

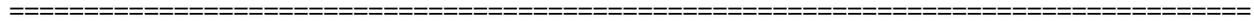


Adoption-Competent Therapist Traits

The need for adoption-competent mental health services is critical to the ongoing wellbeing of adoptive families. Feedback from adoptive families reflects a struggle to meet the mental health needs of their children due to a failure of some mental health providers to understand the unique issues of adoption that are related to mental health. Health and behavioral health care providers need to have expertise related to adoption in the same way that a provider might specialize in substance abuse treatment or in a specific diagnosis such as autism.

The following list of characteristics related to adoption-competence can serve as a gauge in choosing a therapist:

- Knowing that adoption is a lifelong process that includes universal experiences as well as unique individual feelings and perceptions.
- Recognizing the therapeutic importance of parenting relationships and family connections for the child.
- Addressing developmental challenges that are common to adoption.
- Helping families promote secure attachments and healthy relationships, no matter what developmental challenges arise.
- Viewing adoption from a culturally competent family perspective and understanding the power and complexities of adoptive and birth family dynamics.
- Treating adoptive families as team players, reaching towards the mutual goal of healing for the child.
- Avoiding blaming adoptive parents for their children’s behaviors; reframing everyone’s goal as being part of the solution.
- Helping adoptive parents honor their child’s past and achieve a comfort level that allows their child to address separation, loss and feelings about birth family.
- Supporting adoptive parents in assuming parental entitlement, fully empowering them as decision-makers and “experts” in the parenting journey.
- Recognizing and respecting the unique characteristics and skills that make adoptive families successful and that assist families in developing and practicing those skills.
- Striving to provide in-home and outreach services to families to meet them “where they are.”
- Recognizing that temporary out-of-home treatment is not an adoption failure but may ultimately keep the child and family connected and reunified.



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