

[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.

[00:00:10.000] - 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.

[00:00:42.120] - Joel Stabile

We were preparing for this conversation. We're like, Yeah, this time is going to go by quickly. There's a lot to talk about and a lot to hear, and so let's not waste a minute. Even though the other stuff wouldn't be wasted.

[00:00:56.550] - Suzanne Stabile

Do you notice how he's looking at me? Did you notice that?

[00:00:59.140] - Joel Stabile

Looking at everybody.

[00:01:01.770] - Lisa C. Qualls

Well, Melissa and I both are talkers, so he may have to keep us all reined in.

[00:01:07.210] - Joel Stabile

Yeah, I'll be as serious as we're going. And I'm glad you are talkers because that's what I want to hear.

[00:01:12.090] - Suzanne Stabile

Me, too. And we've already talked about the fact that we feel like you have so much to say. We're going to let you take the lead and talk about all that you do. And we're going to respond, maybe, or ask questions, maybe. But we want to get as much of it as we can. And it's astonishing how much you have to talk about. So I'm sure we'll do this again sometime in the future.

[00:01:42.160] - Joel Stabile

Show prep that we did as far as talking about how do you think the conversation should go.

[00:01:49.420] - Suzanne Stabile

And.

[00:01:49.930] - Joel Stabile

We both had the exact same idea and same direction. And that is if you both first just start by telling your story. So, Melissa, as you know, Melissa said that she wants the Trump card since she's in the cohort. She wants to go first. So you can tell your story.

[00:02:10.760] - Melissa Corkum

Is that how that went?

[00:02:10.940] - Joel Stabile

Yeah, I thought you said that in an email to me. Tell everybody about yourself and your story, and then we'll go to Lisa, and then we're just going to go on.

[00:02:20.830] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. Well, super grateful to be here. I will do my best to say my story in a way that is succinct and

hopefully make sense to people who don't already know parts of it. But it started in Korea. I'm an adoptee. I was abandoned on a doorstep of a child home in a tiny southeast Korean village, South Korea, in case anyone's interested. People do ask. And by the time I was three and a half months old, I was in a home here in the States. I grew up just north of Baltimore. And back in those days, they literally put plane-fulls of adopted babies on airplanes with one social worker. And they asked for volunteers to hold us on the 20 some odd hour plane ride. So that's where my baby book starts with me and two business people who got on a plane in Korea, unbeknownst to them, and ended up carrying for a three-month old all the way to Baltimore.

[00:03:34.190] - Suzanne Stabile

When is back in those days, Melissa? What year are we talking? In the 80s. Okay, thank you.

[00:03:40.780] - Melissa Corkum

I came home in the early 80s and I have two younger siblings, both adopted, both came home as infants, which in international adoption doesn't really happen much anymore. But the oldest of the three of us at the age we came home was six months old. Fast forward, 18, 19 years, and I meet my husband. He says two things to me. This makes so much more sense now that he's identified as an 8. But on our first date, he said two things. He said, one, I'm looking for a wife. So if at any point in time you don't think you can marry me, just let me know and this can be over. And secondly, I've always wanted to adopt. And so if you're not on board with that, we can also end this now. And he didn't even know I was an adoptee. That's how little we knew of each other when this conversation happened. And I remember thinking, I think I was a happy adoptee. I didn't feel permission to even say no to that because of our experience. And so I was like, Well, you don't know this about me, but I'm actually adopted, and so I think I can't say no to that. And we got married young. We had two kids quickly by birth and through a lot of twists and turns, ended up adopting a little boy from South Korea in 2009 and then adopted three older children all out of birth order. All three of them were unrelated to each other in 2012. And so they were 11, 13, and 14 when they joined our family. And at the time, our other kids were... Let's go with 5, 7 and 9. That's the foundation of our families.

[00:05:22.680] - Suzanne Stabile

5, 7, 9, 11, 13 and 14.

[00:05:26.640] - Melissa Corkum

Right, in 2012. Now they're 16, 17, 19, 22, 24 and almost 25. We have four still at home. We have a granddaughter that lives with us. Our oldest son is married and they have a son. My parents and Patrick and me bought this house almost 15 years ago. And so that means that we are four generations in a house right now.

[00:05:54.010] - Joel Stabile

And you're an enneagram 7 for the sake of reference?

[00:05:57.160] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, just for the sake of reference. Yeah, absolutely. So that's the short version.

[00:06:05.490] - Suzanne Stabile

Good job on the succinctness of that story. I think sometimes it takes a minute for all of that to sink in for people, the whole journey. A part of my hearing is still back in that they asked for volunteers on the plane to hold us.

[00:06:33.700] - Joel Stabile

God, I can't imagine Suzanne Stabile on a plane where they just come aboard with a bunch of...

[00:06:37.660] - Suzanne Stabile

Babies for me to hold. Man, I'd sign up for that.

[00:06:42.060] - Joel Stabile

They would pull you off the plane. We need a different flight. We want to be helpful, but this isn't going

to go anywhere. And Lisa?

