

CHOOSING A GOOD THERAPIST — OR BECOMING ONE

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- * A Massachusetts study found that the most common post-adoption need was for mental health services with qualified adoption-sensitive professionals. Some families reported seeking services from up to 10 practitioners before locating one who understood their unique circumstances; some never found such a professional.
- * A study of 177 adoptive parents found that mental health counseling was the parents' major unmet need following adoptive placement.
- * Studies suggest that far too often, families themselves have to teach therapists about the most basic issues of adoption: trust, loss, rejection and divided loyalties.

Adoption Competence Questions for Interviewing Prospective Therapists *(from Adoptive Families Together):*

- * Have you been trained in adoption work? When, where and by whom?
- * What is your understanding of the differences in being a family by adoption? (A good answer might include issues of loss, grief, identity, trust, birth family, multiple placements and their effect on all involved.)
- * Do you think there is a difference between being or parenting an adopted child and being or parenting a child by birth? (We hope to hear, "Yes.") What do you understand to be different? (We hope to hear loss, identity confusion, etc.)

- * How much experience have you had with adoptive families? Are there adoptive families who would recommend you?
- * How much experience do you have with the different kinds of adoption? (e.g., special needs, open, closed, kinship, private, public, infant, older child.)
- * Do you think children adopted in infancy have the same issues as those adopted older? (A good answer: Older children may display symptoms of early neglect, but the core issues are the same.)

- * Adoption-competent therapists value the participation of adoptive parents in therapy.
- * Adoption-competent therapists acknowledge the child's earlier experiences in other care settings and view adoptive parents as a part of the solution rather than the source of the problem.
- * Adoption-competent therapists empower the adoptive parents by including them in the therapeutic process and make sure that no intervention threatens the parent-child relationship.
- * Adoption-competent therapists affirm that parents' commitment to the therapy contributes to the success of the therapeutic process for children and families.

An adoption-competent therapist must:

- * Be knowledgeable about adoption and the psychological impact of adoption on children and families and have clinical adoption training in a strength-based, family centered, culturally competent perspective of adoption.
- * Be experienced in working with adopted children and their families and understand adoption issues and adoptive family dynamics.
- * Be supportive of parenting relationships and family connections that may be the single most therapeutic element in the life of a child and family over time.
- * Be a resource for other mental health services available for adoption-related issues and problems. (from Child Welfare Information Gateway)

- * Adoption-competent therapists recognize that a child's adoption issues can interfere with secure, intimate attachments with his or her parent(s) and can negatively impact the family as a whole.
- * Adoption-competent therapists understand and address therapeutically the connection between grief, loss, attachment and relationships.
- * Adoption-competent therapists understand that traditional talk therapy and behavior modification may not be as effective as many of the alternative techniques such as play therapy, art therapy, biofeedback, etc.
- * Adoption-competent therapists empower the parent(s) with ongoing therapeutic knowledge and skills to reinforce the emotional work at home.

- * Adoption-competent therapists view adoption from a culturally competent family perspective and understand the power of the triad of family relationships.
- * Adoption-competent therapists understand the impact of abuse and neglect on child development and the link between brain development and behavior in order to develop skills and make treatment plans to support adopted children who have neurological challenges.
- * Adoption-competent therapists recognize that temporary out-of-home treatment may be essential (not a "failure" in the adoption) and work to keep the child and family connected and reunified as soon as possible.
