INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTEE

Mental Health & Wellness Toolkit

A self-guided check-in for lifelong wellbeing



TRUTH



IDENTITY



BELONGING



JUSTICE



SAFETY



CONNECTION



PURPOSE



HOPE



Contents

Choose the chapter that feels most relevant today. You do not need to work through the toolkit in order.

♥		*Why this toolkit?*	3
	1	Identity, Belonging & Culture	4
	2	My Adoption Story, Truth & Rights	6
	3	Grief, Loss & First Family	8
	4	Racism & Racial Wellbeing	10
	5	Relationships, Attachment & Boundaries	12
	6	Trauma, Triggers & Nervous System	14
	7	Emotional Wellbeing & Depression	16
		*When Life Feels Unbearable: A Safety Page*	18
	8	Physical Wellbeing & Body Care	20
	9	Connection, Community & Support	22
	10	Purpose, Joy & Life Beyond Adoption	24
	11	Advocacy, Meaning & Sustainable Boundaries	26
	12	Lifelong Healing & My Wellness Plan	28
		*My Personal Wellness Plan*	30
		*Closing: The Strengths That Brought Us Here*	31
♥		*Pull-out: Identity & Belonging*	33

Why this toolkit?

Intercountry adoption is not only a legal process or a childhood event. It can shape identity, relationships, grief, race, culture, family connection, safety and wellbeing across a lifetime.

Many mainstream wellbeing resources do not fully recognise the combined effects of early separation, displacement, institutional care, transracial living, racism, cultural disconnection, incomplete or inaccurate records, reunion, and the pressure to be grateful. This toolkit centres those realities without assuming that every adoptee will experience them in the same way.

It is not a diagnostic test. It is a strengths-based check-in: a way to notice what is already supporting you, identify what may need strengthening, and choose practical next steps. You may use one chapter, return to different sections over time, or stop whenever you need to.

Wellness is more than the absence of distress

For intercountry adoptees, wellbeing also depends on access to truth, identity, belonging, justice, safety, connection, purpose and hope.



A note about safety

Some sections discuss trauma, depression, suicidality, racism, family separation and harmful or illicit adoption practices. Pause, ground yourself, skip a section, or work alongside a trusted person or professional. If you are in immediate danger or may act on thoughts of suicide, use the urgent safety steps in the dedicated safety page and contact emergency or crisis support in your country.

Language: this toolkit generally uses "first family" or "family of origin". Use the words that feel respectful and true to your own relationships and experience.

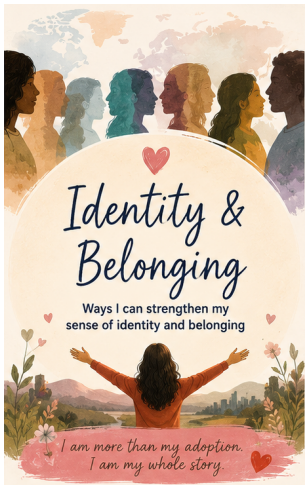
CHAPTER 1

Identity, Belonging & Culture

Intercountry adoptees often grow up across racial, cultural, national and family identities. Belonging may be complicated when others expect us to choose one culture, minimise racial difference, or define us through adoption. A strong identity is not a finished answer. It is the freedom to know, explore and name ourselves on our own terms.

Check in with myself

- ☐ Do I feel able to describe who I am beyond my adoption?
- ☐ Do I feel accepted as my whole self in my family, friendships and community?
- ☐ Do I hide parts of my identity to fit in or avoid conflict?
- ☐ Do I feel pressure to choose between the culture I was born into and the culture in which I was raised?
- ☐ Do I have access to people, stories, language or traditions that reflect my heritage?
- ☐ What parts of my identity currently feel strongest — and which feel neglected?



Identity & Belonging

Ways to strengthen this area

1. **Write an identity statement.** Describe the identities, values, relationships and experiences that matter to you. Include adoption only to the extent that feels accurate.
2. **Create low-pressure cultural connection.** Choose one activity: learn a few words, cook a dish, watch a film, attend an event, read history, or speak with someone from your culture of origin.
3. **Seek spaces where you do not have to explain yourself.** Spend more time with adoptees, cultural communities or trusted people who accept complexity rather than demanding a simple identity.
4. **Notice imposed beliefs.** Question messages that you must be grateful, culturally “authentic”, easy to understand, or loyal to only one family or nation.
5. **Allow identity to evolve.** Revisit how you describe yourself as you gain information, relationships and life experience. Change is not inconsistency; it is growth.