[00:06:51.710] - Lisa C. Qualls

Well, adoption has been a thread that God has woven through my life since I was a young teen. As a young teenager, I became pregnant. It was in the era between maternity homes and most teens keeping their babies. It was in the middle there. When this happened, my parents went to the church. They were Catholic. They were advised to put me in foster care through Catholic charities in a town fairly far away from where I was from. And this is in an era where we didn't have cell phones. I mean, long distance was expensive. And so basically, I could have been across the country. It wouldn't have really mattered. I went into foster care and I did not know or understand that the plan was that I absolutely was going to give my baby to them to be placed with a worthy Catholic adoptive couple. And I fully thought I was going to parent my child for quite a while in the pregnancy until all my hopes and the people I thought I could rely on left me, fell away, and I was left alone. And at that point, I realized I really had no choice. And my parents had no intention of me bringing a baby home. And so I felt very trapped and forced into placing my son for adoption. It was not a willing or joyful choice by any stretch. It was a devastating loss and a grief that was so deep and so unresolvable that I think it shaped a lot of my life. It also was in that year when I was in foster care that I really came to know Jesus and my faith became very, very real. I feel like I was lost and I was found. It was a very profound turning point and I've never looked back in terms of my utter dependence on God and my love for him. Just a couple of years later as I met my husband, we were seniors in high school and he was so solid in his faith. I was still a fairly new Christian and I was so drawn to him.

[00:09:55.730] - Lisa C. Qualls

We ended up getting married as undergrads and had our first daughter just a few years later. We went on to have a total of seven children by birth. And during those years, my husband was in graduate school. We did all kinds of crazy things to have a big family and one very small student income during a lot of those years. But after our seventh child was born, we knew we were done. I'd had eight babies and we had this really beautiful family. I was homeschooling our kids. My husband's a professor, and we knew we were done. When my youngest was about three, I remember thinking, Wow, I think maybe God has something new for me, something else for me. I felt like something was going to shift and change. And during that time, I thought actually that I was going to go back to graduate school, or maybe I'd become a midwife, which is something I'd been interested in for a long time. But instead, one of our dearest friends called to tell us that they were adopting two little boys from Ethiopia. Now, in this gap of many, many years, there's so much to this story. But I really was a very, I would say, very bitter birth mom. I felt like adoption had pretty much destroyed my life. And I had this incredible opportunity. Well, I don't know what you'd call it, maybe not an opportunity, but my son actually found me when he was 16.

[00:11:24.790] - Lisa C. Qualls

That was the most complicated, unexpected, beautiful, broken, very messy situation because his parents, for many reasons, were not receptive to our relationship. So come all the way forward to my friend telling me that they're going to adopt, and I felt something open in my heart. And I thought, Wow, I'm already doing this. I love being a mom. We have this beautiful family so filled with love. We could do this. Maybe this is what God is calling us to. And so we began the process of adoption. We planned to adopt two little boys. We ended up adopting two little boys and a little girl. And then when we went to meet our children for the first time, we met another little girl and we returned a year later and adopted her. So I am a former foster youth, a first/birth mom, however you want to call it, and an adoptive mom. What I see as the thread through it all is just God's incredible love and redemption and just this incredible winding road that he's had me on through all these years.

[00:12:47.900] - Suzanne Stabile

Wow. That's a lot.

[00:12:51.400] - Joel Stabile

That is a lot.

[00:12:52.320] - Suzanne Stabile

That is a lot. And there's a lot to talk about in that, but there's so much more I want you to talk about. I do want to respond by saying that I am glad that in all the beauty and the goodness of what you have both experienced in every way that you're each connected to adoption, it's still messy. I'm 72. I just saw the first picture of my biological father. He died a long time ago. I just found out that I have a living half brother, but the contact from me to him has not been responded to yet. And it's just messy. It's all messy. I have four children. They're all married. They all live here. We have nine grandchildren. We're fixin' to have another one. And it's just messy. And the idea... And my adoption was as good as it gets. My dad delivered me, took me home from the hospital. They adopted me. The whole thing, they were fabulous parents. It's as good as it gets, and it's still messy. I want to start off by saying that I love your work so much because you're not just tipping your hat to the fact that it's messy, but you chose to find out why it's so messy and what some of the solutions are. I would love to hear the two of you talk about that for all the minutes that we have.

[00:14:35.030] - Joel Stabile

How did you all meet each other and form The Adoption Connection and where'd it go from there? And I'm sorry, Lisa is a 3. So that we've got the filter, 3 and a 7, which, by the way, great combination and now go.

[00:14:52.550] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, it is. And it's been really helpful to know that, I think, in the work that we do together. So someone sent me a Jamey Ivy episode podcast years ago before I knew anything about what a podcast was or is. And she had some fabulous people on there and they were all famous, I thought. And I thought there are so many other stories out there that could be told. And if she can figure out how to have a podcast, I probably could too. And so I started one and it just had this adoption thread woven through it, even though that was not how I meant for it to start out. And I had been following Lisa for a long time. We were both adoption bloggers in the day where blogging was the main platform for moms who were stuck at home and needed an outlet and a voice. And she kept saying, I'm thinking about a podcast, but I don't know how I would start it. And I realized I could start us a podcast. And she actually was a guest on my podcast where she told her birth parents story for maybe the first time super publicly. You had really been more of an adoptive mom to people than a birth mom. And the more we started talking and getting to know each other, what happened after all those adoptions for both of us is, like Suzanne, you said, things got really messy for both of us and in different ways and in some similar ways. What we realized through the messy were a couple of things. One was that there was a huge gap in support and resources in what we really needed practically for some of the really messy things that had gone on in our homes. The short and long of it is our kids came to us with an incredible amount of adversity that had happened early in their lives, some of it in people's control, some of it not. Even our youngest son who had adoring foster parents, we were his fifth primary caregivers by the time he was two and a half. I didn't understand at the time what a toll that takes on the nervous system to try to attach to that many people and then be ripped away from them all those times. And the behaviors in our house were just so, so big.

