

[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.

[00:00:09.990] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:19.600] - Lisa C. Qualls

Well, hello, friends. Welcome to today's episode of the Adoption Connection podcast. I have a special guest today. Her name is Amy J. Brown. She is a writer, a mentor, and co host of her own podcast called Take Heart. She's the author of the book, the *The Other Side of Special: Navigating the Messy, Emotional, and Joy Filled Life of a Special Needs Mom*. I imagine that title right there has you all interested. Amy has a Master's degree in spiritual formation and leadership, and she shares honestly about adoption and parenting children with mental health issues and trauma. She is the mother of six children and she lives with her husband in Michigan. So, Amy, welcome to the podcast.

[00:01:00.500] - Amy J. Brown

Thank you so much for having me. I'm thrilled to be here, Lisa. Thanks.

[00:01:04.300] - Lisa C. Qualls

Well, I'm thrilled to have you here, so it's good. Can you just tell us who makes up your family?

[00:01:10.640] - Amy J. Brown

Well, I, as you said, live in Michigan, and I am mother to six. The first three are biological, and they are 30, 28, I always have to think about this, and 23. And then we adopted. So we have three adopted children that range in age from 21 to 17. We have transracial adoptees. We adopted both our girls domestically, but they are African American. And then we have a son who we adopted from an orphanage in Bulgaria when he was 10. So the range of my adoptive kids, they have some mental health issues, some attachment issues, some physical disabilities. So that is that I say sometimes six feels like 12 at times because even adult kids, as you know, they need you. I live with my husband in Michigan. We were high school sweethearts. We had the same fetal pig in anatomy class, and that's how we met. So we've been married a really long time.

[00:02:16.520] - Lisa C. Qualls

Tell me how many years.

[00:02:18.360] - Amy J. Brown

It'll be 37. We got married as babies. So that is who I am and our family. And two of my kids are married, so I do have in laws but no grandchildren yet.

[00:02:34.310] - Lisa C. Qualls

Okay. Well, you know, Russ and I are high school sweethearts as well. We did not meet over a fetal pig. We met in a youth choir at church. And we married as undergrads. Same thing, but we're celebrating our 39th.

[00:02:49.720] - Amy J. Brown

Oh, wow. So yeah, you're ahead of me a little bit. I always say I don't remember a time I didn't know him. It seems that way.

[00:02:56.890] - Lisa C. Qualls

I tell Russ he's the keeper of all my memories.

[00:03:00.010] - Amy J. Brown

That's so true.

[00:03:00.630] - Lisa C. Qualls

Just been together so long. It's a beautiful thing. Well, you've written a book about parenting kids with

all kinds of different needs, and you touched on that just a little bit. But I'm wondering, when you adopted, did you know that you were going to have kids with all kinds of different needs?

[00:03:22.120] - Amy J. Brown

Absolutely not. When you start to adopt and you start filling out all the paperwork and they ask questions, Would you take this? Would you take that? And how hard that decision is to make. We didn't know what we were doing. We felt called to adopt. When we adopted our first child, we filled out all the paperwork. One thing I remember very specifically, putting a big fat note to was fetal alcohol syndrome, because I remembered it from nursing school. I didn't know that much about it. So we never had an idea that that's what we would get because there was no reported history of that. I did not have a good idea of what trauma did to children. I had this naïve idea, and I'm not like disparaging myself. It's the story I was told that, Oh, you're just going to love them. Everything's just going to be fine. And I just thought, I parent my bio kids well, I'll just do the same thing. So for the girls, we had no idea. And then for our son, he has something called Arthrogryposis, which is a virus they get in utero and it looks like polio. So he has some physical disabilities. I knew that going in because he was 10. Honestly, that's not been very hard. The more difficult aspect has been the trauma from being in an orphanage. So no, we had no idea. Not a bit.

[00:04:57.740] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah, I think many people listening are thinking, Oh, yes, I remember when I didn't know. And then as life continues, it begins to dawn on you that things are not just temporarily different, but very different. And do you have any moment or memory of a time when you were like, Oh, we are in, maybe even over our heads. This was not what we imagined.