Embrace all parts of who I am

More support may be useful when...

- Shame or self-rejection is affecting daily life.
- Cultural reconnection brings intense grief, anxiety or confusion.
- Family or community conflict makes it unsafe to express who you are.

♥

I do not have to choose one part of myself to validate another.

My next step

One small action I will take:

A person or service that could support me:

What might get in the way — and how I can make the step easier:

I will check in with myself again on:

Back to contents ↑

CHAPTER 2

My Adoption Story, Truth & Rights

Wellbeing can be difficult when our histories are missing, simplified, controlled by others or contradicted by records. Some adoptees also face falsified documents, illegal or illicit practices, citizenship insecurity, denied information or systems that refuse accountability. Truth and justice are not separate from mental health; they can be essential to safety, identity and dignity.

Check in with myself

- ☐ Do I know who created the official account of my adoption?
- ☐ Can I access my records, identity documents and citizenship information?
- ☐ Are there gaps, contradictions or facts that I have been discouraged from questioning?
- ☐ Do I feel able to speak about both the positive and harmful parts of my adoption?
- ☐ Are legal, ethical or systemic concerns affecting my sense of safety?
- ☐ What truth, recognition or action would matter most to me now?



Discover my identity

Ways to strengthen this area

1. **Take stock of what you have.** List records, photographs, names, dates, places, agencies, court documents, immigration papers and family accounts. Store copies safely.
2. **Build your own timeline.** Separate known facts, official claims, memories, unanswered questions and possible discrepancies. You do not have to force uncertain information into a complete story.
3. **Seek informed assistance.** Contact adoptee-led organisations, record-access services, citizenship specialists, legal services or trusted researchers according to the issue you are facing.
4. **Protect your wellbeing while seeking truth.** Choose the pace, support people and boundaries you need before opening files, contacting institutions or receiving new information.
5. **Decide what justice means for you.** It may include records, correction, citizenship, recognition, apology, accountability, family tracing, compensation, reform — or simply having your lived experience believed.

More support may be useful when...

- New information is destabilising your identity or relationships.
- You suspect trafficking, falsification, coercion or other unlawful practice.
- Citizenship, legal status or access to records is unresolved.

♥

Seeking truth is not betrayal. My story and rights matter.

My next step

One small action I will take:

A person or service that could support me:

What might get in the way — and how I can make the step easier:

I will check in with myself again on:

Back to contents ↑



CHAPTER 3

Grief, Loss & First Family

Adoption can involve losses of people, language, culture, country, continuity, identity and possible futures. Some losses are ambiguous because the people or answers may still exist but remain inaccessible. Grief may emerge at birthdays, anniversaries, reunion, parenthood, bereavement or other life transitions. Recognising grief does not erase love or positive relationships.

Check in with myself

- ☐ Which losses connected to adoption have I been able to name?
- ☐ Do birthdays, anniversaries or life milestones affect me unexpectedly?
- ☐ Do I feel guilty for thinking about or wanting contact with my first family?
- ☐ Are there losses that others expect me to “move on” from?
- ☐ Am I considering search or reunion, or coping with an outcome I did not expect?
- ☐ What would help me honour what or whom I have lost?

Ways to strengthen this area

1. **Name the loss precisely.** Instead of treating grief as one large feeling, identify whether you are grieving a person, culture, missing information, lost time, rejection, or a life that might have been.
2. **Track grief patterns.** Notice dates, events, family changes or media stories that intensify emotions. Plan lighter demands and additional support around predictable times.
3. **Create a ritual of acknowledgement.** Write a letter, light a candle, visit a meaningful place, make art, cook a family or cultural food, or keep a private memory object.
4. **Approach search and reunion on your terms.** Learn about possible outcomes, identify support before contact, set boundaries, and remember that reunion begins a relationship rather than resolving every loss.
5. **Make room for grief and life together.** You do not need to wait until grief disappears before experiencing joy, connection, love or purpose.



Accept complexity

More support may be useful when...

- Grief is affecting sleep, work, relationships or daily functioning.
- Search, reunion, silence or secondary rejection feels overwhelming.
- You feel stuck between protecting others and acknowledging your own loss.

♥

Love, grief, anger, hope and loyalty can exist together.

