

An Honest Conversation About Adoption

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SUMMARY

The Connected Families podcast episode focuses on the complexities of adoption, especially in the context of parenting adopted children. Hosts Stacy Belward, Anna Brash, and Jen Berie share their personal experiences and insights about the unique challenges and joys of raising adopted children, emphasizing the importance of understanding trauma, communication, and the Connected Families framework.

- *Adoption is a complex journey filled with both joy and heartache, and the hosts share their personal stories to illustrate this.*
- *Language matters; terms like "adopted kids" or "gave up her baby" can be harmful and should be approached with sensitivity.*
- *All adopted children experience trauma, which can affect their behavior and emotional responses, necessitating a different parenting approach.*
- *The Connected Families framework emphasizes the importance of creating a safe environment for children to thrive.*
- *The hosts discuss the significance of empathy in parenting, especially in understanding the emotional needs of adopted children.*
- *Modeling accountability and humility, such as apologizing to children, fosters a culture of responsibility and respect within the family.*
- *The framework encourages parents to focus on their children's strengths and potential, celebrating their unique gifts.*
- *The podcast highlights that the principles of the Connected Families framework are beneficial for all families, not just those with adopted children.*

[Music] hi friends welcome to the connected families podcast I'm Stacy belward your host our main aim for this podcast is to guide you towards God's grace and truth for you so that you can pass God's grace and truth on to your children well thanks for being with us today today's podcast is on adoption because November is adoption month and many of us here at Connected families our staff and many of you in our community have adopted but

listen if you haven't adopted don't go away today's episode is for you if you have realized that so much parenting advice is not really a good fit for your family because of your unique struggles I remember thinking that and the two guests that I have with me today also came to a point in their parenting where they realized they needed some new thinking because the old way was not necessarily working well my guests today are first of all Anna Brash Anna Brash

is the executive director at Connected families but really she is my super good friend her and I adopted our kids around the same time back in 2004 2005 our kids were born in Ethiopia we worked together on lots of things around adoption in Ethiopia and so welcome Anna hi it's so good to be here I'm so glad for you to be at the microphone with me here for connected families it's so awesome but would you just introduce your family for

everyone sure I have been married to my husband grant for almost 25 years uh we have two kids both through adoption our son is 16 he joined our family at four months I know he license driving around our son is 16 and again join our family through adoption at four months our daughter is 15 and joined our family through adoption at nine months we also have a golden doodle his name is fzy and

he's pretty fantastic and I just closed him in another room so he doesn't bark during this podcast that's awesome that's great well my other guest that I have with me is Jen berie Jen you came to Connected families after four biological kids you were in the process of adopting here at Connected families you are the content and social media manager so anything you see she makes sure all of our grammar is great and we love you for that Jen so you have a a

newer Journey actually towards adoption tell us about your family we do I've been married to my husband for over 20 years as well and we've had connections to Haiti for a long time and then we got to a point after having four biological children that we were felt moved to adopt more from Haiti and so we currently have a son who's in college our kids range in ages from 11 to 20 well 20 he's almost 21 we have one in

college and five that live at home our youngest two daughters joined our family through adoption um at the ages of seven and nine so they were quite a bit older than your and Anna's kiddos and our girls have been working for four years really hard to learn what it means to be in a family and bond with our family yeah so good I'm so just grateful to be on a team at Connected families with you too and be part of the adoption world

together I don't know if I've ever told everyone our story but my husband is Scottish we've been married for 21 years this year too and our oldest we adopted she was born in Ethiopia and she came home when she was 6 months old and then we had Kaye biologically so we have yeah two daughters and they also are Junior and senior I think everyone knows that cuz I tell stories about high school and but that's our family so I feel like you

know as we were planning this podcast and the three of us sat down I got a little emotional this is kind of a deep topic isn't it Jen and Anna that we that we're talking about here and I mean I know Anna you know we' walked through this adoption Journey for like 16 17 years now right and we know hundreds of families and we really have seen the heights of Beauty in adoption and also the ashes that are around it too and

there's so much heartache and there's there's so much joy and the day daily struggle can be so real it it's complex it's complex and so we here anna Jen and I we feel so grateful for connected families for having found connected families so grateful for the framework and so we're going to dive into that today but I just want to tell you here's what we're going to do in this episode first of all we we want to explain from

