

ADOPTION IS NOT ONE THING

| Keep — one-page takeaway

The pathway into adoption shapes the clinical picture. Use this to orient, not to categorize a client before they've told you their own story.

- **Domestic infant.** Placed within days or weeks, usually via agency, attorney, or intermediary. Most contemporary ones are open to some degree. ~25,000/year currently; the Baby Scoop Era (1945-1973) placed an estimated 20% of babies born to unmarried white American women, and those adoptees are now midlife or older. Watch: early relational disruption, how adoption was talked about at home, and whether openness was actually maintained in practice.
- **Foster-to-adopt.** Follows termination or relinquishment of parental rights; distinct from foster care, where reunification is the goal. 46,935 adopted from US foster care in FY 2024 (peak ~66,000 in 2019); 108,000+ eligible at any time. Most consistently tracked form. Watch: pre-placement trauma, older age at adoption, multiple placements, attachment disruption, continuing birth family relationships, and actual memory of birth family.
- **Kinship.** Adopted by a relative or existing family connection. Not consistently tracked; true proportion unknown. Watch: the original family visible in daily life, overlapping family roles, what the system names and doesn't, less geographic separation. See 6.3.
- **Intercountry.** ~256,000 to US families 1999-2014, plus earlier waves from Korea (1953 on), Vietnam, Russia, China, Guatemala. Annual flow down 95%, from ~23,000 (2004) to 1,172 (FY 2024), post-Hague. Watch: country and culture loss, racial difference from the family, and placement-era coercion, fraud, or falsified records. See 6.2.
- **Transracial.** Cuts across all the other forms rather than sitting beside them. ~25% of currently-adopted US children differ racially or ethnically from at least one adoptive parent. Not tracked as its own category. See 6.1.

The underlying point:

- Mother's Day is the same day for every adoptee and a different clinical situation for each. In reunion, knowing-but-no-relationship, birth mother deceased, and no information at all are four different rooms.
- Form shapes the questions a client carries. It doesn't tell you what they feel.

Continued considerations

- Which forms are actually represented on your caseload, and which have you never worked with?
- Where does your mental image of "an adoptee" come from, and which form is it?
- Sit with this: what do you assume about a client's story once you learn which form it was?