[00:17:24.870] - Melissa Corkum

I had stuff from my past. I didn't know the enneagram. And if someone had told me, I would look like a really unhealthy one in all of that stress, I think that would have been really helpful to know ahead of time. So I take a lot of responsibility for some of the chaos that ensued in our house. And I'll let Lisa finish the story. The other part of that is we realized that in all of that, we as moms had hit this wall of lack of feeling in all that chaos. And as we started talking about it more between the two of us and then more publicly, that there were a lot of other people who felt the same way. And so that brought us... We started The Adoption Connection thinking, we'll just start an adoption podcast together. That's how God got us. Then here we are four years, it'll be five years in August that the podcast started, but it has brought us into deeper work and our own transformation and work for other families that we just never, I think, saw coming down the pike.

[00:18:38.320] - Joel Stabile

Before we get too far away from it, you talked about a lack of feeling in all the chaos. As an enneagram 3 and 7, how do you differentiate between blocked care and what you are talking about and just your personality? I have a lack of feeling, unfortunately, but it's different. Does that question

make sense?

[00:19:01.880] - Suzanne Stabile

Well, it does. I'll add to that with my question, and then we'd love to hear you respond. But my question is, Melissa, you talked about taking responsibility for a lot of the chaos. Actually, my question is, isn't everybody responsible in their way? But the thing that the enneagram offers is a way to see what your part is. Along with the other tools that you all offer, the thing I love about the enneagram is that you can see yourself behave well and behave badly. When you can name the reason, the understanding of yourself for the bad behavior, that's pretty great. I know you're tipping your hat to that, Melissa. I think there's a... Like, Melissa and Joel deal with feelings in the same way according to enneagram wisdom. But there is a third way that goes with being a 3, and that is to understand and feel the feelings and then try to not have those feelings affect how you move forward. That's what I'd like to hear the two of you continue to talk about as we move forward. Melissa, because I know you and love you and have spent a good deal of time with you, I hear you say, unhealthy 1, and I take responsibility for a lot of the chaos at that time. I bet you have responsibility for a good bit in unhealthy 1 space. But also, my guess would be that what your oneness was calling you to was structure in order that you couldn't get to.

[00:20:56.020] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, absolutely. I think the more I couldn't get to it, the more it looked unhealthy for me to try to force people to get there.

[00:21:07.030] - Suzanne Stabile

Right.

[00:21:08.010] - Melissa Corkum

Lisa, do you want to talk a little bit about how we even learned about what Blocked Care was? Talk about that blog post.

[00:21:14.710] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah. But I wanted to reflect on something Suzanne just asked about. I was thinking, I didn't know the enneagram back in the early days of our adopting, but I think deep in myself, one of the great struggles I was having is that I really had a strong identity as a good mom. I was a really good mom, and I ran a good household, a big family, and I homeschooled. And yes, it was all the normal family stuff, but I felt really good about it. And then we brought home kids who had so much adversity and so much trauma. And in their fear, they were protecting themselves and functioning as well as they could. But the behaviors were big. And the family that we were, we were pretty shredded. It was a shock. And very quickly, I tried to keep us all in that box of, This is the family we are, and this is the family we are, and this is how we look, and this is how we go to church, and this is how we educate our kids. And there was no way. Everything just exploded. And so my identity, my way of being in the world as a good mom was just gone. And I think I didn't understand yet that that's how I felt loved was through approval and through success and all these things. I didn't know that about myself. I just knew I was used to going for what I wanted and doing well and succeeding. And all of a sudden it was all out of my control. And I had to learn an entirely new way of parenting. But in the midst of that, Melissa mentioned that we were both bloggers. I started blogging way back. Go ahead.

[00:23:20.480] - Suzanne Stabile

Well, I just wonder how old the children were.

[00:23:27.300] - 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.

[00:24:00.240] - Melissa Corkum

This episode is sponsored by our book *Reclaim Compassion: the Adoptive Parent's 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](http://reclaimcompassion.com/assessment).

[00:24:31.930] - Lisa C. Qualls

Our kids, at the age as they came home, were 5 months, 23 months, 5 and a half, and 10. All from Ethiopia, all biologically unrelated, all from orphanages. And then we did later foster a teen girl also for two and a half years.

[00:24:54.060] - Melissa Corkum

And Lisa, how old were your kids by birth when you guys came home from Ethiopia, roughly?

[00:25:01.050] - Lisa C. Qualls

Our oldest daughter was 20, and our youngest daughter was, I believe, 4. She was four and a half or so, right around there. So she was sandwiched between our two older adopted girls and our two younger adopted boys.

[00:25:20.900] - Suzanne Stabile

Okay, thank you. That's very helpful.

[00:25:23.790] - Lisa C. Qualls

Okay. So anyhow, back in 2006, I started blogging. And really back then, that was how we did community. We didn't do social media the way we do now. We responded to each other's blog posts, and that's how we knew each other. I used to do these Tuesday topics. And a woman wrote a very brave question, and she asked me, she said, What do I do if I don't like my child? I was like, Whoa, I don't know that I can go there because this could get... Well, it might make me look bad for one thing. Also, it could get really messy. But I thought, That's a really honest question. And so I posted it, and the responses just flooded in. So many responses where people started getting really honest. Yeah, they were committed to their kids. They were taking good care of them. They even loved them. But liking them and wanting to be around them was a whole different thing. And there were a lot of parents experiencing despair, like, how am I going to go on? How am I going to do this? And so that was the very, very beginning before we even knew it had a name, before I knew there was something called blocked care. But it was the beginning for me of thinking, Something is happening in these parents who are struggling at this level because nobody can imagine they're ever not going to like their child. That's not who we are. That's why, why would we adopt if we ever imagined we'd get to that point? So anyhow, after Melissa and I teamed up, we talked about this a whole lot. And then we found out that it actually had a name.