an adoptive parents point of view why we do some of the things we do the things that are maybe puzzling to those of you know other people who haven't adopted the second thing I want to do is I want to talk about trauma for a quick minute and why all adopted families um know that we are dealing with trauma and then the third and for most of the time today I really want to talk about how the

framework has really influenced our family our parenting how it brought A New Perspective that we really needed as adoptive families so does that sound good Jen and it does and you had said it feels emotional and I think the reason it feels emotional to talk about this is because it is vulnerable and I'm always very careful about what I share about my family with others even in one-on-one conversation or in a recording like this because it is vulnerable and so we are

protective of our kids and that'll come out in the conversation as well yeah for sure here's the first thing that I want to talk about let's explain why we as adoptive parents feel uncomfortable calling our kids our adopted kids kids now I think I maybe referred to that in the past in my introduction and sometimes I do that when I'm talking about biological versus adopted um but Anna can you explain that adopted kids phrase and why that feels uncomfortable

sometimes yeah sure words matter as we know words are so important and if you say adopted kid this is my adopted child then it is labeling them it is their identity and they joined our family through adoption so they're they're Children First first and adoption comes second just like for instance if you are raising a child with a disability you wouldn't say disabled child you would say this is my child with a disability yeah that's good that's good I remember

when just brought our oldest home and we were we were at a garage sale for some funny reason well I was with my mom she loves them and I remember her explaining to the lady you know oh you know my daughter adopted her baby and and it was and I remember getting in the car and saying to my mom mom you know I don't need to expl La my daughter everywhere we go I don't owe people you know the

story of why I have my daughter who's obviously not my birth daughter because she's black and I'm white and I remember just like her puzzling about that like wow like yeah you're right and so that's really good here's another one another phrase that we bristle at maybe Jen you can take this one the phrase gave up her baby I still hear this sometimes like on the news and different places why do we bristle at that I don't know I mean that

one is that one and put up for adoption are two phrases that I just really don't like G gave up makes it sound like Mom gave up on parenting I mean that's kind of the way that I look at it like she gave up when we all know that these moms showed unbelievable amounts of courage in what they did and things that we hear in this country a lot of us can't even imagine what it would take to to realize

that your baby needed something that you couldn't provide in that moment put up for adoption I don't know how many people know this but if you Google it and you want to learn more back in the day there used to be trains of kids that would move across the United States full of kids that had either been separated from their

parents for some reason or their parents had died or whatever had happened and they literally would stand

them on a block at the train station put them up on a block and people would you know say whether they would adopt them or not that's where put up for adoption oh wow comes from joh I didn't know that there's a book called Orphan Train if you haven't read it it's a it's a historical fiction book but it is 90% of it is true and it is an amazing book I can't think of the author right off the

bat but it's called Orphan Train and it's really you learn a lot about where adoption has gone in our country so we don't like gave the baby up or put up for adoption because it just is such a it feels flippant it does feel flippant and I I feel like the phrase made an adoption plan is honoring both to the to the first mother and to the child MH yeah like that well another one that

makes me bristle is do you have any children of your own I have gotten that one and I'll tell you that one really has made me bristle and the reason is because you know when we when people come to us and ask us some of these things or have these comments I hear them through the ears of my children so if my daughter was standing there and she was at one time I just can't even imagine how she would understand that

question do you have any children of your own so you hear me right girls like yeah I do she's right here she's a 100% my own is the answer that I give similar question that I hear is are your children real brother and sister right cuz they're both born in Ethiopia and so they're Wonder people are curious and they just ask the question what they're asking is are they biologically related so my answer is yeah they're absolutely

real brother and sister and I then I say do you mean are they biologically related and and so it's an afterthought and then people understand oh oh that's right and and so I do try to do some education there yeah I I don't know why people find those types of questions appropriate I think because they're curious and so sometimes I can feel I sense if people are curious just for curiosity or I can sense if they are

genuinely interested in my family my response is based on how I feel if that person is genuinely interested or if they're just curious right right they're just 100 100% I I think I've been fortunate we've we've never gotten that question because our girls are very very close in age and most people think they're twins cuz they look so much alike so people usually don't have to ask us that question and I'm usually not afraid to answer it but I like Anna's

