

[00:00:00.180] - Melissa Corkum

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[00:00:13.050] - Lisa Qualls

In this free video training, we'll introduce you to Block Trust and Blocked Care. We'll help you understand why your child pushes you away, why you're not a bad parent because you're losing patience, and shed the feelings of shame and guilt. There is hope. You can regain compassion for yourself and your child. To grab this free training, head to theadoptionconnection.com/compassion. Welcome to the Adoption Connection Podcast where we share resources by and for adoptive and foster moms. I'm Lisa Qualls.

[00:00:45.070] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:00:50.620] - Lisa Qualls

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 "I'm torn on how to respond to my eight year old adopted daughter when she wants to be babied. She's been home with me a little over two years after being in foster care for two years before that. She's very attached and affectionate with me. Many times she wants me to brush her teeth, dress or undress her, carry her, which is getting harder every day, and take care of her like a younger child. One side of me wants to do everything I can to nurture and connect with her by showing her that I'm always here for her. On the opposite end of the spectrum, she needs to learn the importance of responsibility and caring for herself and single mom here is already overwhelmed with other tasks. Any thoughts or suggestions?"

[00:01:46.120] - Melissa Corkum

Well, first of all, I think this job of parenting kids through adoption has so many layers of complexity and I actually don't think I could do it by myself. I rely so heavily on Patrick and having, you know, a great support team around me. And so, first of all, I just want to say more power to you and that we just think even the thoughtfulness in the way this question was worded says a ton about this mama and the way that she's considering her daughter's needs. And so I just want to start there with we think you're doing an amazing job.

[00:02:21.370] - Lisa Qualls

You really are. You know, Dr. Purvis said that the lesson of the first year of life is I can trust. Most likely, it seems quite likely that your daughter did not receive that. She didn't get to complete that lesson in her early life. She wasn't in a situation where she could trust the adults around her to meet her needs. So she had probably this vast well of unmet need from her early years of development. And so now she is trusting you enough to express her desire for you to meet her needs, which is actually a very beautiful thing. I think it's a, in many ways, even though it's very, very hard, it's a really, really good sign as you grow and develop a secure attachment with her.

[00:03:11.550] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, I mean, if we think about how we grow attachment relationships, how many "yeses" we give, say, babies, and your relationship with her is in its toddlerhood, even though she chronologically looks like a much bigger girl, you know, she's only known the safety of your relationship for a couple of years. And so even if we think about, you know, how many yeses we're still giving two year olds and how much how many needs toddlers still need to have met, it doesn't make your days any shorter or the overwhelm, I think, go away. But I think sometimes for me, just reminding myself how important it is and why, like what's the why behind all of this kind of helps keep my compassion a little bit higher as I think about oh, yeah, I forgot about, you know, what if we think about our job as parents is like pushing our kids towards independence, then this feels like we're not doing our job maybe, but if we think about our job as adoptive parents to create that attachment relationship and create trust, then all of a sudden, meeting all of these need in a lot of sense does become exactly what we were meant

to do as adoptive parents.

[00:04:34.790] - Lisa Qualls

Right, because trust is so foundational for secure attachment, I mean, we know that there are four hallmarks of attachment and they're being comfortable with giving care, receiving care, negotiating your needs, and being autonomous. So your daughter is working on these. She's receiving care. That is a hallmark. She's maybe negotiating or needs, I don't know, she's expressing them a lot. But, you know, and I don't know if she's able to give care or be autonomous yet, but this is part of the journey of attachment for her. So her expressing her needs is, it's a positive sign, even if it again, even if it does feel difficult to give so many yeses and meet so many needs.

[00:05:22.390] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, and so this is where we also want to say "we're human" and we also understand this balance between structure and nurture, and we've said this here on the podcast before, but Dr. Previs used to say that if we give our kids nurture when they need structure, we inhibit their ability to grow. But if we give structure, when they nurture, we inhibit their ability to trust. So as the question was asked, like there are two sides of this coin and we do need to set healthy boundaries, we don't need to be at our kids beck and call, they don't need to run the show, we're still mom and dad and we can acknowledge all the things that they need in terms of healthy attachment. But we can still set the boundaries, right. So we might be able to say something like, I can't get you a snack right this second. You can either get it yourself or I'll be able to get you a snack in ten minutes, let's set a timer. Or, I can't do, I'll rock you, but I'm not going to rock you all night long. I'll rock you for ten minutes before bed and then I need you to get in your own bed and go to sleep.

[00:06:43.160] - Lisa Qualls

Right, because if I think if we pour everything out into meeting this vast well of needs, parents are going to be, we're going to be completely exhausted and then we'll hit a wall and we aren't able to meet any needs. So I think it's important, it is wise to set some structure around it. Also, really, depending on how old your child is, and this little girl is old enough to talk about kind of some compromises. Like, OK, you can use baby talk with me at home, but not in public. You know, that's just something that you can do at home and I understand that it feels good to you to talk like a baby, and that's OK to do at home. Or like you were saying, Melissa, I'll rock you before bed, but I'm not going to sit here and rock you all night or, you know, I'll snuggle with you on your bed, but you can't come and sleep in my bed all night. You know, they're just ways that we can set some boundaries and structure around it while still meeting the need. And one of the things I like to talk about even long before I was an adoptive mom is the value of running ahead of the need, like trying to meet the child's need before it's even asked so that I, you know, I wonder how she would feel if she knows that you're going to maybe, depending on the age of the child, maybe do a warm cup of milk at bedtime. And if you did that before, she could even ask, what would that say to her? It's like, I'm going to meet your needs even when you don't need to say it with words, because that's, that's what I'm here for. I'm here to connect with your, to meet your needs.

