

Lifespan Adoption Mapping

What happened across the timeline to bring this client here

Lifespan Adoption Mapping reads a client's history for the moments when adoption moved from the background to the front, and for what was relationally available to them at each one. It is a timeline tool. Use it at formulation, and again whenever a client's material changes without an obvious cause.

STEP 1

Map the activations

Classes: **SM** symbolic marker (recurring, calendar-bound) **LT** life transition **RE** relational event **CR** consciousness-raising encounter **EH** embodied or health event

LIFE STAGE	WHAT HAPPENED	CLASS	WHO KNEW, AND WHAT SUPPORT EXISTED
Childhood			
Adolescence			
Early adulthood			
Partnership & family formation			
Midlife			
Now			

STEP 2

Sort what you found

Recurring (it will come back, and you can see it coming):

Singular (it happened once, and the work is different):

STEP 3

Look forward

What is predictable and coming for this client in the next twelve months?

STEP 4

One sentence

Adoption material is currently active for this client because _____, which is a _____ activation. What recurs for them is _____.

Yours to reuse and to adapt for teaching and supervision

Reading Engagement

Where this client is right now, and what you do with it

Where Tool 1 reads across time, this one reads the present moment: which dimension is loud right now, how loss is operating, which response pathway is running, and what you can influence.

PART A

Which dimension is loudest right now?

Lifelong development <i>identity</i> Origin, body, and the cultural story. Who am I, where did I come from, what do I not know. ☐ quiet ☐ present ☐ loud	Connection and belonging <i>relationships</i> Whether belonging is assumed or worked at. Vigilance, indispensability, leaving first. ☐ quiet ☐ present ☐ loud	Storytelling and sense-making <i>narrative</i> The account the client holds of their own life, and whether new information fits inside it. ☐ quiet ☐ present ☐ loud
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PART B

How is loss operating?

- ☐ **Ambiguous** Physically absent and psychologically present. No endpoint, because the situation is not settled.
- ☐ **Disenfranchised** The client polices their own grief, apologizes for it, or qualifies it heavily.
- ☐ **Recurring** It has come around before, with different content each time. Earlier work did not fail.
- ☐ **Not present** Not what the client is describing, and I am not going to supply it.

PART C

Which response pathway looks like it is running?

Hold these as possibilities and watch. Integration is not the only legitimate outcome.

- ☐ **Cyclical integration** Moving through the meaning-making, with the loss held inside a coherent life story.
- ☐ **Arrested processing** In the cycle and stuck. Questions circle, grief stays chronic.
- ☐ **Deflection** The activation is turned aside before the cycle engages. Often self-protective when the people around them cannot hold it.
- ☐ **Narrative collapse** The material overwhelms the story and no coherent account has formed yet.

PART D

Which of the four can you influence here?

- ☐ Relational safety ☐ Communicative openness ☐ Access to information ☐ Support

The one that is most missing, and what you would do about it:

PART E

The sentence you would say

The words you would use with this client, next session.

Yours to reuse and to adapt for teaching and supervision

The action card

Six things to notice, two scripts, three changes, and one commitment

NOTICE

Which column is this client in?

Nothing on the left means the client's issue is adoption. Three of them move to the right the moment you learn one fact.

NONSPECIFIC · HOLD AS ONE HYPOTHESIS	ADOPTION-SPECIFIC · ASK DIRECTLY
<i>Apologizes throughout, and thanks you at the end like something was granted.</i>	<i>A family medical history that has never had an answer. Not one form, a lifetime of them, and the same blank at every new appointment.</i>
<i>Whole life built on being useful, and anxious when the doing stops.</i>	<i>A document that asks for parents and leaves room for one set. Intake paperwork, a school family tree, an end-of-life planning workbook.</i>
<i>Has left every long-term relationship first, and calls it fear of commitment.</i>	<i>My mother or my father, used without specification, by a client you know has two. Which one they name is doing work.</i>
<i>Waits for the shoe to drop in every close relationship, and calls it anxiety.</i>	<i>Never having seen a face like their own, or having just seen one. Including the version that arrives through their children.</i>
<i>The holidays hurt every year, with no memory attached to it.</i>	<i>Chosen, offered as the family's whole account of it, and what that implies about having been unchosen first.</i>
<i>Tells you, in different words for weeks, that they do not know who they are.</i>	<i>Gratitude arriving before the sentence is finished. I had a good adoption, but.</i>

SAY

Language that keeps the material available

RETIRE THIS	USE THIS
<i>Tell me about your family.</i>	<i>Tell me about the people in your life and how you came to be in family with them.</i>
<i>Was your adoption a good experience?</i>	<i>What is your adoption like for you right now?</i>
<i>But your adoptive parents loved you.</i>	<i>Tell me more about that.</i>
<i>Your biological mother must have loved you very much.</i>	<i>Is that something you want to come back to, or something you wanted me to know?</i>
<i>(when a client says my father)</i>	<i>When you say my father, are you talking about the father who raised you, or someone else?</i>

REPAIR

When your language lands wrong

The repair. *I have been thinking about something I said last week. I asked about your mother and I am not sure I framed it well. I want to check in about how that landed.*

Holding an opening. *Last time you mentioned a DNA test. I have not forgotten that. We can come back to it whenever you want, or not at all.*

CHANGE

Four things you can do

- ☐ **See what the form assumes.** Mother's age, father's age, sibling ages presumes one set of biological parents. Change it if it is yours; notice it either way.
- ☐ **Say the line out loud.** I know these forms can be hard for adoptees who do not have biological family medical information, and I am glad to work with whatever you have.
- ☐ **Name it once in session one.** I see on your intake that you were adopted. I wanted to mention that I noticed, and that we can talk about it whenever it feels relevant to you, including today or never.
- ☐ **If you teach or supervise.** Bring either tool into your next supervision hour, or a class that already covers loss.

MY ONE CHANGE · IN A COURSE I TEACH, A SUPERVISION HOUR, OR MY OWN CASELOAD