My next step

One small action I will take:

A person or service that could support me:

What might get in the way — and how I can make the step easier:

I will check in with myself again on:

Back to contents ↑



CHAPTER 4

Racism & Racial Wellbeing

Racism is not a personal sensitivity or an individual failure to cope. It is a social reality that can affect safety, identity, belonging, confidence and mental health. For transracial adoptees, racism may be compounded when adoptive families minimise it, lack racial literacy, or expect us to prove belonging in the country where we were raised.

Check in with myself

- ☐ Have recent racist incidents or repeated microaggressions affected me?
- ☐ Do I minimise racism because others dismiss it or become defensive?
- ☐ Do I have racial mirrors — people who share or understand my racial experience?
- ☐ Do I feel pressure to prove that I belong in my family or country?
- ☐ Have I internalised negative messages about my appearance, ethnicity or culture?
- ☐ Do I know what support helps me recover after racism?

Ways to strengthen this area

1. **Name what happened.** Describe the behaviour and its impact without debating whether you are "too sensitive". Trust your experience.
2. **Build racial mirrors.** Seek adoptees, mentors, friends, creators, histories and communities that reflect your racial and cultural identity.
3. **Create a response menu.** Decide in advance when you may speak, document, report, seek an ally, leave, or protect your energy. No single response is required.
4. **Recover deliberately.** After racism, choose restoration: talk with someone who understands, rest, move, write, create, or reconnect with affirming culture and community.
5. **Challenge internalised racism with compassion.** Notice learned shame and replace it with accurate histories, positive representation and relationships that affirm your worth.



Strengthen my cultural identity

More support may be useful when...

- Racism is causing persistent fear, avoidance, anger or low mood.
- Work, education, family or community spaces feel unsafe.
- Internalised racism is affecting body image, relationships or cultural connection.

♥

Racism reflects a failure in the environment — not a flaw in me.

My next step

One small action I will take:

A person or service that could support me:

What might get in the way — and how I can make the step easier:

I will check in with myself again on:

Back to contents ↑



CHAPTER 5

Relationships, Attachment & Boundaries

Early separation, multiple caregivers, institutional care, later rejection or unsafe relationships may influence how we experience trust, closeness and conflict. These patterns are often protective adaptations, not character defects. Secure and meaningful relationships can be built throughout life through consistency, boundaries, repair and mutual care.

Check in with myself

- ☐ Do I fear abandonment or assume people will leave?
- ☐ Do I become highly independent because relying on others feels unsafe?
- ☐ Do I people-please, over-give or hide my needs to keep relationships?
- ☐ Do I struggle to trust affection, support or reassurance?
- ☐ Can I set boundaries without feeling guilty or disloyal?
- ☐ Which relationships help my body feel calm, respected and accepted?

Ways to strengthen this area

1. **Observe the pattern before judging it.** Notice what happens when someone comes close, disagrees, becomes unavailable or offers help. Ask what your response is trying to protect.
2. **Practise trust in small amounts.** Share something low-risk, ask for a small favour, or allow someone to follow through. Let trust grow from consistent behaviour.
3. **Use clear boundary language.** Try: “I am not able to do that”, “I need time before answering”, or “I can discuss this if my experience is not minimised”.
4. **Choose mutual relationships.** Look for reciprocity, accountability, respect and repair — not only intensity, obligation or fear of loss.
5. **Learn to receive support.** Allow trusted people to care for you without immediately repaying, apologising or proving your worth.

More support may be useful when...

- Fear of rejection drives repeated harmful relationship choices.
- Conflict triggers panic, shutdown, dissociation or unsafe behaviour.
- You are experiencing coercion, violence, control or emotional abuse.

♥

I do not have to earn love by abandoning myself.

My next step

One small action I will take:

A person or service that could support me:

What might get in the way — and how I can make the step easier:

I will check in with myself again on:

Back to contents ↑



CHAPTER 6

Trauma, Triggers & Nervous System

Some adoptees experience hypervigilance, shutdown, dissociation, panic, emotional numbness or strong reactions linked to early separation and later adversity. These responses may have helped us survive when safety, language or reliable care were unavailable. Healing often begins by increasing moments of present-day safety rather than forcing ourselves to "get over" a response.

Check in with myself

- ☐ Do I often feel on alert, easily startled or unable to relax?
- ☐ Do I shut down, disconnect or lose track of time when overwhelmed?
- ☐ Do particular smells, places, dates, conflicts or separations trigger strong reactions?
- ☐ Do I recognise fight, flight, freeze, fawn or collapse patterns in myself?
- ☐ Do I know what helps my body return to the present?
- ☐ Are trauma responses limiting daily life or relationships?

