

IS THIS ABOUT ADOPTION, OR NOT?

| Keep — one-page takeaway

The task is reading what the client is actually bringing, rather than defaulting to adoption attribution or adoption avoidance. Both are frames of yours; neither is the client.

Presentations where adoption may be operating unnamed

- Apologizing throughout, thanking you at the end as though granted something.
- A life organized around being useful and needed; anxiety when the doing stops.
- Leaving relationships before being left, explained as needing space or not being built for commitment.
- Waiting for the shoe to drop across close relationships, called anxiety.
- A lifelong outsider feeling with no trigger the client can name.
- Holidays that hurt for no reason the client can identify.
- "I don't know who I am," without a clear depressive picture, alongside accomplishments and people who love them.

What to do with a recognized pattern:

- Don't impose the connection. Keep working on what the client came in for and stay alert for when surfacing it would be useful to them.
- The client may connect it themselves, or after a small question months later, or never. The work can be useful in all three.
- A client with adoption history whose presentation doesn't fit these may simply be working on something else. Read what's operating.

Your own pattern (you have one)

- **New to adoption work.** The framework is fresh and explains a lot, so the pull is to see adoption everywhere. Ask what the actual clinical evidence is for an adoption formulation.
- **Experienced in adoption work.** Familiarity becomes its own blind spot. You expect adoption because it usually is operating, and a client working on something else gets read through the lens anyway.
- **Personally connected to adoption.** As adoptee, adoptive parent, birth parent, or close family. Recognition is a real asset, and it can import expectations that don't fit this client.

Continued considerations

- Which direction do you err in, and what evidence would change your mind about a current client?
- Think of an adopted client on your caseload. What are you attributing to adoption that you haven't tested?
- Sit with this: what would it take for you to conclude a client's problem has nothing to do with their adoption?