[00:27:13.740] - Suzanne Stabile

It's fascinating how hard it is to say, this is really hard and it's hurting other people I love, and I'm trying to do the right thing. And in God's faithfulness, why isn't that working? I think it requires a lot of courage to say to a community, the wider community, not necessarily the community that formed immediately around that person's question, but the wider community sees adoption as where it starts. Now, you all correct me if this is not how you think, but I think the wider community sees adoption as so generous and so loving and so kind and so I don't know how you do it. And it's all so beautiful. And then when you pull back the curtain, it's we don't know how we're doing it either. And it's not always beautiful. And we have it now to do. And I'm hoping with my work this year that it will add to the conversations that you all have been having for a longer time about how very challenging and messy this is at a time when we have so many children worldwide but here in the United States who are being fostered and who need adoption and homes. And it's a very big topic.

[00:28:44.840] - Joel Stabile

When you were talking there, you said about your identity being that you're a good mom. I can remember, I don't remember the day or where I was or anything like that. I had said something similar

from a different perspective. I was like, I'm a good dad. I thought I was a good dad. I was trying to be a good dad. It was very important to me that when I was doing other things in the world that probably weren't the best, I was like, but I'm still a good dad. Then I remember the day that I had the realization around parenting, not that I wasn't a good dad, but that sometimes it doesn't matter. That you can be the best dad in the world and it's still really hard. There's not a justice or right or wrong to it. It actually came up recently in an AA meeting where someone was talking about, they're doing all this stuff, they're doing things and life is still really hard. I was like, yeah.

[00:29:47.920] - Suzanne Stabile

It is hard. And I think it's interesting to hear Lisa as a 3 and Melissa as a 7, because you can hear this baseline that they operate from where one is success and one is actually, this 7 idea of look at all of this opportunity and what happened to the opportunity. And/or, Wow, I don't really want people to know that I'm not successful, because that's the 3 thing. All right, you all keep going. I want you to say everything you can real fast.

[00:30:29.260] - Lisa C. Qualls

Well, touching on that 3 thing, I truly did not want anybody to know how bad things were. I was afraid to ask for help because I didn't want anybody to know. And besides, all of these people in our community had raised money for us. And here I was failing. I hardly recognized myself some days. Everything changed so dramatically. I think it was a bit of a very much a dismantling, I guess, of the life I had and who I thought I was. And it was painful.

[00:31:09.880] - Suzanne Stabile

I was very taken by the fact that you said our family was shredded. That's a very descriptive, really big word. And I keep hearing stories where families are shredded by trying to do the right thing and make it work somehow. I don't know if you all notice this in your conversations with one another, but, Lisa, do you ever notice that while you're feeling shame, Melissa is reframing?

[00:31:43.500] - Lisa C. Qualls

Oh, yeah. She's amazing. And she has all this energy. She can just make it. And I'm just like, I don't think I could say that. I mean, there's a limit to how much I'm going to reveal about my failures. And Melissa is just all out there. She's got it all figured out. It's really interesting. I am more cautious, too, because failure is unbearable. And she's willing to take risks, so she pushes me pretty far.

[00:32:12.450] - Suzanne Stabile

Yeah. You all are a good team for this.

[00:32:15.510] - Joel Stabile

Just one quick note on reframing. I realized this morning I'm driving down here to the Micah Center, and I've got this system I've got where after I drop off kids on this one route, I've got all my different routes. And I was like, All right, if I can get over, because traffic is so awful, if I can get over in this one spot, then this is the way I'd like to go because it's quicker. However, and then I'm driving, I'm like, But if I can't and I have to go a little bit on his way, at least I could stop over by the post office. There's always a good reframe and things as small as that and things as big as what we're talking about today.

[00:32:54.250] - Suzanne Stabile

Yeah. It's much easier for you and Melissa to be hopeful than it is in my triad with 2s, 3s and 4s.

[00:33:05.760] - Joel Stabile

Can you talk some, too? I love this processing the gap between expectations and reality. When you have the environment that you all have and the story you have, and then we're talking about how hard it is, and then you've got taking care of yourself, taking care of biological kids, taking care of your spouse, taking care of adopted kids, taking care of the unit as a whole. Is there a hierarchy to that and how to manage and how to take care of everything and manage the expectation versus reality?

