

# Why Adoption Counseling Services Matter for Birth Parents, Adoptees, and Adoptive Families

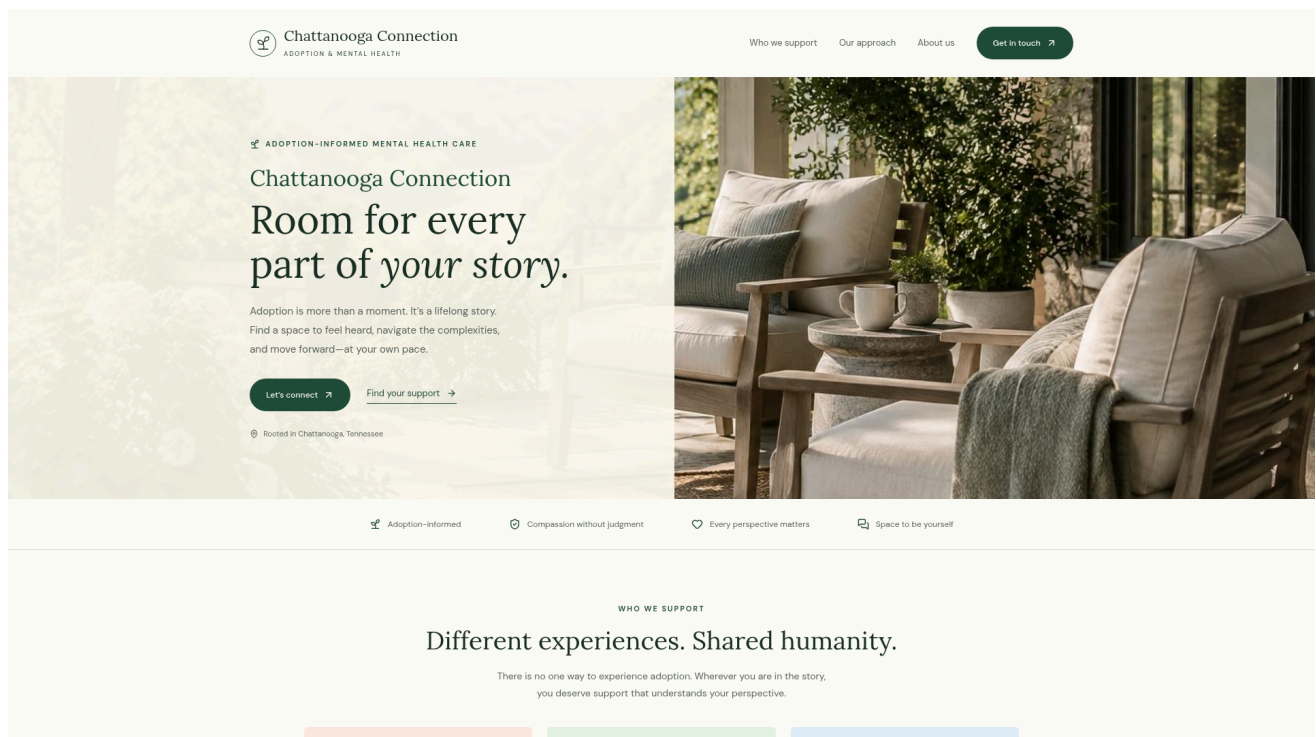
When I first started working with families touched by adoption, I assumed the hardest conversations would be about legal paperwork or logistical hurdles. I was wrong. The real challenge is emotional. Adoption touches identity, belonging, grief, and love all at once. Over the years, I have sat with birth mothers struggling with conflicting feelings years after placement, with adoptees trying to make sense of their origin story, and with adoptive parents wondering if they are doing enough. In almost every case, the same truth appears: adoption is not a single event. It is a lifelong process. And that process is where adoption counseling services become essential.

I practice in Chattanooga, Tennessee, a city with a strong sense of community but also a quiet need for better mental health support around adoption. People here know each other. They see each other at the grocery store, at church, at school events. That closeness can be a comfort, but it can also make topics like adoption loss, adoption regret, or reunion counseling feel harder to bring up. Many families I work with come in nervous, unsure if a therapist will really understand what they have been through. That worry is valid. Not every clinician has adoption competency. Knowing the difference between general grief and the specific grief that comes from adoption separation matters.