point about you can tell when you're talking to someone what their intent is in some ways and that does dictate the answers that you give them because another one is really about our kids' story and I'd say that I haven't gotten the question in their later lives their teenage years but when they were younger I did like people wanted to know what her story was and we don't share our kids stories do we no no why don't we

share their stories because it's their story yeah exactly it's their story to tell in fact when our daughters came we started them in school pretty quickly after they got home we had them home a few months but some of the English teachers said they didn't speak any English and we were told that the sooner we could get them in

school and get them immersed the better it would be for them and we just wanted some structure for

them and they they both really loved School in Haiti and we knew they would love school here and one interesting thing we we had to try and navigate was our older daughter started in third grade and by the fourth grade she knew enough English that she was oversharing her story in class and that was kind of a that was where we had the convers it was kind of a reverse of what you're saying Stacy because we actually had a

conversation with her saying this is your story and what you say you can't take back so be really careful what you tell in class and at school if you feel comfortable you can tell it but be careful so it kind of goes along to what you said but that was something we had to try and navigate that's good I often use the example of like you you don't want to explain your uncle as you know the alcoholic Uncle everywhere he walks

in he walks in everyone's like oh that's the alcoholic Uncle well you know it's not information to tell so when I'm telling people my kids story I don't want them to be known as the adopted kids who this is their story that's I want them to be able to grow and have their own identity and that's why we don't tell our kids story yeah that's right that's good all right well let's move on to just touch on trauma we

believe that all adopted kids all families have trauma so why do we say that Jen do you want to take a stab at that first Stacy we were talking earlier and you talked a little bit about the big tea trauma and the small tea trauma and how most of us can say we've been through small tea trauma in our lives we can think of incidences that have were traumatic for us but our kids kids from hard places have been been through big

tea trauma and this is trauma that starts in the womb and goes right up until they are removed and and feel more safe where they are our daughters had a unique situation in that they're from Haiti and one of our daughters I feel comfortable telling this so that's why I'm going to tell it was in in her mother's womb when the earthquake hit Haiti and I can't imagine how much trauma was going adrenaline and all the

things that were going through her mother's body that were getting into her as she was in the womb and this is science I mean this has been proven there's another really good book out there called the body keeps the score that talks about things that happen in utero and throughout life your body keeps track of that in a physical manifestation our girls had extra trauma because they were removed from their first family when they went to the

orphanage and then when they got comfortable at the orphanage for a few years they were removed from their friends there and brought to live with us so they suffered loss numerous times in their life and got to a country in a place where everything smelled different and the food was different and everybody looked different and the weather was different and I think it was so traumatic for them that if we even ask them about the first year that they were

here they have very few memories of the first year they were here yeah what would you say around trauma

because your little guy came home little months right so what do we believe around trauma when when they're infants and adopted being separated from first mom is traumatic even in the very best ad adoption situation it still is traumatic the smells and the sounds and everything that the child would have known in utero is disrupted during adoption if people

go into adoption thinking that their child is a blank slate that that's just going to be a rude awakening because the child has come with already nine months of of experience and you know our child our son joined our family at 4 months and so he'd already had four months of living before he joined our family and then again traveling across the world and all the different smells and and sounds it is traumatic on a little

little body when our daughter joined our family that was also traumatic for him and and so that was another change that happened change is hard on little kids and so even with biological children there is different points of trauma through their life as well you know and then if I think through the brain science of trauma so then how it affects daily life someone who's experienced trauma is extra sensitive to feeling unsafe and perceives that unsafe often

as an attack and so the person moves into fight ORF flight really fast in order to protect many many children who were adopted have are hypervigilant they're just scanning all the time to know what's safe and what's not safe so that's what we've seen through a lot of kids who were adopted they just are always aware always scanning and having that that heightened sense just never lets their body calm so that makes their

they could be sensory seeking then or sensory avoidant they could have more difficulty in school it could manifest as ADHD there's multiple layers because they're hypervigilant all the time I like to say our older daughter is like Jason Bourne you know when we enter a room or a large social situation I can watch her I can watch her eyes I can watch her scan for the exits I can watch her scan where the food is I can see her

scanning every face to see if she's safe she is extremely hypervigilant in crowded situations and it is I call it Jason Bourne because that's what it is and at home then that safety can translate to what I can't have a granola bar right now and that's unsafe and now there's an explosion because I need to self-protect over something like that or you know a sibling took a toy and so what what I'm saying is this trauma you

know then transfers into hypervigilance around safety which then will trigger into fight ORF flight really fast real fast yes real fast we all can raise our hands we've experienced this haven't we moms yeah right so then when my pattern of parenting is to be maybe big loud large that is not a good setup is it it's not and what's interesting is even if I I don't even if I don't yell but if