[00:33:43.880] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. I mean, there's so much wrapped up in all of that. I think the first question you asked, Joel, about hierarchy. I think, especially because we both came from pretty conservative Christian backgrounds, that we came in expecting that we could take care of all the people and back burner ourselves for as long as it took to get everyone transitioned, adjusted, and relatively stable. I think part of the expectation, at least on my end, was that that would be super 7 optimism, which said probably not that long. I don't really think I even had put a number on that, but it was like, however long it is, I'm pretty sure we can survive doing hard things for however long it takes. And I think I was thinking no more than a year, maybe two. And the thing is more of our kids are over 18 and legally adults now than not. And parenting is just as messy, just as complicated, and requires just as much energy. And my story is that we hit... I mean, I didn't just hit blocked care. I hit an all time mental health low, and it had to do with that exact thing, which was I was pouring out, pouring out, pouring out. I had no idea what was doing to my nervous system. I had no idea about the enneagram and my stress move. And it just got uglier and uglier and uglier. And so when we started doing this work together and we decided that it could be not just a podcast, but more services to families, we struggled a lot because we were like, We can't even figure out our own kids and their behaviors some days. And so how are we going to get people to pay us money to help them when there's no guarantee? It's not like we can put a money back guarantee that if you do steps A, B, and C, then your kids will turn out the way that you would like them to or start behaving better than they were before you found us.

[00:35:55.960] - Melissa Corkum

So through all that wrestling, we realized that what we could do was help parents, mostly moms, but we're working more and more with dads, that we as parents have to be the stable foundation for our families. And that the needs of our kids can be so high that if we just pour into them, the return on investment there is not always what we want it to be. But the return on investment for investing in ourselves is much, much greater. And if we can be the stable foundation and there's so much neuroscience around this and around how our nervous system affects other people's nervous systems, that we cannot discount our own personal work, whether it be spiritual work, enneagram work, which I think is closely tied to spiritual work, just eating well and exercising, getting enough sleep, all of that matters immensely. So I don't know, at least if you have anything to add to that. But it's so much easier said than done, first of all.

[00:37:03.900] - Lisa C. Qualls

Absolutely. And one of the other things we've done for people is we've created community. Community where people can be honest and vulnerable with one another. Because as long as we're all pretending everything is fine, we are no good to each other. I've parented kids I've given birth to. I've parented a foster daughter. I've parented my adopted children. Parenting is complicated. It can be super hard. And especially for some of us who have these really large families. I mean, the age range between my oldest and youngest is 20 years. So Russ and I have had children. We've been parenting in our home for 36 years. We'll have been married 39 years in June. And we need space where we can really hear each other and we can say, I get it. I've been there and support one another. People in our community and people who come to us, they get support from us. And we have some other parent coaches, including a phenomenal dad who's on our team. But they have each other and we've given them this beautiful safe space where they can support each other.

[00:38:23.750] - Joel Stabile

When you're talking, especially, Melissa, it made me remember the countless number of times at workshops that people have gotten up during Q&A and said, I'm a 7 and my daughter... Most of the time it's women. I'm not trying to be sexist. I'm a 7 and my daughter's... Actually, it's usually flipped. I'm whatever number and my daughter is seven. And how do I help her? Blah, blah, blah. And every single time that I can ever remember, your answer has been, you've got to be the best whatever your enneagram number you can be to help her. It's not about helping her and her number, but you being healthy yourself. And that just really came screaming back to me while you were talking.

[00:39:06.610] - Suzanne Stabile

Yeah. That's so unfortunate. It is. And it's the only answer I know.

[00:39:12.950] - Lisa C. Qualls



Right. We have to do our own work. I have to. Melissa and I always tell people you need a therapist and a spiritual director and a community around you.

[00:39:22.370] - Suzanne Stabile  
Can't do it any other way. And I...

[00:39:25.240] - Joel Stabile  
I think you got to start adding that to your spiel. Because Suzanne always says, I bet it's in every single podcast episode for the last decade, everyone needs a therapist and spiritual director and add community to it.

[00:39:40.870] - Suzanne Stabile  
Usually here we talk about that because we talk about the Micha Center as a place for solitary work that can't be done alone. So that's what we're doing here. But I am going to add that line if it's okay with the two of you.

[00:39:52.700] - Melissa Corkum  
I'm pretty sure we took therapist and spiritual director from you.

[00:39:55.540] - Suzanne Stabile  
Okay, great.

[00:39:57.670] - Lisa C. Qualls  
Although we both have one. Actually, I'm in the process of becoming a spiritual director. So that's an exciting.

[00:40:02.140] - Suzanne Stabile  
That is a good thing. Okay, I got some notes here. One of the things I'm aware of, Melissa, is that 5s, 6s and 7s, you and Joel, are dutiful. You do things out of duty and out of a sense of duty. I don't know a lot, but what I have learned from you and from others from South Korea who have been in workshops or in cohorts that I've done, is that you also are carrying a lot of dutiful responses to family. So you have four generations. So it's not just you and children. It's you and children and parents, and now children of children. So here's the question. Is the fact that you see it as your duty to do certain things, how much of your motivation is that? I want to leave that on the table while I include Lisa, and then we'll see where we go. Lisa, we don't have that. Our motivation comes from a different place than that. It then begs the question of the difference in what motivated the two of you. Then my third piece is, what is your motivation? What was it for making the choices that you made? And what is it now for doing the work that you're doing? And I realized I just asked 10 questions, and that's because I didn't want to interrupt again.

