

Emergency Action for Records Storage EARS Mental Health Guide

Psychological counseling and therapy are understood and practiced differently in each country depending on the culture, language, and regulations.

This guide is geared towards Korean adoptees. We do not endorse a particular clinic or therapist, but we encourage you to find a person and orientation that works for you. It is common for adoptees to experience strong emotions following an adoption conference, during a trip to Korea or birth search, or following the death of a parent or birth of a child. These events may trigger a reaction in your body or a surge of emotions, or even feelings of dissociation. We encourage you to take time and reach out to your support people.

Questions to ask a therapist or counselor:

1. How much is the fee and how long do you typically see clients?
2. What is your theoretical orientation and what does this look like?
3. What is your experience working with adoptees or with trauma related to adoption?

Questions to ask yourself:

1. Do I feel safe with this person?
2. Am I ready to explore this issue?
3. What are the hesitations I have around therapy or change, and how can I express them to my therapist?

South Korea Counseling

In place of licensure, therapists and psychologists obtain levels of certificates. There are a number of English-speaking therapists who have obtained their training and licensure in the U.S. and abroad.

This is the website for the Korean Psychological Association:

<https://www.koreanpsychology.or.kr/eng/main/main.html#HOME>

Emergency mental health resources can be found here:

<https://findahelpline.com/countries/kr/topics/suicidal-thoughts>

Do I need therapy to heal?

There are many ways to heal and find meaning. Therapy is one way that people use to: manage challenging relational dynamics, recover from trauma, gain greater self-understanding, learn coping skills, or seek treatment for a mental health disorder. Therapy is sometimes used in conjunction with self-care skills (regular sleeping and eating habits), medication, art and creative expression, strengthening one's support system, and self-advocacy and activism work.

There are many different types of therapy and different types of therapists, and it is encouraged that you keep seeking a therapy/therapist that helps you to feel comfortable, authentic and heard.

Adoption competency: What does this mean? Is this the same thing as having an adoptee as a therapist?

Adoption competency *implies*¹ a certain level of education, skills and training around issues that are significant for adopted people and members of the adoption triad (adoptee, adoptive parents, birth parents). Adoption competent therapists generally have completed a course or continuing education. This training involves the acquisition of knowledge and skills, as well as a critical reflection of the therapist's own values and biases related to adoption.²

There are many adoptees who want to see a therapist who is also an adoptee. This is understandable, as this is a unique experience and many therapists will have little to no training on adoption issues (65% of doctoral-level therapists did not have any course about adoption, Brooke-Randalls, 2014) and providing adoption competent care.

Having said this, being an adoptee does not guarantee anything except that this person is an adoptee. It is recommended you ask about your current or future therapists' training and education around adoption issues if this is important to you.

Specialization and training: What does trauma-informed or specialty in adoption/ family separation/ human trafficking mean?

Therapists often specialize in certain areas, such as working with kids, treating eating disorders, or using specific therapies like dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT). Some have years of experience with particular groups, like veterans or trauma survivors. If a therapist lists a specialization, it's a good idea to ask about their training and how it influences their work.

There are also special treatments for trauma, such as Prolonged Exposure (PE), Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), and Somatic Therapy.

Briefly explain what these treatments are:

- Prolonged Exposure (PE): Gradual confrontation of trauma memories and triggers
- Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT): Changing unhelpful thoughts about trauma
- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR): Using eye movements to process trauma
- Somatic Therapy: Body-focused techniques to release trauma

¹ Anyone can say they have a competency in something without specific training in a topic. This is not a regulated term.

² Adoption competent therapy: <https://bpar.org/adoption-competent-therapy-what-it-is-why-it-matters-and-how-to-find-it/>

What do different therapy approaches mean? For example, how does person centered therapy differ from cognitive-behavioral therapy?

The theoretical orientation of your therapist represents a specific school of thought/training around the human condition and healing that they endorse. There are many psychological theories (for example, Freudian/psychoanalytic, Rogerian, Feminist, etc.). The theoretical orientation of your therapist means that they endorse a specific school of thought around counseling. Many therapists are more intensely trained in 1-2 theoretical orientations, but are flexible depending on the client and the client's needs. Many therapists will cite an "eclectic" approach to therapy, meaning the therapist utilizes a variety of different orientations or approaches depending on the needs of the client.

The majority of psychological theories were formed by white, European/U.S. men. This does not mean it cannot be effectively applied to numerous types of people, but it does mean that these theories and approaches were all created by people within a specific context. These people were more likely male, Western, and privileged.

The most popular theoretical orientations include: Cognitive behavioral therapy, psychodynamic, humanistic and person centered.

There has also been a movement to decolonize therapy, and to stop pathologizing people who are reacting to various systems of oppression. Decolonial therapists advocate to heal from the impact of colonization and to reclaim the collective healing practices of communities of color.

Individual vs group vs couples vs family therapy: Which one is right for me?

Individual therapy is a one-on-one treatment between you and a therapist. You are the client, and individual therapy generally involves reflection on your thoughts and behaviors, as well as a supportive relationship between you and your therapist.

Group therapy is a treatment that involves more than one client and a therapist (or co-therapists). As clients, you and other members interact and provide feedback to each other, as well as process feedback from the therapist.

Couples therapy is a treatment that occurs between you and a partner, and a therapist. You and your partner discuss relationship dynamics and goals you have for the relationship. The therapist helps you reflect on the behaviors and patterns in your relationship.

Family therapy is a treatment that involves members of a family and a therapist. You discuss issues related to the entire family unit and the complex family dynamics. The therapist will discuss individual members, dyadic relationships between two members, as well as the family functioning as a whole.