[00:05:30.150] - Amy J. Brown

I would say, well, first of all, you said we have those moments when we didn't know. And then maybe we have a moment where we think we know. We've gotten one diagnosis and we're hitting the ground running. I had moments like that where I got another nebulous diagnosis and I learned all about it. I think it took us... I don't know if it's a specific moment. It was a series of steps to we are not able to handle what is happening in our house. I just kept trying to run over the next hurdle of if I just change this one thing, then it might be the key to behavior. Our oldest daughter has reactive attachment disorder and fetal alcohol syndrome. And I do have a moment, like the first moment that I remember thinking something was off because she was my first adopted child. And she had a seizure and we were in the hospital and they had to do some testing and she was on the X ray machine. And the nurse said to me, Pick her up and hold her like she likes to be held, mom. I stood there frozen. She was four years old and I thought, oh, wait a minute. I don't know how she likes to be held. At that moment, it was mom guilt. But as I continued to... My eyes were opened just a bit to, not only does she not like to be held, she pushes away. And because she was the fourth kid, with the first baby, I think you're so centered on that. But of her old other siblings were holding her, so I don't think I picked up on it. I just thought she was wired differently. But as we got that first little piece of information, and then around seven or eight, behavior really started to escalate, and everything we tried didn't work. And that's when I thought, not only are we not helping her, we don't even know how to help her. And this is going to be not a quick fix.

[00:07:28.920] - Lisa C. Qualls

When you realized that, how did you respond? Did you start seeking help or did you withdraw or all of the above? Do you remember? And how many years ago was that now?

[00:07:41.020] - Amy J. Brown

Well, she's currently 19, so she was eight or nine, so yeah, 10 years ago.

[00:07:46.780] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah.

[00:07:49.120] - Amy J. Brown

Have to say that my go to when the going gets tough, Amy Brown gets tougher, and just gets in and gets it done and reads everything, which is a fear response, I think. I'm just going to get all the

information I can get. So there was that piece of it. But there's also the piece of behavior happening in our home, erratic behavior, violent behavior that you just don't tell anybody about. If you did tell somebody, I didn't even understand it. So how can somebody outside my home say, Oh, it's just a temper tantrum, a normal temper tantrum. I knew it wasn't typical, but I didn't have any other framework for where to put it because I didn't know one single person who was hiding their knives and locking doors and having alarms and up all night thinking, Oh, no. What's next? What's she going to do next? And so I didn't know where to seek help because honestly, if I'm being honest, I thought I'm going to walk in and they're going to go, Well, it's probably you, mom. It's probably your fault. That's the narrative I had continually. You're just meant... If you just get one more thing right. So I think it was a mix of I want to help her, but I don't know where to go and I'm afraid of being judged. And everything's crazy at our house. I think looking back, I wish I would have reached out earlier, definitely. I have a lot tougher skin now than I did then. And I think sometimes you have to get over the insensitivity of some people to get to the gold of other people, if that makes sense. So I wish I would have persevered in that a little bit more. But at the time, I was just bewildered, honestly.

[00:09:34.090] - Lisa C. Qualls

And were you scared? You did say the research part was maybe a bit of a fear response.

[00:09:41.080] - Amy J. Brown

Sometimes when we're afraid, we just are stunned. I don't know what to do. And some of us go into fighting mode, and that was me. I was just, I'm going to learn every single thing. And I think the fear response is, I can't control this. What can I control? And there's also the fear of, I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow because today was terrible. What's going to happen when she hits puberty? I mean, it spirals so quickly. I always say fear is a part of our life, but it can't be our constant companion. It just can't be. I think looking back now, I would tell a younger Amy, just to take a minute. Just to take a minute and pause. And fear puts us in the dark and we're thinking, Oh, my gosh, she's acting this way now. I wish I could have taken a moment and stepped into the light a little bit like, Okay, this is what I need to know for today. Because I think that fear is always going to be wrestling with it with unknown futures and unknown diagnoses, but I wish I would have known to go, Okay, you can stop for a minute and breathe and then move forward. But I just was like, I'm going through. I'm going to figure it out. And it was exhausting.

[00:10:57.680] - Lisa C. Qualls

I think I handled things somewhat similarly, and I was blogging. So I'm just like, Okay, I'm going to learn. I'm going to write. I'm going to learn. I'm going to write. And somehow I'm going to get this figured out. And if I could just find the right tools and be the right parent, I can make this the tide turn. I can do something. I can heal my children. And I think I moved from that into a deeper fear and shame.