[00:41:40.390] - Melissa Corkum  
I'll start. I think it's really interesting to think about the dutiful piece. I'm going to do a little bit more thinking about it. But on first pass, when I've told the story, it actually hasn't been out of duty. It's been this very 7, and my husband with 8 that access to the 7 wing of like, sure, we'll do that. I'm sure it'll work out. When we moved in with my parents, it started because we were trying to do this housing project that required us not to live in the house we were in. And so we moved in with them out of necessity. And as a 7 who hates the mundane and specifically hates chores in general, and my mom, who's probably a social 9 and just loves to give, and she cleans for therapy, and it was so easy to live with them. And we couldn't have done it with any set of parents. My parents were just really easy going and had really good boundaries and let us be our individual selves while also... They felt like they had the better end of the deal because they got to live with their grandchildren. And we felt like we had the better end of the deal because we got babysitting and cleaning wrapped up into the deal. And so it started out as temporary, and it was so good for everyone that we made it permanent. So it started with that. And the adoption for my husband was this very logical, there are so many kids that need homes in the world, so why keep reproducing them when there's already so many there? And I mean, if you could have heard us, Suzanne, when we put our application in to adopt our kids from Ethiopia, he doesn't remember quite this way. Maybe this is a 7 reframe, but I remember sitting at the

computer going, they're asking us how many children we'd like to adopt and him going, I mean, just put down three. I'm sure it'll be fine. That's probably the max that we could have in our home. And so we might as well do it all at once because it's better to do it all at once than to financially then to do them three separate times. And it was like, Well, now they're asking what ages we're willing to take. And we had already adopted a toddler, and it was very, very difficult on our family. We had a history of doing high school ministry. We love teenagers. All of our kids love teenagers. And it was like, I don't know, just put, we'll do whatever we can handle whatever they need us to do. So just put three children, any age, any age any gender, anything, we'll do anything. And I was like, Okay, that sounds fun.

[00:44:36.870] - Suzanne Stabile

Wow. I don't know how many times you said that one of you or both of you said, I'm sure it'll be fine. I'm sure it's going to be fine.

[00:44:46.160] - Melissa Corkum

I know. And you know what? And that expectation and reality, when we hit the wall, Suzanne, where things were not fine in 2015, it devastated us because we didn't know how to live in a world where we couldn't make it fine, where we couldn't get to where it was livable. And we had just put up with a lot, and we lived through a lot. And when we got backed into a corner where everything was chaotic, no one was safe, and we had reached out to literally every person we knew how to reach out to. We opened three social service cases on ourselves in 18 months and had social workers that were like, I don't know how to help you. We had no idea what to do with it.

[00:45:40.500] - Suzanne Stabile

Okay, I want to throw in something here that I know we're going to get back if I don't do it. I just want to say that there can also be chaos and things are not fine in homes where there are no adopted children. I also want to say that there are times with my biological children, they're all very different from one another. And there were some challenging moments when things were chaotic and I thought, I don't know how to deal with this. And nobody, no mom, I think, or dad, wants to say, This kid's too much for me right now. I want not a day off. I want six months off. And of course, you can't have it. But you get to say out loud that you want it, but people don't. Instead, we put on this face of it's all great. And oh, yeah, we have, I don't know, 11. I don't know how many children you all have anymore, 16, 21, and everything's fine. I seem to continue to hear stories about lots of encouragement on one side of adoption for families to take more children. Then when things get chaotic and there's need and desperation, then there's not a lot of support on the other side of that. You all are fairly honest about that, too, which I'm very grateful for.

[00:47:21.370] - Joel Stabile

The very good Reverend Dr. Andy Stoker was here this weekend, and he popped in the office just to say hi. I was like, Yeah, it's good. You know doing this and this. He goes, Anything I can do for you? Any way I can help? I was like, I don't know. Tag in for me for a couple of weeks and I can just go away and handle some things. That'd be helpful. That'd be great. Outside of that, I don't think so. I just wanted to chime in on give my two cents on the whole dutiful bit. I think it is, and the two of you can answer this better than I can, the three of you actually, it goes back to, I think for me, feelings and emotions trump duty for you all.

[00:48:03.350] - Suzanne Stabile

For Lisa and me?

[00:48:04.700] - Joel Stabile

Yeah, they do. For 2s and 3s and 4s. That feelings and emotions trump duty. And, Melissa, when you were talking there, you talked about your husband being logical and like, okay, put this and logic, the absence of the feelings and emotions means that you're going to do what you got to do no matter how you feel about it.

[00:48:21.640] - Suzanne Stabile

And, even if you're not dutiful, you're responsible. I'm responsible for this so I got to figure out a way

to do it. And then you can't.

[00:48:32.250] - Joel Stabile

Man, I can just find myself in average to below average one space right there of being dutiful because I have to and a victim.

[00:48:43.610] - Suzanne Stabile

Well, I think, Melissa, I don't know if you felt this, but I have. I felt like, too, as an adopted child, there's not room that doesn't have some hooks in it to question all of this stuff. It's like when you're so grateful to have been adopted, then what happens in all of these family systems where things are just really, really complicated and people who should have answers don't? I don't know who those people are, but it seems like there should be people who do have answers. And so you two just got together and said, Well, we're going to find some. And so I'd love for you to talk about the answers that you found.

[00:49:38.760] - Lisa C. Qualls

I can comment a little bit about that. When we were struggling and things were very unbelievably hard in our family. We were able to find an incredible therapist, probably one of the very best in the country, adoption therapist in Seattle, Deborah Gray. And then I had the amazing opportunity to meet Dr. Karyn Purvis from TCU, and get to know her work and get to know her, which later led to co-write a book with her, which I still can't even believe that that happened. But we wrote *The Connected Parent* together. But I think what is unique about what Melissa and I do is I am so grateful for all the researchers and the professionals and the really wise people who have helped us understand how to parent children with this degree of trauma and wounding and some neurodivergence and all these things. But what was missing in all of that was that none of them were living my life. None of them were afraid to get out of bed in the morning because we didn't know if we were going to make it through that day. And so what I think, Melissa, I have done...