Ways to strengthen this area

1. **Orient to the present.** Look around and name where you are, the date, five things you can see, and one sign that the present is different from the past.
2. **Map triggers and early warning signs.** Notice body tension, racing thoughts, numbness, urgency, withdrawal or people-pleasing before the response becomes overwhelming.
3. **Build a regulation menu.** Choose several options: longer exhales, cold water on hands, movement, pressure from a blanket, music, nature, sensory objects, or contact with a safe person.
4. **Increase predictability.** Use routines, sleep cues, preparation for difficult dates, and clear plans for leaving or pausing overwhelming situations.
5. **Seek trauma-informed support.** Look for a practitioner who understands adoption, race and culture, explains their approach, respects consent, and does not reduce every experience to adoption.

More support may be useful when...

- Flashbacks, panic, nightmares or dissociation are frequent.
- You feel unsafe in your body or unable to function during triggers.
- Substances, self-harm or risky behaviour are being used to manage activation.

♥

My nervous system learned to protect me; it can also learn new experiences of safety.

My next step

One small action I will take:

A person or service that could support me:

What might get in the way — and how I can make the step easier:

I will check in with myself again on:

Back to contents ↑

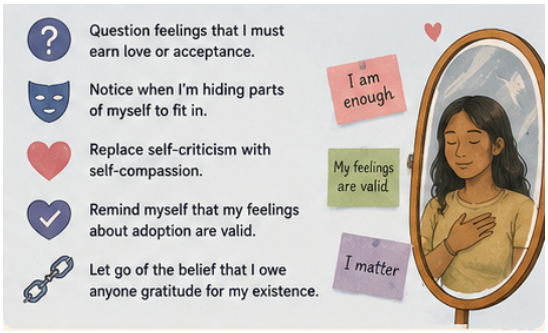
CHAPTER 7

Emotional Wellbeing & Depression

Persistent low mood, emptiness, hopelessness or loss of interest may need professional care. Adoption-related grief, racism, identity stress and isolation can contribute to emotional distress, but not every mental health concern has a single cause. Support should address the whole person rather than assuming either that adoption explains everything or that it explains nothing.

Check in with myself

- ☐ Have I felt low, empty, irritable or emotionally exhausted most days?
- ☐ Have I lost interest or pleasure in things that usually matter to me?
- ☐ Am I withdrawing from people or daily responsibilities?
- ☐ Has my sleep, appetite, concentration or energy changed?
- ☐ Do I feel hopeless, worthless or like a burden?
- ☐ Have I spoken honestly with anyone about how I am feeling?



Challenge internalised beliefs

Ways to strengthen this area

1. **Tell one person the truth.** Use simple words: “I am not coping well” or “I need help”. You do not need to explain your whole history before receiving support.
2. **Reduce the size of the day.** Choose a few basic anchors: get up, drink water, eat something, shower, take medication as prescribed, step outside, and contact someone.
3. **Reintroduce gentle activity.** Do one small action that used to bring comfort, interest or connection, without expecting it to fix your mood immediately.
4. **Arrange a professional check-in.** Speak with a doctor or mental health professional, especially when symptoms persist, worsen, or affect functioning. Ask about physical contributors as well as psychological support.
5. **Make support easier to access.** Save numbers, book follow-ups, tell someone about appointments, and write down what you want the professional to understand about adoption, race, culture and family history.

More support may be useful when...

- Symptoms continue for two weeks or more, or are worsening.
- Daily care, work, parenting or relationships are significantly affected.
- You are thinking about self-harm, disappearing or ending your life.

♥

Struggling is not failing. My pain deserves care and support.

My next step

One small action I will take:

A person or service that could support me:

What might get in the way — and how I can make the step easier:

I will check in with myself again on:

Back to contents ↑



When Life Feels Unbearable

A safety page for suicidal thoughts or immediate crisis

URGENT

If you may act on suicidal thoughts, have taken steps to harm yourself, or cannot stay safe: contact your local emergency number or go to the nearest emergency department now. Stay with another person and do not rely on this toolkit alone.

Suicidal thoughts can signal unbearable pain and a need for immediate support. They are not a moral failure, weakness or evidence that you do not matter.

What to do now

1. **Tell someone directly.** Say: "I am having thoughts of suicide and I need you to stay with me while we get help."
2. **Create distance from anything you could use to harm yourself.** Ask another person to remove or secure it, or move to a safer public or supervised place.
3. **Contact urgent support.** Call emergency services, a recognised crisis service, your doctor, therapist or another health professional in your country.
4. **Focus on the next ten minutes.** Breathe slowly, put your feet on the floor, name what you see, and delay any action while support is being arranged.
5. **Do not stay alone.** Remain with a trusted person or in a place where others can help until the intensity reduces and professional support is in place.

