I love that about the work that you all are doing. I will make sure all of those things get in the show notes. What else would you like people to hear before we wrap up today?

[00:54:01.640] - Lisa C. Qualls

I wanted to add one thought, and I just want people to know that we have a number of dads in our group. We have a dad, a TBRI practitioner who is a coach in our group as well. And so a lot of times we find that it's the moms who will seek the help and we get a lot of women, but we are really happy that we have as many dads participating. And so that's, I think that's a really special thing about the community that we've created.

[00:54:34.240] - Robyn Gobbel

That's awesome. I love that. Well, you all, I just have so much gratitude for both of you and the work that you're doing and the families and the kids that you're serving and the way that you do that. I know being a parent to a kid who's really struggling is a lonely journey. And being a practitioner in this world can be a really lonely journey too. There aren't a lot of other folks out there who really get it. And so I'm just so grateful for the connections and the relationships that I have with the folks that do get it selfishly for myself. What is it like to do this really hard work, but also to share in the way that we do in helping the families who really need it. It's so important, I think, for us to all feel like we're not doing it alone, just like the families that we serve. We want them to feel like they're not doing it alone. So thank you. Thank you for the amazing, important work that you're doing.

[00:55:42.650] - Lisa C. Qualls

Thank you for having us, Robin.

[00:55:44.370] - Melissa Corkum

Well, we appreciate you, too, Robin. And thank you so much for your glowing, yet punchy endorsement.

[00:55:51.010] - Robyn Gobbel

Well, now I'm feeling like maybe it wasn't quite punchy enough. If it didn't give you pause, I'm going to have to think of something. Maybe a little punchier, Melissa.

[00:56:00.560] - Melissa Corkum

Well, the Amazon reviews are open.

[00:56:02.520] - Robyn Gobbel

I just wrote mine.

[00:56:05.710] - Lisa C. Qualls

Thank you so much. We appreciate it.

[00:56:08.630] - Robyn Gobbel

Yeah, you're so welcome. Thank you again, you two. This has been just an absolute delight.

[00:56:15.480] - Robyn Gobbel

Well, you all, wasn't that lovely? What wonderful humans. If we think about owls and watchdogs and opossums, oftentimes the neurobiology of blocked care looks a lot like the possum pathway. If you're noticing some similarities there, if you're trying to put these two frameworks together, that's how I would look at it. Often, blocked care can result in some watchdog behavior, but the neurobiology of blocked care that leads to that lack of desire for connection and some of that apathy and what often feels like helplessness and hopelessness, or I would put over on the opossum pathway. And just like we can see our kids behaviors through the lens of the nervous system and bring care and compassion to the fierce way that their nervous system is working so hard to be protective, the same is true for us. And we deserve as much care as our kids do. So I really encourage you to go check out their book, *Reclaim Compassion*, and start to look for some of those ways that you can soothe your opossum brain and invite that owl brain back through safety and connection, connecting with yourself and connecting with others. As always, I'm just so grateful for you tuning into the podcast, for your

continued, fierce commitment to yourself and to your kids, and if you're here as a professional, to the families and the kids that you serve and support. Thank you, thank you, thank you. We will see you back here next week.

[00:58:18.590] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:58:33.250] - Lisa C. Qualls

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

[00:58:42.030] - Melissa Corkum

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