[00:51:08.440] - Suzanne Stabile

Lisa, I'm sorry, but will you say that again? I want to make sure everybody hears you say what you just said. So please just back up. I can't hit rewind, but I need to because the integrity of the honesty of that answer, people will hear who haven't heard their experience yet.

[00:51:33.440] - Lisa C. Qualls

If I can remember, I think what I said was as much as I deeply value all that the professionals have done for us, none of them were living my life. I can remember going to bed at night and just crying and then holding Russ's hand and saying, Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. We were hanging by a thread. I could cry just thinking about it. And I think where, Melissa and I, what we have done. We bring this very real experience, the real life of taking everything we've learned from all the amazing professionals and applying it to the very best of our ability and walking it out every single day. And I think that that's what was missing in the gap that we fill.

[00:52:27.840] - Suzanne Stabile

The line that I wanted to hear again, along with what you said, was afraid to get out of bed in the morning.

[00:52:35.580] - Joel Stabile

Yeah. I bet in editing, I can just pull the clip and move it right around there.

[00:52:38.820] - Lisa C. Qualls

Would you like me to say it again?

[00:52:43.600] - Joel Stabile

No, it's all good. Yeah. For you listeners, go ahead and hang on one second.

[00:52:45.820] - Lisa C. Qualls

But it's true.

[00:52:46.860] - Joel Stabile

And now it's happened. When you say that, someone else is out there saying, Yes, I didn't want to get out of bed today. And the thing that just keeps coming screaming back to me over these past few months as we've had these discussions is just the uniqueness. I think that's why there's no... You talk about it with church a lot how if someone hands you the laminated ten steps to get to heaven, whatever, how you don't trust it. And that's out there. People are like, I've got the answers. I wouldn't trust someone as far as family stuff goes. They're like, I've got the answer. Here's what we did, and it will work for you. It's like, You're not me and you're not my kids and you're not in our situation.

[00:53:34.750] - Suzanne Stabile

And there's no way it's working perfectly for you. That's the other one.

[00:53:38.190] - Joel Stabile

When we talk about if there was another... As you know, man, I'm thinking about Andy a lot today. I love how we always like to personalize it. There might be another person out there who is divorced, remarried, has this kid situation that I have, all that. But they're not an enneagram 7 or the son of Jo and Suzanne, or living in Plano, or also in Alcohol, all the things. That's right. What I love the most from what I've heard, read from you all and heard from you is it's just like, let's ask the questions together. Let's find, like you said, solutions together in community. Not, oh, here's what you got to do. Here's sitting potty training. Oh, my gosh. And there's a perfect example.

[00:54:26.610] - Suzanne Stabile

Yeah, that's all different at two. And yet at the same time, you all do have some suggestions that I think people can hold on to. And so talking about... Man, I don't know how much time we have.

[00:54:46.950] - Joel Stabile

I was just about to say, just to manage time, we got 10 minutes.

[00:54:50.170] - Suzanne Stabile

Okay, I'm not going to say another word, I hope. But I would love for you to talk about blocked care. And of course, we're going to tell everybody how to get in touch with all the work that you do. But I want them to hear you talk about blocked care before we just add that to something for them to look into and look for from you. Please.

[00:55:11.700] - Lisa C. Qualls

Do you want to define it for people?

[00:55:14.330] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. We've talked around it. And so I think it lends itself to people maybe getting a feel for what it is. But it is something that happens in a specifically a parent's nervous system. It's subconscious, which is the most important part that we get parents to really reflect on. This isn't because you're a bad parent. This is your body's survival mechanism. It happens when your nervous system is so overwhelmed that some of the parts of caregiving that we associate with good and successful parenting become harder and harder to access. And so that overwhelmed feeling can be from COVID. We all just are coming out of and have lived through and are living through something that was extraordinarily overwhelming for a lot of people. It could be behaviors from a child because their nervous system is overwhelmed. It could be a sickness or a lost job or divorce. There are lots of reasons this happens, and it doesn't just happen in adoptive families. But I think the rate at which it's happening is higher in the families where there's adopted and foster kids.

[00:56:45.490] - Suzanne Stabile

There was a time when with one of my children, if the phone rang and it was before we had cell phones, it was caller ID on the phone. If it was the school, literally, I would have a... What's that called? A panic attack? No, but that thing...

[00:57:04.760] - Joel Stabile

Heart skips a beat?

[00:57:06.220] - Suzanne Stabile

Yeah. I'll think of it, maybe or maybe not, but I could feel it in my whole body just by seeing the number come up on caller ID, so

[00:57:14.770] - Lisa C. Qualls

I can relate to that.

[00:57:16.420] - Suzanne Stabile

Yes. So I'm just saying other people can relate to that, too, if they know what we're talking about. Okay, keep going.

[00:57:23.750] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah. So the term itself was coined by Jonathan Baylin and Dan Hughes, and they talk about it in a number of their books. And so that's when I first read about it. I put it together with some of the stuff Lisa and I had been talking about, specifically that blog post. I was like, Lisa, it has a name. And that just took us on this journey. And the short and long of it is that once we know about it, knowing JIO, knowing to have the battle, then there are things. It's not an easy fix, but there are things that we can be aware of. And there's small intentional steps we can do, we call it nervous system care for parents that help their nervous system, instead of being closed up and so self protective, start to open up again. And we wrote a book about it. And it's a journey, right? We say in the book, it's not like you read the book from beginning to end and you're like, oh, I got it. This is it. But it just gives words. Dan Siegel would say, Name it to tame it. It gives words to people's experience so they can realize they're not alone, so they can understand. For those of us in the head triad, we can put some logic and understanding behind what's going on and then gives people intentional things. We call them practices because it's like spiritual practices. It's not like, I do centering prayer today and then the thing that I want to change happens tomorrow. It's like, now I need to integrate this into my day to day. And it's the thing that keeps me open and available to my relationships instead of being closed off and protective.