[00:11:34.010] - Amy J. Brown

Definitely.

[00:11:34.910] - Lisa C. Qualls

Shame that I didn't want anybody to know how bad it was. I didn't want people to witness the chaos because I felt like such a failure. And that was a scary place to be.

[00:11:48.520] - Amy J. Brown

I agree. That is such a scary place to be. And because of the behavior we have with kids that come from trauma, people don't see the trauma underneath it, and they just see behavior. I remember going to a... In one day, this happened to me, I went to a parent teacher conference for my child, the one with all, most of the issues, she was in third grade. And my teacher sat me down and said, the teacher sat me down and said, Every single parent teacher conference has been about your child. I didn't even know what to say because, yeah, I get it. I get why it would be. But I had such this shame, like, Every parent's talking about me. The teacher thinks I'm a bad mom. And that, I think that shame isolates us so much that we don't want to reach out. And then two hours later, I went to the high school and had parent teacher conference with one of my bio kids. And the teacher said, Your son is such a delight. And I burst into ugly crying because I was already on edge. And I'm sure that teacher is

thinking, What in the world is going on with this mom? But it's just like, I didn't know how to hold all of that in any way that didn't make me seem like the bad guy.

[00:13:06.080] - Lisa C. Qualls

Right. How can you go from being a really terrible mother who does not know how to control her child to being the mother who's raised this delightful son? It's like, who am I? What does this all mean? We only know what we know. I think in the beginning, in the early years when a lot of Christians were adopting, we weren't talking about the hard stuff because nobody wanted to discourage anybody from caring for orphan children, for foster children, children who desperately needed families. And I thought if I tell anybody what's really going on, I'm going to maybe mess things up as if I have the power to mess up God's plans for people. I don't have that power. I know that. And the shame. So all of that together. So there's a chapter in your book. By the way, we will talk more about your book, but it really is a beautiful book. And it came out just very recently, the *The Other Side of Special*. And you co wrote this with two other women. And we'll get to that. I want to talk about it. But one chapter in particular in here just really caught my attention. Maybe it's because it's been such a painful part for me, but it's Chapter Five, Guilt to Acceptance. I would love for you to talk a little bit, and you work with moms, too. So it's not just their personal story, but you do a lot of the similar work to what I do and what Melissa does. And so you've seen this a whole lot. Mothers carrying guilt, mothers carrying shame, and not just mothers, fathers too. But this particular book is for moms. And how did you get from guilt to acceptance?

[00:15:02.730] - 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.

[00:15:35.990] - 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.

[00:16:09.290] - Amy J. Brown

Well, let me just say, first of all, when I work with moms, and I know you have this experience, they'll come in to our meeting together, and the first thing I will tell them is no matter what you tell me, what you thought, what your child has done, this is a judgment free zone. And they almost lean in and whisper. A feeling they felt like, I can't do this. Why did I adopt? I have those two. I'm afraid he's going to grow up and go to jail. Or my child did this. So we're whispering our hardest things because there's not a safe place for us to say them. And I feel very strongly that we need a safe place to say those. I will say that for me, like the story I told about my daughter at the MRI, that was the beginning of mom guilt around this issue of my child's attachment. Both all three of my kids have attachment. I think I just wanted to try harder and try harder to be a better mom and to love more. I kept saying, I'm going to love more. But we don't understand the more we love, the more they push us because of the attachment. And that just is so counterintuitive to how we would normally do life. But for me, it was a long journey to get over the guilt. But I think it's Brené Brown that says guilt is when you've done something wrong. Shame is when you think you are that something wrong. And for that has been the distinction for me. My brain will have a situation like, let's take the situation of the MRI. Immediately, I don't hold her. I'm a bad mom. Then your brain is off and going.

[00:17:45.820] - Amy J. Brown

But for me, learning to say, Wait a minute, I'm not that something wrong. And how I do that has been the practice of writing down what happened. This is what happened. The nurse said this. This is the story I was telling myself. And this is the actual truth. That little practice, and I've had to do it

countless times, has really helped me to go from shame to accepting that I am a good mom and that this is just a deficit that our children have because of their trauma. An example I have given to people before is, my son's physically disabled, so I don't expect him to hike with us. He can't. So why would I expect a kid from trauma to be able to respond to my love for them the same way? I mean, it's painful. I'm not saying it's not. But to look at it in that way a little bit has helped me, too.

