

WHAT ADOPTION IS, AND THE WORDS THAT CARRY WEIGHT

| Keep — one-page takeaway

The core idea: Adoption is legally a one-time transfer of parental rights. Clinically it is a lifelong relational and developmental context. Your client is living inside an open chapter, not reporting a closed one.

Words that carry clinical weight:

Phrase you'll hear	Why it lands hard	Reach for instead
"Real mom / real parents"	Implies one set of parents isn't genuine	birth/biological mother, adoptive mother, or just "your mom"
"Given up / gave away"	Frames relinquishment as casual discarding	"placed for adoption," "relinquished"
"Lucky to be adopted"	Demands gratitude, leaves no room for grief	don't reframe the loss as fortune at all
"Just like your own"	Marks the adopted child as a near-match	speak about the child without the comparison
"Where are your real parents?"	Conflates biology with parenthood; intrusive	avoid; redirect if a third party asks it

Watch your own reflex: the urge to mirror a client's loaded word so things don't get awkward. Notice the word; it marks the tender place.

In session: don't police a client's language. Register the weight, stay with the person, let the words be theirs.

Remember: you don't need perfect language. You need to hear the weight.

Companion download: Adoption Vocabulary Glossary (full term list from Module 1), offered as a separate reference handout, not taught on video.