



Episode 004—Expectations

Welcome to Adopted into Allyship, a podcast about loving one another well and fighting for connection. I'm Jamie K Corbin and this is episode four, expectations.

Friendly reminder—this is intended to be a safe place to learn, but I do talk about hard things here because when you've been adopted into allyship, you don't shy away from conflict or pain. Healing and growth aren't compatible with avoidance or apathy. You can expect both an uncomfortable amount of honesty and vulnerability, as well as an abundance of grace as we work toward becoming better allies.

Speaking of what you can expect—we are going to jump into the tricky topic of expectations. I have a love/hate relationship with expectations because they are a bit of a relational wild card. Expectations can either be at the root of many of our disappointments and hurt feelings, or they can help us form emotional and relational health. The game changing variables with expectations? Honesty and vulnerability.

Listen, the first time I understood the power of expectations, or unmet expectations, rather, was when we brought our oldest daughter home from the hospital.

Before I go further with the story, let me just state for the record. I love my daughters, all of them. They are brilliant, mischievous in a way that challenges my ability to maintain a straight face while doing my best to parent them properly, and they have the biggest hearts. I love being a mom, especially these days when I get to see them explore their God-given interests and gifts. But the process of becoming a mother is difficult for anyone, and my status as an adoptee with attachment disorder added layer upon layer of bonus challenges. One of these challenges was a set of idealized expectations about what it would look like to grow our family.

Back to the story! We had created an adorable nursery, completely ignorant that, as the sunniest room in the house, we were setting ourselves up for disappointment. She only slept in there once and it lasted less than ten minutes, do I sound bitter?

Our house was full of baby gifts given in love and excitement from our friends and family. We read a small library worth of books on pregnancy, birth, and parenting. And, for extra-credit, I was an elementary teacher with three nieces, so obviously I was an over-qualified expert for what we were about to experience.

My overall expectation? Becoming a family of three was going to be a wonderful experience and we were completely prepared. I had even dreamed up this expectation for a really beautiful family photo outside the front of our house, with the sun shining

down and everyone smiling with joy as we brought our baby girl home for the first time. It would be clear to everyone who saw that photo that this was one of the happiest days of our lives.

The reality of that moment is that we would be driving home an absolute hot mess—I would be starting my fourth day with literally zero sleep and starting to lose all cognitive and emotional capacity. The baby would have been crying at the top of her lungs for the entire duration of the drive home. We would have a ridiculous amount of stuff to unpack from the car, we had no idea what to do with our daughter now that we were on our own so to speak, she was jaundiced and nursing wasn't going great, so the possibility of having to take her back to the doctor was looming over our heads, it was raining, and did I mention I hadn't slept?

We brought the baby in through the garage, at least two of us crying and there was no cute family photo on the front step of our house.

Later, with a combination of tears and laughter that can only come when a person has hit an alarming amount of exhaustion, I confessed my disappointments about how things were going to my husband and my parents. And when I did, I realized, my expectations were so far away from reality that I hadn't even considered who exactly would take this perfect family photo in the front of the house.

As allies, we have to understand that the space between expectations and reality is a dangerous one, because it is the space where disappointment can grow into hurt, anger, bitterness, and even contempt. If you think back to your most recent relational hiccup or hurt, can you trace it back to unmet or unspoken expectations? My guess is that the answer is likely yes.

Expectations are tricky because they are formed in our minds, sometimes subconsciously, as we synthesize all of the ideals placed in front of us via social media reels and consumerist marketing, creating an unrealistic vision of what we think our lives should look or or feel like. Oftentimes, I am unaware that I have a list of expectations stored away in my heart and mind until they go unmet. As I have explored expectations in conversations with friends and family over the years, this seems to be a common experience.

What I have found to be somewhat unique to adoptees is that our expectations can be extra idealistic, often to the point of being not just unrealistic but extremely impossible. You can imagine then, that if unmet expectations can lead to disappointment for anyone, that an unmet expectation for an adoptee might quickly lead to more intense feelings of disappointment, hurt, anger, bitterness, or contempt.

One of the examples that first comes to mind to illustrate this is how tricky a time birthdays and holidays can be with an adoptee, if you have experienced it, you know what I'm talking about and how hard it is to get through those times, but if you haven't,

don't worry, it's a topic worthy of its own future episode, and I promise to eventually go there.

But today, I think it's important for us to get a few expectations about adoption and allyship out in the open, for the good of our community.

To start, a few expectations that you can expect of me:

- You can expect for me to be honest and vulnerable in the stories I share and the lessons I have learned
- You can expect me to have put a lot of learning and thought into my words before I bring them to you
- You can expect me to be human: I will get it wrong sometimes and when I do you can expect me to think about it and then apologize and do my best to make it right.
- You can expect me to approach these conversations with grace, because that's the secret sauce to showing up and growing in the spaces of adoption and allyship

And, it wouldn't be right to have an episode about expectations without also discussing what you can expect on your own adoption and allyship journeys:

- You can expect for it to be uncomfortable
- You can expect to do at least as much unlearning as you are doing learning
- You can expect to make mistakes and hurt people you love along the way
- You can expect for it to cost you time, energy, and humility
- You can expect that some people in the adoption and allyship communities will be skeptical of your efforts and intentions; they will criticize them, declare them not enough, or straight up unwelcome them.
- You can expect it to take time, in fact, you can expect it to be a lifelong learning experience—you will never finish learning how to be a better ally!
- You can expect that showing up in these spaces equipped, reliable, and ready to take action in loving others well and fighting for connection will mean everything to the people you love, even if they don't come out and say so.