[00:18:40.690] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah, I definitely... One of the things we talk about a lot in our work, which is similar is radical acceptance. Can I radically accept that my child has been deeply wounded and what the behaviors we're dealing with are the result or a manifestation of that wounding, that harm, in your child's case, the true actual damage to the brain from alcohol exposure, all of those things... Can I radically accept that this behavior really does not have anything to do with me? Now, can I make it worse? Yes, I can. Do I ever become not a good version of myself? Yeah, I do. But if I can remember, if I can look at them with eyes of acceptance, then I can stay regulated so much better. Because if I let it go into shame, then my fear response comes up like, Oh, I don't like how this feels. I got to fix this right now because I don't like what I'm feeling in my body. So it's a really interesting thing.

[00:19:52.560] - Amy J. Brown

A therapist once said to me something like, I said, I wish we could... I wish there's a way to fix this. And she said, go back three generations. Trauma upon trauma upon trauma. And something about that sentence made me go, Well, obviously, I can't go back and fix three generations of trauma. Because it's not just what happened in those nine months. It's generational trauma. And I think I didn't have an understanding. A lot of us don't. And that was very helpful for me to frame it. Now I will say to the mom who... This all sounds great when we're sitting here talking, but we don't have a screaming person over here that we have to deal with. When the times when you don't handle it well, that's okay too, because this is really challenging parenting. And you're not handling it well is not making... I mean, if you have a pattern of not handling it well, it may be adverse. But I even think the times that I wouldn't handle it well, I would be so hard on myself. And a friend would say, Look at what you've dealt with just in this week alone. So there are going to be times you don't handle it perfectly. Because I think the question in that practice is this is the story I'm telling myself is never really the truth if you sit with it for a minute. And I think that's an important distinction.

[00:21:11.110] - Lisa C. Qualls

I think also we always talk about the beauty of repair and that when we mess up and then we make repair, we're actually teaching our children an incredible, valuable skill. And just last night, I was actually really unhappy with one of my kid's behaviors. I said something fairly, I was going to say, maybe a little harsh, it was a little harsh, to another child. He started to react because I was coming on strong about something that was a small thing. I actually stopped myself and said, Wow, actually, I am really sorry because what I just said to you actually had nothing to do with you. It totally was because I'm upset about this other interaction with your sibling. I'm really sorry about that. Just please just forget it. And he did. And it happened super fast. So fortunately, it wasn't like I had to go back two hours later. I've had to do that also. But we don't do it perfectly. But the more aware we are and the more aware of our nervous systems we are, I think the better we get at both calming ourselves, knowing when we are getting dysregulated, and what we're bringing into the interaction.

[00:22:33.100] - Amy J. Brown

Right. And I think that's why a reflection practice is really important, because in the moment, you may not understand what was happening, but as you continue to reflect, and it doesn't have to be three pages in your journal. It could be short, you start to notice patterns. Like I said earlier, I know a fear response is when I start collecting experts instead of pausing to go, Okay, what am I supposed to hold my hands today? What has God asked me to hold my hands about the situation? I have literally researched everything for the next 35 years of life, and I know now. I used to think, Oh, I'm so on top of it, and I like to learn. But no, that is a fear response. And I also know a guilt, a shame response is isolation for me. And I don't think I would have picked that up if I hadn't continued to reflect on these situations because this is marathon parenting, as we know. And so for me to know how to be the best in my role as mom, I have to do that reflection. And I think it maybe intimidates people because, like I said, they think they have to write it up. Just a little simple questions like, I think this is in the book.

How am I talking? This is what I said about myself. Would I talk about this way to a friend? What would I say? What would I say to a friend in this situation? What does God have to say about me?

[00:23:52.200] - Lisa C. Qualls

That is so good. What would I say to a friend who had just said what I said, done what I've done, because we don't extend the same love and kindness and grace to ourselves that we would to anybody else. I think that's a super good question.