[00:08:24.830] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, or I see you, right. Like I notice you, I'm in tune with you enough to know what you might need even without asking and I care enough to meet it. You don't have to always ask me, right.

[00:08:40.310] - Lisa Qualls

And I haven't forgotten you, you know, like you said I can.

[00:08:43.830] - Melissa Corkum

I've been thinking about you, yeah.

[00:08:45.560] - Lisa Qualls

Sometimes our children talk incessantly because they are afraid we're going to somehow forget them. And so, you know, with this meeting of needs, if we do it before, it's like, I see you, I haven't forgotten.

[00:08:58.320] - Melissa Corkum

I think the other thing that's important to note about putting some of that structure around our nurturing of our kids is that just because we say it calmly and because it sounds reasonable to us doesn't mean that our kids are going to be like, "OK, sounds good." You know that there might be some drama or some meltdowns around that and that's OK because our kids are still learning how to manage their big emotions and our job isn't necessarily to give in or to give 100 million compromises, right, but to still be in charge, but also in charge of ourselves. So to not get on the crazy emotional roller coaster with our kids and be compassionate that hearing "no" or having a boundary can be hard, but also the boundaries are still there.

[00:09:53.120] - Melissa Corkum

And we know that being playful is an important trust building experience for our kids, and so one thing you could do is not only meet her needs, sometimes do things with her rather than just for her. So like at bedtime, instead of brushing your daughter's teeth saying, OK, we're going to go together, we're going to brush our teeth now and do it side by side, or instead of helping your daughter, I don't know, put her dishes in the dishwasher or whatever, like, OK, now we're both going to put our dishes in the dishwasher. So just simple things where you are doing it together and side by side, in addition to the fact that you're also meeting needs lots of other times.

[00:10:36.920] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, sometimes that playfulness like we do, like almost reverse role playing. And so you can kind of be silly about it, especially if the, if the need feels almost silly because it's such a, you know, something you would probably do with a younger child and your child's older is maybe make a game out of it, like where maybe you meet kind of what might seem to be like a silly need for them and maybe they need a silly need for you. Like this goes back to the giving and receiving care, like receiving and giving and just kind of adding some of that playfulness, because playfulness is such a huge tool in building that trust and attachment.

[00:11:17.060] - Lisa Qualls

That's a good point. I think also just affirming our children, addressing maybe some of their fears by saying things like, I'll always be your mom, I'm always going to love you. There's nothing you could ever do that would make me not love you, things that would just be hopefully, hopefully speaking into some of the fears that they may have and also just delighting in them. You know, you're fun to be around. I like spending time with you. Things that are going to remind them that they're not, we're not just committed to them, but we actually want to be with them. It's not just a have to, it's a want to. Now, let's be honest, it's not always going to feel like a "want to" for us because it's really, really hard sometimes, but I still think it's important to express it in a way, because for one thing, when we express the want, like, you're fun to be around, our kids do become a little more fun to be around in our brains, too. It affects when we speak it, it affects how we feel as well as how they feel.

[00:12:22.160] - Melissa Corkum

Well, and I think our kids have learned through survival that sometimes relationships are transactional. And so this kind of obsessive need to have us meet needs that we think they might be capable of meeting for themselves sometimes is that transactional piece of relationship, like as long as I still need you, you'll still stick around. And so I think some of those comments about your fun to be around, like the relationship for the sake of relationship starts to address this particular need and behavior from the foundational pieces, right. The abandonment piece of, you know, I enjoy you for you not because you need me, not because you behave well, all of these different pieces. And so I think those statements and that that idea of delighting in our kids helps to comfort them from another direction instead of maybe directly addressing this need to be baby.

[00:13:24.140] - Lisa Qualls

And lastly, this will not last forever. You know, even apart from adoption, foster care, just parenting their seasons, we go through with our kids that are really, really hard and we think it's never going to end. And then eventually it does and then put that into the complexities of adoption and foster care, because sometimes the needs are so big or the behaviors are so challenging, whatever it is, and we think "this will never end. We will never make it through this." But our children, she, your daughter is

continuing to build attachment. And I think as you continue to meet those needs over and over and she matures and heals and grows and you get whatever professional help she needs to, you know, it won't always be like this. The demands won't always be this heavy on you.

[00:14:13.370] - Melissa Corkum

Yeah, and we say that from a place of now we're all see you and me are both parenting all teens and young adults and the needs that are still needs. And there's still things, but they're not the same kind of pressing needs of the eight year old or the two year old as it might be. And so it does feel like forever, but there is an end in sight.

[00:14:37.260] - Lisa Qualls

There is and then the day comes when they can do everything independently and we have to find the things that we can do for them in order to continue meeting the needs that they are capable of. But we need those moments of connection that I've talked about this before, just making breakfast for my teenage son. He's capable, but it's a point of connection, so it's kind of an amazing, well, it is an amazing journey, it's not kind of it's an amazing journey to watch our kids grow, develop, and heal. It's beautiful.

[00:15:09.630] - Melissa Corkum

So if you'd like to ask a question that we'll answer on a future Mentor Moment, you can call our listener hotline at 208-741-3880. Don't worry, that line doesn't ring anywhere, so you can call it at any time of the day or night. We look forward to hearing from you.

[00:15:27.180] - 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.

[00:15:34.770] - Melissa Corkum

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

[00:15:44.970] - Lisa Qualls

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

[00:15:52.120] - Melissa Corkum

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