I raise my voice it sounds like yelling yes or even if I think that I'm giving a serious look the look could come across as shaming or condemning so everything is threatening right everything is heightened and I wasn't prepared for that right no I wasn't either but that's how I was raised too so this is how you do it isn't it how you do it absolutely yeah because it works or it worked it worked for me and I think see one thing that people

ask me a lot is is this harder than you thought it was going to be as far as navigating all this trauma and I always tell them that it's we were prepared for the trauma we were not prepared for how much that trauma would permeate every part of our life for so long and how long it takes to work through that trauma I mean this really is a lifelong process for these kiddos so those who have been around connected families and

maybe are a little bit familiar with what we teach and around the framework you heard me mention big large and loud and those are kind of trigger words around the foundational layer of the framework which is that we want to communicate the message you are safe with me so it's the opposite of big large and loud and so I think now maybe our listeners are starting to understand why I we're here and we're going to be

talking about the framework and why the three of us are sitting here so grateful for connected families and for the framework because it gave us just some new perspective of how to parent our kids and what I want to say right now before we go to the break is that Jen mentioned it a little bit earlier and the reason that we talked a little bit about trauma is because we do believe that sure our adopted kids have

experienced trauma we have all all experienc trauma your kids have experienced trauma I'm talking to all of you listeners out there and so while you know being safe for us as a as parents of children that came to us by adoption you know is particularly important it's important for all of us and that's why we really believe this podcast is is useful for everyone today in this topic okay so after the break Jen and Anna we're going to dive into the framework

and we're just going to go layer by layer the four layers and talk about how it influences our parenting even today with our kids you good we're good we're good all right see you after the break hey friends would you like to be part of the connected families team well I want you to know that we have an exciting opportunity for you it's called the Insiders team I have a question for you and we are inviting you to be a part

of it here's how it works as part of the Insiders team you will receive an email email each Friday with one only one simple action step they will take 5 minutes or less and it comes from our executive director anab brush you'll also have Early Access to resources that we are developing you will be called on to give feedback you're going to learn about jobs or opportunities that we have available first and here's a good one

you're going to feel all the love of the connected family staff you'll feel the love because we consider the Insider team sort of like our jet engine when Anna our executive director set it all up we had no idea how crucial this team would be to our continued growth and reach well if you're interested in joining the Insiders team at Connected families check the links in our show notes to sign up or go to our website

and search insiders team we look forward to having you on board all right well we're after after the break and I'm having this wonderful conversation with my good friends Anna and Jen who also work with me here at Connected families you guys we were talking about adoption and the things that make us bristle we talked about trauma and we're going to dive into the framework now and just how each level has really transformed how we see

parenting and how we show up with our kids but I want to ask you guys how you came to Connected families and really you know what was the moment or the season of life that made you realize the old Way's not working I need something new maybe Anna do you want to start sure thing uh my kids were around three and five four and six in that general area when I realized that the way that I had

been parenting just wasn't effective I had truly read all the books I'd listen to all the podcast I was doing everything I could to be a successful parent and and I think one of the struggles I really had is that I I thought that I knew what I was getting into I didn't and so I was going to do everything in my power to figure this out and I was going to be a successful parent so it was all about me it was my

energy and really all that energy was making my children feel like they were a project and I was there to fix them so they had this identity as being broken when I saw the connected families framework again my kids were around three and five four and six in that General age range and the connected famas framework put the you are safe with me at the bottom and then you are responsible at the top in my head all my energy up to that

point had been completely flipped and I didn't even know it so there was this one day when my son was angry I was angry we were in the middle of a big fight and he threw a kitchen stool at me and it made this huge gash gouge in my kitchen floor and I took him by the neck and I pushed him down to the floor to see what he had done to my floor I wanted him to see the damage he had