[00:24:09.360] - Amy J. Brown

And in doing that, I can tell you that the mom shame is not... I mean, do I have moments of it? Yes. But I have trained myself to be reflective about it. Just the other night, one of my youngest daughter had a tennis banquet and I was dreading it because I don't know what she said about me. That's really common. We've already had false reports to CPS about us. So you go into a situation like that and think, Okay, I don't know what she said about me. And then you see other moms and daughters having a typical bond. And I came away from that situation sad and a little bit crabby and mad about it all and everything. And then I said, Wait a minute, you need to go reflect because it's okay that you're feeling sad. That's okay. It's okay that you might be a little irritated that this is what it is. But once I start reflecting, this doesn't have anything to do really with either one of us. It really has to do with trauma. And I have no role in that, really, except to do the best I can to support her. Her nervous system isn't completely mature. This may not be where we land forever, and I know that. So it just took me a bit to get there. But I had to ask myself some questions about the evening.

[00:25:34.240] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah, that's really good. And I do think, I mean, I learned that from Brené Brown, the story I'm telling myself is, and I don't know if she came up with it, but it is so useful. It's useful in all relationships, in my marriage. The story I'm telling myself about Russ not being home on time for dinner is... When in reality it is probably not at all what this story that's running through my mind. So I think it is super helpful. But I do want to comment on what you said about we never know what our kids are saying about us to other people, and that is hard. It is really hard. I picked up one of my kids from another parent, and I'd not met this parent before. I didn't want to go to the door almost because I thought, What does she think of me? I have no idea. She may think absolutely nothing about me. She has plenty of her own life. She doesn't need to be worrying about me. But I think we get that because it's that shame thing. And it's so easy to go there.

[00:26:39.220] - Amy J. Brown

And a little bit of it seems to go a really long way. Just a little bit. You just can see yourself. And I also think, you talk about regulating your nervous system. One of the other keys to not just reflection is knowing what it feels like in your body, so you can catch it. My whole chest feels hot and my face feels flushed. It may not look flushed, but it feels it. It feels that way. And I know this is what you're feeling. And I don't think I would have figured that out if I hadn't talked to the therapist about some somatic practices and also just really nailing down, instead of off to the races, me trying to solve or fix, or what are you feeling right now? What is this body feeling telling you about your emotions? Which is hard sometimes when we keep pushing past our bodies and taking care of a lot of kids to recognize that. And I think that's helpful for me. That's also helpful for me to know this is the time I need to step back and think. But that is hard. I've had many a situation. I can write a book on that alone.

[00:27:46.790] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yes. Well, and I think when we can begin to recognize the early signs in our body that we're starting to feel a little dysregulated, we can actually do things to help ourselves. Yesterday, Russ and I had an appointment together, and we met at this appointment, and we were about five minutes early. I said, You know what? I feel so dysregulated. Can we just walk around the block before we go into this appointment? It truly helped. Just being in his presence, coregulating to him, and moving in a rhythmic and repetitive way just in those four minutes, I actually did feel somewhat better. I can't say I felt all the way better, but it helps when we can begin to recognize this sense of dysregulation that's starting to creep up on us. And if we don't pay attention and do something to help calm and regulate ourselves, it will just get bigger. It won't just be like, Oh, okay. I guess I wasn't feeling safe for a

minute. I feel safe for note. I think we have to be intentional.

[00:28:51.420] - Amy J. Brown

Right. And I think, too, it's hard to use the word I don't feel safe when... It's like it's a child and an adult. That's a weird dynamic, too, to say, I don't necessarily feel safe in my home. And I dismissed that because I didn't feel safe because my daughter was violent, but I was bigger than her in the adult in the room. But my nervous system didn't feel safe, and I didn't understand that I couldn't outthink that, that I needed to go, Okay, your nervous system is not feeling safe for a really reliable reason. And so I think that our head gets in the way sometimes. And if you would have sat down and said, I'm going to just solve something in this five minutes, you would not have regulated yourself as well as the walk. And I think that is... It seems really simple. It should be harder, but it's really simple.

[00:29:40.440] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah, I agree. I actually tried to think my way out of it earlier in the day, and I just couldn't quite do it. And it was that movement that really helped me.

[00:29:51.660] - Amy J. Brown

Yeah, I love that.