[00:59:04.800] - Lisa C. Qualls

And I think one of the gifts that we give people, especially for those of us in the heart triad, is we really help people shed the shame. I mean, parents carry so much shame. They can't understand why they feel the way they feel, and they don't recognize themselves. And of course, some parents feel a lot of fear and some feel a lot of anger. And of course, it all swirls together. But when we can name it and we can tell people this is what's happening and it is not about your character, your lack of faith, it's actually neuroscience. And we can help you find your way back.

[00:59:48.180] - Suzanne Stabile

And the enneagram fits perfectly with that because of the reality of the fact that shame, fear, and anger are default emotions. So you feel that without even knowing that you're feeling it, and then you go with it. And they all three lead someplace that's not particularly helpful.

[01:00:07.730] - Lisa C. Qualls

Right.

[01:00:09.000] - Joel Stabile

You talked about self care several times.

[01:00:12.120] - Suzanne Stabile

Adrenaline rush. Sorry. There we go. There it is. That's what I had when the phone number came up. Sorry. I'd hate to have to edit me. All right.

[01:00:25.760] - Joel Stabile

No, that's taken in. Speaking of self care. One of the things I forget which one of you provided it, but you said under spiritual practices or disciplines that you integrate in your life, hand lettering. I was like,

what the hell is hand lettering?

[01:00:44.410] - Melissa Corkum  
That was me.

[01:00:45.610] - Lisa C. Qualls  
That was not me, man. I'm all about efficiency. I don't have time.

[01:00:50.430] - Joel Stabile  
For that. Yeah. I need to hear some about hand lettering, please, just so I know what it is.

[01:00:55.190] - Melissa Corkum  
You need to get on Instagram, Joel. But it's like the beautiful... It's like where handwriting becomes like drawing and an art. It's like fancy forms of... Well, calligraphy is a form of it, but there's so much more to be had in the hand letterings. The possibilities are endless. Maybe that's why I like it so much. But it's very visual. Suzanne, I don't know if you're one of people in the head triad like to catalog things and they're visual. I don't know. Yeah. And that's me. I can put up with a lot of auditory chaos and my desk faces our bed with a bedroom office and I hate things that have to be done every day, like chores, but I have to make the bed every day now because I have to look at it all day.

[01:01:42.730] - Suzanne Stabile  
I've always loved making the bed every day. That's my 1 wing. I think it's such a great thing to do. Joel used to sleep on top of the covers as a child, so he wouldn't have to make his.

[01:01:52.560] - Melissa Corkum  
That is a classic 7 move.

[01:01:55.490] - Lisa C. Qualls  
I did that too. I slept in a sleeping bag on top of my bed when I was a teenager, and every morning I'd just shove it in the closet. I didn't want to waste time with making it.

[01:02:04.160] - Suzanne Stabile  
Yeah, there you go.

[01:02:07.320] - Joel Stabile  
Suzanne, what would you want to wrap up the conversation today with?

[01:02:12.090] - Suzanne Stabile  
I would just say that I've discovered while I've been spending this year looking at trauma and family systems and adoption and fostering and all those things that one word that I keep using more and more and more and more than I didn't before is integrity. I think it's because we live in a culture, and you two are perfect numbers to do it. Thank God you don't, where we dress everything up so that we can look like we've got it all together and everything is fine, and then everything that's happening at home becomes a secret. The more darkness and secretive nature you have around the reality of the struggles that we have in our lives, then I believe the worse they get. I'm so thankful for both of you and for your work. I respect it totally and fully and completely. I recommend it highly to not just adoptive and foster parents, but to parents because there is chaos in a lot of homes where there are only biological children. We need to get away from how great it all is and talk about how it really is so that we can build a community. Because a community built on dishonesty and a lack of integrity will never last.

[01:03:50.380] - Joel Stabile  
Thank you all so much. Like I said, we'll do it again because especially I feel like nibbles at all the things. There are several different things that could have spent 20 minutes on this one sentence or this one topic or this one area. So we just got to get into it more next time.

[01:04:08.060] - Suzanne Stabile

I feel like the whole thing was topic sentences for a paragraph.

[01:04:11.740] - Joel Stabile  
We've got the outline now.

[01:04:12.630] - Suzanne Stabile  
Yeah, exactly.

[01:04:14.270] - Joel Stabile  
For our three hour show.

[01:04:16.170] - Lisa C. Qualls  
Thank you all. It's been a huge honor. Thank you so much for having us.

[01:04:19.680] - Suzanne Stabile  
Thanks again for joining us. We'll look forward to next time.

[01:04:23.640] - 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 theadoptionconnection.com/Facebook.

[01:04:39.170] - Lisa C. Qualls  
Thanks so much for listening. We love having you. Remember, you're a good parent doing good work.

[01:04:47.570] - Melissa Corkum  
The music for the podcast is called New Day and was created by Lee Rosevere.