caused and it was that moment that broke me because I realized that I was not safe he had experienced trauma as an infant and transitioning to our family and when my daughter came that transition he had had all of this trauma and then I was piling more trauma on top of that I wasn't part of the healing process I was part of the problem so it was around that time that a friend introduced me to Connected families and

one of the first things I saw on the website was the new rendering of the serenity prayer that is prominent on our website God grant me the serenity to accept the people I cannot change the courage to change the one I can and the wisdom to know it's me and that moved me to a depth that I didn't even know that was possible and I was I was broken and I needed to get to that place before I

could really really transform my parenting and so connected famas just came into my life at the right time really good and then you've learned the question what's going on in me is where we start always daily yeah which is just so important because when we do have children who are quick to react quick to feel like they need to protect themselves so big reactions it's so much more important for us to know what's

going on inside of us so that we can come slow low and listening instead of previously big large and loud and that's the Deep foundational work that we have learned to do as we parent Jen do you have thoughts around this you are safe with me message so I knew Anna from school our kids knew each other and she suggested that I take the discipline that connects in preparation for our adoption as part of our process and to

let our agency know we were doing our education and when we finished the course I thought oh my gosh how did I not find this would have been great for our biological kids and still is but I was seeing it all through the adoption lens that's how I know that discipline that connects and connected families is not only good for adopted families but for families that have grown their families other ways so you came to Connected families just like okay I'm

doing my studies to be able to adopt my kids and then you're like wow this is everyone it was so eye opening and it was so eye opening and a reminder that with these kiddos traditional parenting doesn't work really good okay let's move on to the next level of the framework you are loved no matter what which I had tears in my eyes thinking about that in the context of this adoption and all that our kids have you know gone through

and man what a powerful powerful message that we want to communicate to our kids which one of you would like to start talking about this level I can start with that because our kiddos were a little bit older when we brought them home I think there's so much that happens in your family with biological kids meeting their needs when they're young that they had never have any doubt that they're loved but having to show empathy when you don't feel like showing

empathy and asking yourself constantly what's it like to be my child does my child know they're loved in this moment move toward the struggling child these are all things that are so hard and yet so important and so Rich yeah I know empathy was something that I really had to grow in big time I had to learn how to understand what was going on inside of my child I mean I remember when she was little specifically the question is

this an adoption issue is there underlying issues there and I would think that and it would just be so overwhelming to me you know I didn't even know what to do with it but later through connected families I learn to ask the question like what is going on inside of you right now and this was a really this was an area where I felt like you know this question it doesn't even matter if my child has gone through

big tea trauma little tea trauma you know that is something that I want to grow in and I want to work in is to understand what's happening inside of my child so that I can come alongside them as a teammate and supportive and that's what you are love no matter what really looks like at a very deep level and so then I'm seeing through you know reactive Behavior quick reactions or defensive Behavior or you know any of

those kinds of behaviors that might come because of trauma okay let's move on to the third level of the framework which is you are called incapable one of my favorite levels but I'll let you take a step at it first Anna go ahead yeah you know all children obviously are a gift from God and it's amazing to see that gift just wrapping each year when you watch your kids grow and develop and see their strengths I don't know what it's

like to raise biological children but for me it's kind of a this amazing surprise when I see different traits come out in my kids I see their tenacity or their focus or their love of play or you know whatever it is that I am watching unwrap as they grow older as they mature and then being able to pull that out and say I wonder how God's use that someday and just put that out there and and maybe in biological families

there's like well this is to family always does this or this is what our family is good at our family is good at math or basketball right when you're raising children through adoption you don't know it's just this mystery it's this unwrapping of this beautiful gift that God's given us and that for me is probably my favorite part of parenting just imagine IM ining what the future is going to be like imagining with them pulling out their strengths hauling

those out all the time as much as I can I think it's just fun that to me is fun I will feel like I am a successful air quote successful parent if I can encourage my kids in their gifts and then see them someday use their gifts to bless the world agreed here here I just love it and I sometimes phrase that is in this way we have learned to just honor our differences because we are a family well