[00:29:54.280] - Lisa C. Qualls

I would love to hear... Okay, well, let me ask you this before we move on. So you know, we do a lot of teaching about blocked care, a lot. And we wrote *Reclaim Compassion*. I got to be on your podcast talking about that. And I'm wondering, both with yourself but also with the moms that you work with who are moms, all different kinds of moms, have you seen blocked care? And what do you think helps? What's a good starting point for moms?

[00:30:27.410] - Amy J. Brown

That's a great question. I have seen a lot of blocked care in moms that have children that have behavioral issues. I've also seen it in moms who have medically fragile kids that they have a different kind of load than we do, because they're doing actual physical trait care and all the thing. So I've seen it in both places. And as you know, with the women you work with, there's a lot of guilt talk around what's actually going on. The moms I talk to are just so... They're just like, I don't care anymore, and I feel bad that I don't care. And as you know, you know this. And so I think the first thing, honestly, and like I said, I haven't written a book on it. My first thing is, please tell me your story.

[00:31:17.630] - Lisa C. Qualls

That's so good.

[00:31:19.300] - Amy J. Brown

This is a place for you to feel seen. And let's just start with your story. And I think starting there just brings it out of the darkness again. That's like, how do you step into the light? And we step into the light when we tell our story. So that's the first. And when I'm listening, and at least I'm sure you do this when you mentor, I hear all these things they're saying, and they're talking around, and they're talking about behavior and this and that. And the real core is that they need to be... The mom needs to feel seen and heard, not only by another person, but by God. There's all kinds of things they say, but that's the core is like, who are you? And you need to be in a space where you can really talk about everything. And I think that's the starting point to find one person. And I think that's part of your reclaimed compassion, right? That's just part of finding a safe place to talk about it.

[00:32:19.850] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yes, definitely.

[00:32:20.960] - Amy J. Brown

And that's hard to find. I'll admit that.

[00:32:24.390] - Lisa C. Qualls

Yeah. And then I think when we begin to teach about the nervous system and how the nervous

system is trying to protect us, this is not about character. This is not about something we've done. It's about the way we are wired to be safe and that in this feeling of being unsafe, our nervous system is trying to protect us. There's a whole lot more. We wrote a whole book about it, so there's a lot to it. But I think you're so right that hearing people's stories, there's just incredible value and not trying to solve their problem at first. We may come to a point where we're helping them figure out how to solve their problem, but being an attentive, empathic listener, I think in one of my spiritual direction books for my training, we talked about how listening is love. When we truly listen, that is a very loving and kind act. I love that.

[00:33:31.010] - Amy J. Brown

And also with these moms, there's a mom I just finished mentoring recently, and our goal was for her to feel hydrated because she said, I feel dry. And she had sent me a note. She goes, I feel hydrated. But she fought that a bit because it wasn't like, Here's how to go and advocate in an IEP meeting. That was not what I was telling her. I was stepping back and going, you as a person needs to figure out how to hydrate yourself. And we talked a lot around that. And I think that's what I didn't know either. I just wanted to solve. Get the right treatment so my daughter's, children's behavior would be back to normal, which for lack of a better word. And I would think I would have, I wish, looking back, that I would have taken the amount of time that I tried to solve behaviors that weren't going to be changed and took that time to hydrate myself so I could keep on this long road. But yeah, I just think just that hearing of story and figuring out how are we going to stay healthy in the midst of this is super important.

[00:34:34.380] - Lisa C. Qualls

Absolutely, I agree with you. So tell me, you wrote this book with two other women. The three of you have a podcast together. Tell me a little bit about how the three of you came together and about the book.

[00:34:47.770] - Amy J. Brown

Okay, I would love to. Well, we met in 2020. We were part of a writing Mastermind, and we happened to be the three special needs moms. And we were going to meet in this was in March of 2020, so the world was going to shut down literally a week later. It was a weekly monthly Zoom situation, but we met three times a year. So the first one was in California. So I was really nervous. It was first day of school thing. So I called Sara, one of my co-writers, and I started talking to her on the phone about, What are you going to pack? Are you nervous about going? All that stuff. And she has a son, TJ, who is 18. But at eight, he was diagnosed with Duchenne muscular dystrophy, which is a terminal disease. So he has physical disabilities. And so she and I started talking, and I was so surprised how many emotions we had in common, even though our kids had vastly different needs. I just didn't expect that. I just thought, well, I'm a mom of kids with mental health issues and attachment issues. I'm not going to have the same struggles that a medically complex mom has. I just assumed we had totally different lives. We do have different lives, but we have very common emotions.

