

[00:00:01.150] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:00:09.040] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:14.350] - 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 do we help extended family have respect and compassion for our foster child's birth family?"

[00:00:36.610] - Lisa Qualls

Well, I think we have to begin with making sure that they have some understanding, really, of what foster care is in the first place. You know, why do children come into care? Well, they come into care because for whatever reason and there are many reasons their parents are unable to care for them properly at that time. And I like to speak really positively about the fact that, yes, it is so hard for these parents to have their children in care, but while their children are in care, they have an opportunity to do whatever work is needed in order for them to become safe parents for their kids to come home. So I always want people to understand that first before I try to explain anything more, just what is foster care? And that as a foster mom, you know, when I was fostering, I was really a bridge for my child to kind of come to me and cross over and go back to her family. That was the goal.

[00:01:38.510] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, absolutely. So I think education's really important. I think right in the moment, if I was faced with maybe a comment or something that didn't reflect the way that I've learned to have compassion and respect for birth parents, I would probably turn it around to myself in a, in order to teach. So, you know, I might say something like, yeah, I am with you. I totally used to think that before I understood more about trauma and the way trauma affects the brain and different behaviors and how important it is to have, you know, really good attachment and really good safe relationships in order to do the things that we all think are kind of the adulting, responsible things. And so I'd probably talk about my own transformation journey of been where, you know, I might have had some judgmental thoughts or misconceptions about whose kids were being placed in the foster care system and then kind of use my story, my experience as the way to teach, you know, but then I learned about these things. And so that really helped me have a better understanding of why a parent might not be able to care for their child or how it was so cyclical, you know, how you can go back generations sometimes and see multiple generations of a family being in and out of care.

[00:03:16.520] - Lisa Qualls

Right, because many people whose children go into foster care, probably most, were not raised in a healthy, safe environment themselves, and so they're parenting the only way that they know how. They're, often they are doing the best they can. The other thing that we have to be willing to learn a little bit about, I think, is about addiction and what it does to the brain. And, you know, obviously not all people whose kids are in the system have addictions, but it's not uncommon and I think we have to understand there are a lot of people that think, "Well, if she really loved her child should stop using meth." Well, that's easy to say, but when we really understand what happens in the brain in addiction, I think we can have a lot more compassion for these parents who are really struggling and fighting. It's like a horrible demon that they're fighting to try to overcome. So understanding that, I think, is important too. But I really agree with you about sharing what we thought and what we now know. I think that is really useful and really helpful. I think also it's really important that people understand that our children are listening. Even little children are listening to our conversations. And so our children, they came from their birth parents. And so we always want to speak respectfully about our kid's birth parents because we don't want them to feel that they, that there's anything inherently wrong with them or wrong with their parents, but that we respect them. And so if people are talking about our kid's parents where our kids can hear it, I think it's important to kind of shut it down if it's disrespectful because our kids need to know that we will defend them and by defending their parents,

we're defending them. Does that make sense?

[00:05:13.350] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, absolutely. Well, it's funny. When I first read this question as it came in, my first thought was like, how do we do this in a diplomatic way? I mean, that's kind of what I was talking about, like how we share our experience and kind of preserve, you know, kind of the best of both worlds, right? That we can educate extended family and maybe it was just a misunderstanding and maybe they didn't know. Kind of give the benefit of the doubt. But ultimately, for those of you who are kind of those people pleasers out there, and I totally understand that, I think we have to kind of make the move that keeps in mind that our kids are listening. So even if it means having to be a little direct with that person and say, I'm sorry, we don't talk about, you know, that wasn't a very nice thing to say or directly kind of addressing it, even if that person may get a little defensive because, again, I think there's nothing more powerful to our kids than listening to our response and watching how we respond when someone talks about, you know, them and their birth parents.

[00:06:23.400] - Lisa Qualls

And I think especially for our kids are in care, in foster care, and the goal is reunification, then I think it's important to express we're on the side of the parent. We want them to be able to reunify. That that is, and I know that's really, really hard. I'm not saying it's easy, it is hard, but I think we need to express that our hope is for our child to be able to be with their parents. If that doesn't happen, then we readjust, but that is our hope. And if it doesn't happen, then we are grieving for that parent who has lost her child and isn't able to care for her permanently. So we want to just, I think, demonstrate compassion and care.

[00:07:09.660] - Melissa Corkum

OK, so that brings me to a question I'm wondering if you're willing to share with us in how this question impacts you as a birth mom yourself and a former foster youth.

[00:07:26.880] - Lisa Qualls

Hey, friends, we're jumping into the middle of this episode because we're really excited to share with you about the Insight Virtual Conference which is happening on April 29th and 30th. This two day intensive will help parents gain a practical understanding of your child's trauma, change your approach and build healing, connection, and trust. You'll have the chance to learn from amazing world renowned speakers such as Dr. Ivor Chasnoff, Deborah Gray, Jamie Finn, Leah Cushman, Melissa and me, Jeff Noble, Dr. Laura Anderson, and Mike and Kristin Berry.