## What Adoption Counseling Services Actually Look Like

[Adoption counseling services](#) are not one-size-fits-all. A birth mother in her twenties who placed a child through open adoption five years ago has very different needs than a ten-year-old adoptee who is struggling with attachment at school. Good adoption-informed therapy starts with listening to the specific story in the room. It means understanding that trauma-informed care in adoption is not just about the placement itself. It is about the months and years before, the way the child was spoken to, the way the birth parents were treated, the way the adoptive family prepared. All of that shapes how someone experiences adoption.

I remember working with an adoptive father from near Chickamauga who said, "I read every book on attachment theory. I still felt lost when my daughter had a meltdown over a haircut." That moment taught me something important. Knowledge alone does not always translate into emotional readiness. Attachment therapy, especially when rooted in adoption competency, helps families connect the dots between behavior and history. It gives parents a framework for responding to hard moments without taking them personally.



## Birth Parents Need Their Own Space

Birth mother counseling is an area that often gets less attention than it deserves. Many agencies focus heavily on the adoptive family and the child, but birth parents carry their own weight. In my practice, I have seen birth mothers who were told they would "move on" after placement, only to find that the grief and loss resurfaces during holidays, birthdays, or even just a song on the radio. They need a place where they can say, "I am glad I chose adoption, and I also miss my child every day." Both things can be true. Adoption counseling services that ignore that complexity are not doing their job.

Open adoption adds another layer. It can be beautiful. It can also be confusing. Birth parents and adoptive families have to negotiate boundaries, communication styles, and expectations that change as the child grows. Without support, those relationships can drift or become strained. Family systems therapy is particularly helpful here because it looks at the whole network, not just one dyad. It asks: How do the birth mother, the adoptive parents, and the child talk to each other? Where are the gaps? What is unsaid?

## Adoptees and the Search for Identity

For adoptees, especially those who reach adolescence or young adulthood, questions about identity become central. I have heard versions of the same sentence from clients in Chattanooga and beyond: "I want to know who I look like." That is not curiosity. That is a core human need. Adoption regret is real for some adoptees, not because they do not love their families, but because adoption itself carries a loss that is hard to name. Reunion counseling

can help when an adoptee decides to seek out birth family, whether that goes smoothly or brings up unexpected emotions.

I am part of a local network that shares resources around adoption. Groups like the Adoptive Families Circle and the Adoption Network provide community connection that therapy alone cannot replace. National Adoption Day is a reminder to celebrate families, but for many of my clients, the quieter work happens in the months between the celebrations. The Adoption Triad - birth parents, adoptee, adoptive parents - each point of that triangle needs its own support. Post-adoption support groups in Tennessee have grown in recent years, and I see that as a sign that more people are ready to talk openly.

## **When Adoption Disruption Happens**

Adoption disruption is a term that many people do not want to say out loud. It refers to a placement that ends before finalization, or an adoption that dissolves after it is legal. It is painful for everyone. In those cases, adoption counseling services become triage. Families need a space to process shame, anger, and grief without being judged. They also need practical guidance on what comes next. I have sat with families who were terrified that they had failed, and I have helped them see that disruption often stems from a mismatch in support, not a lack of love.

Working in this field has taught me that adoption competency is not about having all the answers. It is about being willing to sit with hard questions. It is about knowing when to refer to someone with deeper expertise in attachment therapy or grief and loss. It is about staying humble and curious. I still learn something new from every family I meet.



## Practical Steps for Families in Tennessee

If you live in the Chattanooga area and are thinking about adoption counseling services, here are a few things to consider:

- Look for a therapist who explicitly names adoption competency or adoption-informed care in their approach. General therapy can help, but specialized knowledge matters.
- Ask whether the therapist has experience with open adoption dynamics and birth parent relationships. Not every clinician is comfortable with that triad.
- Consider whether you want individual, couple, or family therapy. Each serves a different purpose, and sometimes you need more than one.
- Check if there are local support groups near Chickamauga or Chattanooga that meet regularly. The Adoption Network and Adoptive Families Circle are good places to start.
- Be patient with the process. Real change in adoption-related mental health does not happen in one session. It unfolds over time.

I have seen families walk out of my office lighter than when they walked in. Not because I fixed anything, but because they finally said the things they had been holding inside. That is what

good adoption counseling services do. They create a space where the full truth can be spoken: the joy, the grief, the confusion, the hope. And from that honesty, families can begin to heal.