I mean actually we're Intercultural and interracial family my husband is from Scotland and so we're all different and we love honoring how God has created each one of us and then celebrating each other in that way well let's move on to responsible this is the top of the framework and this is a good one because the message is you are responsible for your action exhale big exhale so J how does this message you

are responsible how does that play out in your parenting right now you know I was raised in a home where we didn't say sorry a whole lot in our house I'm not it was a really loving really connected home but it wasn't necessarily modeled for me and so this part of the framework I realized that I cannot possibly expect my my kids to do things that I am unwilling to do so I'm just going to tell a quick Story one day last week I

was calmly talking to my daughter about something that she disagreed with and she started talking over me and my 11-year-old daughter and I banged my hands on the kitchen counter and said listen and I got big large and loud and she was far away from me in the kitchen so she knew she was physically safe but she got a look on her face and she turned around and walked out of the room and I immediately thought oh man I

messed up she did not feel safe in that moment so after I got myself together I about 5 minutes later I walked into her room she was sitting on the bed reading a book and I said sweetheart I said I am really sorry I banged my hands on the counter I shouldn't have done that one thing I've learned about apologies and I'm sure it was through connected families and other places is as a parent when you are willing to humble yourself

and apologize there cannot be a butt on your apology you need to apologize and leave it at that so I can't say but you were talking over me or but you were being disrespectful to try and excuse your behavior as a parent so the next day she and she accepted my apology and she forgave me and the next day she came to me in the morning because the rest of that evening was terrible she was really

disrespectful and rude to me and I think I just had set something off in her that was not good and I stayed calm and we got her to bed and she knew she was safe and loved when she went to bed but she was still being rude and disrespectful F and the next morning she came and found me immediately when she woke up and she said she was sorry for being so mean to me and asked for my forgiveness now are

those two things connected I I don't know but I can't help but think that if I had not modeled that for her and it was excruciating I will tell you apologizing as a parent is excruciating I don't know if she would have done that and it was mended and we got to have a talk about how much better you feel when you make things right and how that icky feeling you feel inside will go away when you have made things right or

you've made things wrong I love that story Jen because you know what we often in the framework talk about you are responsible for your reactions as we're telling our kids that we're you know our kids are responsible for their reactions and you just flipped that and said no I'm responsible for my actions and I'm responsible to reconcile to my kids when I am showing up in ways that are not honoring to them or myself ooo that's

good that's powerful Anna I think you have something to say though about what it does look like to think about this level in terms of our kids my go-to phrase that permeates really all of my parenting is I'm not worried I know you're going to figure this out and I say that a lot and I I say that because I I can ring my hands and I can be anxious and but I want my kids to know

that they are going to make mistakes along the way there are going to be some bruises mostly figurative some literal um and they're they're going to learn from those mistakes we're not going to swoop in and fix the mistakes but they're going to learn from them so they know that if they do make a bad choice there's an impact for that bad choice but I don't want them to see me like oh my gosh what's going to happen in the

future I just want them to hear confidence and so for me my confident phrase is I'm not worried I I know you're going to figure this out and if you need my help along the way I am here for you I can help you we can Walk Through This Together my faith really rests on the promise that God redeems all things so even bad choices God can redeem those and you know just like Jen losing her temper in the kitchen I have

made plenty of bad choices in my early parenting and even still do um so when I do make a bad choice how can I redeem that and again being an example for my kids and really My Hope and my prayer is that my kids can see that truth in me that God does redeem all things uh just recently I had a opportunity to ask my daughter hey what can God redeem and her answer is all things so this is just

something that we say in our so good and it does permeate my parenting it permeates our family it is a family value God does redeem all things amen I love that so good Anna that's really good well friends I think we painted a great picture you know around adoption we've talked about that and then we've painted the picture around the frame workor and really how each level of the framework has influenced our perspective has changed us as moms in how we come

and we we parent our kids so thank you Jen and Anna for being with me today well hey friends if you found this podcast useful I want to be sure you know that the conversation will continue every Monday over on the Clubhouse app we have a live conversation where you can just listen in or you could raise your hand and ask a question we would love you to join us over there we put links in the show notes for all the

things and please go check out our new website it's at [Connected families.org](http://Connectedfamilies.org) I'll see you next [Music] time