

[00:00:00.685] - Melissa Corkum

This episode of The Adoption Connection podcast is sponsored by the Enneagram and Adoption Collective. We invite you to join this intimate group of adoptive moms as we use the Enneagram to gain powerful insight, build stronger connections, and have greater compassion for ourselves and the people we love.

[00:00:19.555] - Lisa Qualls

This group is for you if you're an adoptive mom, if you're curious about the Enneagram and new to it, or if you already love the Enneagram, if you want to explore your adoption journey in a deep and meaningful way, if you want to have a better understanding of how God made you and why you do what you do, and lastly, if you crave community and connection with other adoptive moms.

[00:00:42.145] - Melissa Corkum

So we are super, super excited about this new group. We do have a Facebook group that has started already and we'll be meeting a couple of times a month on Zoom with some themed conversation. We just could not be more thrilled to be digging so deep into what our adoption journey has for us as people and as moms. And I think especially because of maybe covid and the lack of in-person connection, when we've started some of these conversations already. And the deep, deep connection is like feeding my soul. I love it.

[00:01:20.065] - Lisa Qualls

Me too. I'm so thrilled about this group. And right now you can be a founding member. We are just getting rolling. If you like, to be in on the ground floor of things and if you want to pay a special founding member monthly fee, we invite you to jump right in with us.

[00:01:35.545] - Melissa Corkum

You can find out more information or become a founding member at theadoptionconnection.com/collective.

[00:01:44.535] - Lisa Qualls

Welcome to The Adoption Connection podcast, where we share resources by and for adoptive and foster moms. I'm Lisa Qualls.

[00:01:52.455] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:01:58.215] - Melissa Corkum

Today is a Mentor Moments episode where we answer a listener question. These episodes give you a chance to join the conversation and guarantee we're providing the most helpful tools and resources for exactly where you are. This week's question is, how should I respond when my child says, "You're not my real mom"?

[00:02:18.345] - Lisa Qualls

Well, I'll start on that one. First of all, I think we have to get a sense of what is the context of this statement? Is it being hurled at you like a weapon? Is it actually a thought? You know, what is it that's being said in that moment? It can, those words can be used in so many different ways.

[00:02:42.075] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I think context means a lot. And, you know, if you've never even heard this from your child's mouth yet, but even if you have, it'll probably happen again. I would say take a moment when you're not in the moment and think about how those words land for you because, you know, they can hit us in some really tender parts of our heart. Interestingly, my sister used these. I remember her saying things like this to my mom when she was itty bitty, like four. I don't even know how she even knew to say something like that, but 10 years ago, when we were first on our adoption journey, I think I would have taken them very personally. It would have hurt very deeply. Now, I think I've built up a little bit more of an outer shell or armor or whatever you will, I feel like I would just roll my eyes and keep moving on, so. I think do a little reflection work for yourself, because again, if they're being used as a

weapon, you don't want that to have power over you because your children, even if you say something out of your mouth that is meant to communicate, you didn't hurt me with that. If you really are truly, deeply hurt, your child will pick up on that. And even if you don't respond at all and you're hurt, your child will pick up on that. And that just means that they're going to sense that this statement or these types of statements have power over you. And so that can put you in a pretty tricky position.

[00:04:26.885] - Lisa Qualls

Right. And I think whether these words are said or not, this is part of the complexity of adoption, right? Our children were not born to us. They have another mom who came first. It's important for us to process through those feelings because it is a reality, whether it's said or not, whether it's spoken. And even if it's not spoken by your child, it may be spoken by someone else in your world or in your family. You know that, "Well, you know, you're not really his mom." You know, it's going to happen. So I think doing a little bit of work and processing, what does that mean to me? What does it mean to me to be my child's mom? You know, you might be able to process it with a good friend. You might want to process it with a therapist, but I do think it's important. I think another thing we need to consider with our children, especially for children who have come to us through foster care, is that they may have had multiple mothers. And so when we say the word mother, we mean sort of like, many of us grew up in our families of origin, so I had one mother, but my foster daughter had probably four or five mothers. And so just the value of that word, what does it mean? Mother is going to be different for different kids because they've had multiple mothers or mother figures in their lives.

[00:05:52.835] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, it's so funny. So in our family, my parents called each of their respective sets of in-laws, mom and dad, once they got married. And I grew up hearing that. And then, of course, I grew up in a family of adoptees. And so we didn't have open adoptions, but there was, you know, mother could be used in multiple senses. And we actually had an honorary child in our family, not a child. He's actually older than my parents, but he called my parents, mom and dad. So I had kind of this looser understanding of the word maybe. But when I met Patrick and once we decided to get married and we were kind of talking about what we would call our parents and I had mentioned, "Oh, well, my parents just call their in-laws mom and dad." I just really thought that was the only way to go. I didn't really think that there were other ways because it was the only way I knew. And he was like, flabbergasted. He was like, I already have a mom. I don't need another mom. Like, he would never occurred to him to use those words for any other person. So I think it is interesting to reflect on that, because that kind of history, our history with that word impacts the how we'll experience our child using this phrase in one way or another.