Allyship is love in action. Expectations are super important to understand in our adoption and allyship journeys because they are constantly threatening to add layers of disappointment, hurt, anger, and bitterness onto our relationships. And, a relationship can only handle so much before distrust begins to grow. Distrust will destroy the effectiveness of our efforts to love one another well and fight for connection.

So, how do we navigate our way through the tricky terrain of expectations? How do we minimize the dangerous space between expectations and reality so that we reduce the chances for disappointment to grow into something worse?

It starts with getting honest and vulnerable with yourself and God about expectations. I have found two really great ways to do this through prayer: journaling and going on a walk by myself without headphones. There is something about solitude and silence when my body is doing a repetitive motion like writing or walking that helps me focus more on hearing and feeling God's voice over my own. I ask for God to help me see my blind spots and to help hold me accountable for being completely honest with myself when I would rather not.

Whether I am walking or writing in a journal, I set about answering the questions: What is my ideal scenario? What does reality look like? Where are my expectations along that continuum? Are they close enough to reality, or do I need the Holy Spirit to help me let go of some things in order to realign them?

Once we have been honest and vulnerable with ourselves and God about our expectations, and have adjusted accordingly (thank you Holy Spirit) we have to speak them out loud to someone. You'll have to decide on a case-by-case basis if the someone you choose to speak your expectations aloud to is the someone they are most likely to impact or a someone who is a neutral third party, but make no mistake—your expectations impact someone besides just you and in order to avoid all the negative fallout of unspoken and unmet expectations, you're going to have to have that conversation eventually.

There is something powerful about speaking your expectations aloud. Sometimes they come out and you realize they were more important and meaningful than you originally thought—something that had felt silly and trivial is actually a bigger deal to you. Sometimes they come out and you realize how unrealistic or unfair they are, and it makes adjusting them less painful. I have literally cracked up laughing saying some expectations aloud because you guys, I am the queen of unrealistic expectations. I would much rather laugh at myself **before** my expectations go unmet than **cry or lash out** after I end up disappointed.

Again, it's up to you whether you need a safe space to process these or if you go straight to the source, but eventually the fairest way to fight for connection and the most loving thing you can do for your people is to share your expectations with the those they impact. I know, it's vulnerable and potentially awkward. Believe me, I wish there were a way around vulnerability, but I promise there isn't. I have explored all other options and they never work out well.

And, just a disclaimer—doing the hard work of identifying and sharing your expectations does not mean that they will get met. It just means that you will have done what you can to give yourself the best opportunity for loving yourself and others well. It means you have taken away the potential emotional fallout of unspoken expectations and honored yourself in the process.

Our adoption and allyship journeys are full of expectation land mines. It's just a part of the journey. I hope that today's episode has given you some practical ideas about how

to handle those expectations in a way that will minimize relational damage, and I would encourage you to spend some time reflecting about your experiences with expectations: how have you handled them in the past and how has that worked out for you? What expectations are you currently holding that need to be discovered and shared with the people around you?

Well, after all that, I expect we are all in need of a little bit of help from the Holy Trinity.

Father God,

Thank you for being all-knowing and therefore already aware of our messed-up relationship with expectations.

You've seen us create outrageous, unhealthy ones in our minds and hearts when we thought we were all alone, nurturing them into monsters ready to attack our relationships; and you've seen them emerge outside of the radar of our own consciousness—taking us and the people we love by surprise.

You've also seen us reduce and neglect important, healthy expectations to the detriment of our own well-being.

Neither of these situations are for our good, Father, and therefore we know they are not your will for us.

Father, expectations that are not aligned with reality, especially when kept to ourselves, wreak havoc on our relationships and we don't want that in our adoption and allyship journeys. We want better, but we need your help.

Would you help us to be more aware of our own expectations, and give us the courage to be vulnerable in saying them aloud? Father, would you help us trust that you will be here for us in our disappointment when they go unmet, just as you are in our triumphs when they are.

Father, help us.

In our brother Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Thank you for joining me for another episode of Adopted into Allyship, produced by Day Three Studios. It's an honor to be your ally as you push yourself to listen, learn, and love in a way that helps you become an equipped, reliable, and action-oriented ally.

If you found this episode helpful or encouraging, I would be most grateful if you would take a minute and rate the podcast, leave a review, and share it with those you know who could benefit from joining us as we work toward loving one another well and fighting for connection. I will be back with more next Thursday, but until then, I would

love to connect with you on social media. I mostly hangout on Instagram, but you can find me on most platforms at jamie k corbin and of course, I have more thoughts on the topic of allyship on the website, jamielcorbin.com.