[00:08:03.930] - Melissa Corkum

Also, if you register through the link we're about to share with you, you will get exclusive free access to our new webinar Creating a Safety Plan for your Family. This is a training that we wish we had had before we were in the midst of crisis or even just had big challenging behaviors with our kids. So you can join us at the INSIGHT conference and get free access to that webinar at the adoptionconnection.com/insight. Now back to the episode.

[00:08:41.450] - Melissa Corkum

OK, so that brings me to a question I'm wondering if you're willing to share with us in how this question impacts you as a birth mom yourself and a former foster youth.

[00:08:54.860] - Lisa Qualls

Mhm. Oh, wow. Those are big, big questions. Well, starting with when I was a foster youth, you know, I think people assumed things about my parents that were completely untrue. I didn't, I didn't like that. I didn't like the feeling that people were talking about me behind my back or talking about my family. Of course, I was a young teenager and that was a little bit different, but, yeah. I mean, I loved my family and I wanted them to be thought of well, even though I was in this strange situation of being in foster care. And then when you go further and then you talk about me being a birth mom. Wow. I mean, I, you know, this, it was a different era that things were not as open. But I wanted my son's adoptive parents to think well of me, to care about me because I cared so much about them. I mean, I thought about them all the time. I prayed for them all the time. And I wanted them to communicate that to my

son. And when he and I were reunited and he was a teenager, it turned out that they really hadn't communicated much at all, which left in his mind really terrible things. Like, he knew nothing of the truth of who I was, really, why I had, he had been adopted. And so what that means to me is that his parents didn't communicate positive things to him. So they're, his extended family, everybody viewed it that he was sort of being rescued, which, in fact was not the truth at all. And so I think it is important, really important to speak with respect and compassion with the knowledge we have. And we may not have very much knowledge. I think, in particular about children who are maybe adopted internationally, where they were found in a bus station or different things like that. I think we always have to search for the positive words to say both to our child and to other people. Like, for instance, well, actually, my son's mom left him in a bus station where she absolutely knew he would be found very quickly and he was wrapped in a warm blanket or whatever it is, you know, take the little bit of information we have and speak with kindness and respect for the sake of our kids. But also, I think just because we want to give the people who care about our children and surround our children also the most positive image we can when possible.

[00:11:37.880] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, absolutely. Well, I remember when, it was within the last 10 years, there was an article about Korean adoptions where it was revealed that at the time a lot of adoptees in my generation were adopted, there was no legal way for a single mom to keep a baby and have that baby receive all of the benefits of Korean citizenship. And without that, there would be no health care, there would be no education, I mean, it's like they didn't exist in the culture. And so I think there was a lot of stigma around all of these Korean moms who had, you know, quote unquote, "abandoned their babies" and what that meant and I think a lot of adoptees really struggled with that. And so when this article came out and talked about kind of this rock and a hard place that these women were in, knowing that there was literally no future for them or their child and that abandoning their child, so a child who had been abandoned was granted automatic citizenship, but a child with a single mom could not. And so all of the sudden, all these adoptees had all these "ah ha!" moments about the care that their birth moms had for them in order to get them the best chance of all the things we consider to be necessary in life. So I think we don't always have all the pieces and so I think it does behoove us to give the benefit of the doubt wherever possible and encourage those around us, you know, the extended family we're with, to do the same. Now, all that being said, unfortunately, we know that you can do all the things we've just talked about and maybe still feel like you're banging your head against the wall or feel like you have extended family who's just doesn't seem open for whatever reason to be speaking about birth family with the respect and compassion that you really value. And unfortunately, we would say you need to set really clear boundaries around that for the sake of your kids, for the reasons that we already talked about, and that maybe it doesn't mean that you need to cut off all communication. Maybe it's a cousin or someone that you can still enjoy without your kids. Maybe you meet for coffee or something, but it does maybe change the way you approach extended family gatherings.

[00:14:16.960] - Lisa Qualls

Absolutely, I mean, we have to do what's right for our children first, and if that means setting boundaries, then that's what we have to do. But hopefully the people in our family who love us will also want to love our kids and will be willing to learn and grow, but when that doesn't happen, then I do think boundaries are an important thing. Well, we appreciate this question, this was a great question and we would be happy to answer a question from you if you have a question for us, you can email it to us at email@theadoptionconnection.com or you can call us at

[00:14:56.650] - Melissa Corkum

208-741-3880, and that's what we call our listener hotline. It doesn't ring anywhere, so no matter where you are in the world, we would love to have your question recorded there so we can share your voice here on the podcast.

[00:15:13.900] - Lisa Qualls

Before you go, we'd love to connect with you on social media. You can find us on Facebook or Instagram as [@theadoptionconnection](https://www.instagram.com/theadoptionconnection).

[00:15:21.490] - 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.

[00:15:31.690] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:15:38.860] - Melissa Corkum

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