[00:07:10.475] - Lisa Qualls

Yes, I completely agree. It's just family relationships are very, very different for some of our kids. So, and also, if they were internationally adopted, they came from a completely different culture, if they were older, their experience of what family is, what mom is, is may also be different. So I think we have to be really careful not to give the statement too much power, you know, and to really consider all these other factors as well.

[00:07:39.875] - Melissa Corkum

So to circle back to what you were saying just about how the words are being used, I think also impacts how we're going to maybe respond to them. And we have to know our child also, because some of the responses or the possibilities that we'll talk about may work really well for your child or they may not. So like, for instance, if your child is already in the middle of a rage and they're already throwing around also a lot of other words, mean words, things that are meant to hurt, maybe they're throwing physical things around. This is not about these words, right? In this case, it's about dysregulation your child's survival brain in a downstairs brain. They're having a lot of big feelings and emotions. And the words don't take them at face value, right. The words are just a verbalization because they can't find the correct words to express all the things that are going on. All the turmoil that's happening inside, so I think it's important to, again, go back to that context and know really what's going on versus if your child were to say it, maybe after reading a story where there were parents or maybe just kind of in passing or maybe they're testing it out, then maybe if they're not completely dysregulated, you can respond with, like what Dan Hughes calls space, right, and

playfulness, some acceptance that this is their experience, which we just talked about, some curiosity and some empathy.

[00:09:13.255] - Lisa Qualls

And I think we would agree that especially if the child is at all dysregulated, the least helpful thing to do is respond with logic. This is not the time to say something like, well, I didn't give birth to you, but I'm the one raising you. I am your real mom. This is not the time to defend your position as their mother. That is a very different conversation and probably not something that can happen in the very moment, because, again, if they're dysregulated, they are not operating in their thinking upper brain anyhow. They are down in their lower brain where it's all about the big feelings. And so they can't even process language when they're like that. So do not try to argue your way into being the real mom because it's not going to work.

[00:10:04.915] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I agree with that. And I would say just validate. I mean, this is important in whatever our kids are doing, but to validate the emotion, the, even the words, right? Like those words come from a place of hurt, confusion, of maybe wondering what your identity, what your place is in the world, what your child's places is in the world. And so, you know, we can respond with big energy if they're having big energy, like if they're yelling at you, you can you can still be controlled, but you can have bigger language, louder language and say, you know, that must be really hard to feel like you're not living with your real mom or something like that. Just validating or it sounds like you're really frustrated or it sounds like you're really angry, which is kind of like what Brian Post would say, kind of ignore the behavior or ignore the actual words and try to really start to narrate what's going on, like what's the emotion, what's really happening for your child.

[00:11:07.435] - Lisa Qualls

Right, right. We always talk about what is the need that's actually being expressed. It's it's not the words. There's something behind those words. There's something behind the behavior that is actually driving it forward. And that's what we want to be curious about and really consider not to react with a whole bunch of words and make your argument, state your case, because it's just not useful. What is useful is some empathy and just trying to give your child some space to process this and be supportive, you know, but I think what it really comes down to at the end of the day is that we have to be clear about who we feel we are to our child. I think it's important to ask ourselves, what is my identity in this relationship and does it come from my child or does it come from my faith, my belief that God called me to do this? He called me to be this child's mother. So if I believe that, then what my child says in a moment of dysregulation or even if if they see it long term, that's not where my value as a mother comes from. My value as a mother comes in fulfilling the calling that I think God has put on my life to care for and mother my children.

[00:12:27.175] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I think being able to separate those things is going to help us sustain for the long haul, especially if our child is struggling with their place, their belonging. If this is something that comes up often, if we're not really solid in who we are, what success looks like, who gives us that identity, then they do have a lot of power to hurt us. If if we identify as their parents because they want us to be their parents or they accept us as moms. So we know we say this at the end of every podcast's anyway, but we thought this particular episode needed an extra reminder. So if no one has told you today, we want you to know that you're a good mom, doing good work.

[00:13:21.625] - Lisa Qualls

And just in case you need to hear it more than once, you really are a good mom, doing good work.

[00:13:27.185] - Melissa Corkum

So if you have a question you'd like us to talk about on Mentor Moment, we invite you to call in to our listener hotline. You can leave your question. No one answers that number. So you can call it at any time of the day or night, no matter where you are in the world. And the number is 208-741-3880.

[00:13:48.365] - Lisa Qualls

We will not have a new episode of the podcast next week because we are taking a break for Easter. We wish you all a wonderful Easter and we will be back the following week. Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. You can find us on Facebook or Instagram as @theadoptionconnection.

[00:14:06.875] - Melissa Corkum

Thanks so much for listening. We love having you. If you enjoyed this episode, please leave a quick review over on iTunes. It will help us reach more moms who may be feeling alone.

[00:14:17.015] - Lisa Qualls

And remember, until next week, you're a good mom, doing good work and we're here for you.

[00:14:24.215] - Melissa Corkum

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