

BELONGING IS NOT ONE RELATIONSHIP

| Keep — one-page takeaway

Adoptees build belonging in a family they weren't born into, and a specific watchfulness for being left, returned, or removed often comes with it. That watchfulness produces coping patterns. Three recur, and they're adaptations that once protected the client rather than flaws. Naming them that way is usually what lets a client look at them without shame.

- **Making oneself needed.** Becoming indispensable, on the quiet logic that someone who's needed can't be sent away. In life it looks like high achievement, helpfulness, caretaking, the person everyone relies on. In session it can look like the good client who performs usefulness rather than lets themselves be helped. Often praised by everyone around them, and exhausting to keep up.
- **Internal exclusion.** Externally accepted and even loved, while keeping an inside wall that holds part of the self outside the family. The client may report a genuinely happy childhood and still describe a lifelong sense of being apart. In session it reads as cooperative but somehow not fully present, a wall you can sense but not quite reach behind.
- **Quick exit.** Leaving first when belonging starts to feel uncertain, in friendships, romantic relationships, work, and sometimes therapy itself. Others often experienced the relationship as solid, so the exit looks sudden from outside. It frequently follows a session that went well, because the deepening is what set it off.

The move in the room:

- Name the pattern as an adaptation that once kept the client safe rather than a character flaw. That lowers the shame enough to examine it.
- When usefulness is the pattern, ask what they get from the work, not what they give to it.
- Watch the quick exit inside the therapy relationship as the work deepens. A cancellation after a strong session is often the pattern rather than a verdict on you.

Sample language:

- **Making oneself needed:** "I notice how much you carry for everyone. I'm curious what it would be like to be here without having to be useful."
- **Internal exclusion:** "You describe a family that loved you, and a part of you that stayed outside it. Can we get curious about the part that stayed outside?"
- **Quick exit:** "When things get uncertain, leaving can feel safer than waiting to be left. I want to name that, because it may show up between us too."

Continued considerations:

- Which of the three do you recognize fastest, and which do you tend to miss?
- Where might one of these be operating in a current client, still unnamed?
- When a client pulls back after a good session, what's your first assumption, and is it about them or about you?