[00:35:59.780] - Amy J. Brown

So Sara and I became friends. And then Carrie has a son who was diagnosed at 20 week ultrasound, had spina bifida. He's medically complex, trach, all that. We got together and we just were surprised how much we had in common and how special needs moms are limiting themselves if they think, Well, I'm a FASD mom and I can't learn or have community with other moms. So we wanted to bring the three of our experiences together and share from our own unique perspectives, but also open up the table and say we can all sit around this table. So the book is 12 common emotions special needs moms feel. It's not a how to do these three steps and it's fixed thing. It's just our honest telling of how we've dealt with doubt and fear and jealousy and how we've handled it. And you'll get each one of our perspectives in the chapter. And then at the end, we have some discussion questions. So we started with a podcast, and that's been really fun. It's patterned the same way. Each week you get one of us talking, and then the fourth week we all talk together. And we just have been... We've learned so much from each other. I feel like the table's got more chairs now because we've opened up our lives to each other and they've learned stuff. And it's interesting because if we're talking about a subject on the podcast and they're talking because they both have medically disabled children, and I'll say, hold up, that doesn't fit for our kids. And it's just been a great way for us to learn and like I said, open the table

to more different kinds of experiences and realizing that we have a lot of unifying emotions.

[00:37:51.760] - Lisa C. Qualls

I think for some parents listening right now, there might be some comfort in being able to say, Oh, no wonder this is hard. I'm a special needs parent. I'm parenting children who have special needs that are different from other families. I hope that that actually does give people some comfort, like, No wonder this is hard.

[00:38:15.170] - Amy J. Brown

Right. And I need help. I need resources. I have had more than one mom of kids that come from trauma that have fetal alcohol or reactive attachment, where to say, I did not know I was a special needs mom. I just didn't know until I heard you talk about it, because we think medically, we think medical equals special needs. And another thing, if I can say this, is recently we had somebody that was listening to our podcast, an older woman, and she wrote to us. She had a neighbor who had adoptive kids, and she said, I would go inside my house when the kids came out because they behaved so terribly. The mom just seemed like she didn't have it under control. Then I heard Amy talk about. She said, I thought, What Christian am I? If I'm going to my house, this mom needs help. I think she might have... It would be more evident if there was a physical disability, Oh, this mom needs help. So I think we're opening the conversation a little bit around this, and I think that's good. And I was encouraged to hear that because I thought, Okay, there's plenty of neighbors who are not going to be nice. Here's one that's going to help, which made me very happy.

[00:39:19.960] - Lisa C. Qualls

So remind everybody again, the title of your book and tell them where they can find it.

[00:39:25.970] - Amy J. Brown

Well, the title of the book is the *The Other Side of Special: Navigating the Messy, Emotional and Joy-filled Life of a Special Needs Mom*. And you can get it wherever you get books. It's on Amazon, Christian Book Distributor. If you go to our publisher, Baker Publishing House, you can get it at the cheapest price there. We have a podcast. It's called Take Art Special Moms. And you can listen to that anywhere we listen to podcasts.

[00:39:53.440] - Lisa C. Qualls

Wonderful. And do you have Instagram or Facebook, some place people can find you there?

[00:39:58.380] - Amy J. Brown

Yes, we have Take Heart Special Moms is our Instagram page. And then if you go there and you go to our... It will lead you to our website, so you can find me and Carrie and Sara, you can find our individual pages under our collaborative website. So if you have one writer that you would like to follow more or whatever, resonate with more, that's how you can find us personally.

[00:40:22.710] - Lisa C. Qualls

Great. And we will have, for those of you listening while you're driving or doing something else, we will have all of that in the show notes for you. Amy, thank you so much. This was really a delightful conversation. I just enjoy getting to know you more.

[00:40:35.780] - Amy J. Brown

Well, thank you. I am so glad to be here. Thanks.

[00:40:38.910] - 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.

[00:40:53.940] - Lisa C. Qualls

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

[00:41:02.750] - Melissa Corkum

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