My personal safety plan

My warning signs:	
People I can contact immediately:	
Professional or crisis contacts in my country:	https://findahelpline.com/
A safe place I can go:	
Things that help me stay present for the next hour:	
Reasons, people, commitments or future moments that help me hold on:	

Prepare this page before a crisis

Complete it with someone you trust, keep it easy to find, and add the emergency and crisis services relevant to your country.

♥

My life has value. This moment needs support, not silence.

Back to contents ↑



CHAPTER 8

Physical Wellbeing & Body Care

Mental and physical wellbeing are connected. Chronic stress can affect sleep, energy, pain, digestion, concentration and the ways we use food, alcohol or other substances to cope. Caring for the body is not about appearance or perfection. It is about helping the body that carried us through survival experience rest, nourishment, movement and medical attention.

Check in with myself

- ☐ Am I sleeping enough and waking reasonably restored?
- ☐ Do I regularly notice pain, tension, fatigue or digestive symptoms?
- ☐ Am I eating and hydrating consistently?
- ☐ Do I move in ways that support rather than punish my body?
- ☐ Am I using alcohol, drugs, food, work or screens to avoid difficult feelings?
- ☐ Have I kept up with medical, dental and preventive health care?

Ways to strengthen this area

1. **Choose one body anchor.** Start with the area most likely to help: a regular meal, medication routine, bedtime cue, water bottle, short walk or health appointment.
2. **Move with kindness.** Choose movement that feels accessible and enjoyable. Focus on energy, strength, mobility, regulation or pleasure rather than changing your appearance.
3. **Listen to persistent symptoms.** Track patterns and seek medical advice rather than assuming everything is “just stress”. Ask for culturally safe and trauma-aware care when possible.
4. **Notice coping without shame.** Identify what alcohol, substances, food, overwork or scrolling provides in the moment, then add safer ways to meet the same need.
5. **Build rest into ordinary life.** Use brief pauses, quiet, warmth, nature, stretching or sleep routines before exhaustion becomes the only permission to stop.

More support may be useful when...

- Sleep, pain, eating or substance use is significantly affecting life.
- You avoid health care because it feels unsafe, shaming or overwhelming.
- Physical symptoms are new, persistent or worsening.

♥

My body is not a problem to solve. It deserves care for all it has carried.

My next step

One small action I will take:

A person or service that could support me:

What might get in the way — and how I can make the step easier:

I will check in with myself again on:

Back to contents ↑

CHAPTER 9

Connection, Community & Support

Healing rarely happens in isolation. Connection can offer understanding, practical help, cultural belonging, reality-checking and hope. No single person or community can meet every need. A strong support network often includes different forms of connection: trusted relationships, adoptee peers, cultural community, professional care and places where adoption is not the centre of life.

Check in with myself

- ☐ Do I have at least one person with whom I can be honest?
- ☐ Do I know another adoptee I can contact?
- ☐ Do I feel supported within an adoptee-led, cultural or racial community?
- ☐ Who can help with practical needs, emotional support or a crisis?
- ☐ Do I withdraw when I most need connection?
- ☐ Which relationships leave me feeling more grounded rather than depleted?



Build belonging

Ways to strengthen this area

1. **Map your circle of support.** Name people for honesty, laughter, practical help, cultural connection, professional guidance and crisis support. One person does not need to fill every role.
2. **Strengthen one reliable connection.** Arrange regular contact rather than waiting for a crisis. Consistency can matter more than the size of the network.
3. **Find adoptee-led connection.** Explore peer groups, events, online communities, mentoring or one-to-one relationships where lived experience is centred.
4. **Practise a direct request.** Try: “Can you listen without fixing this?”, “Can you come with me?”, or “Please check on me tomorrow”.
5. **Choose communities that respect complexity.** Step back from spaces that demand gratitude, silence, cultural performance or a single adoption narrative.

More support may be useful when...

- Isolation is increasing or you feel that nobody would understand.
- You rely on one person for every kind of support.
- Community conflict, exclusion or online content is harming your wellbeing.

♥

I was never meant to carry my whole story alone.

My next step

One small action I will take:

A person or service that could support me:

What might get in the way — and how I can make the step easier:

I will check in with myself again on:

Back to contents ↑



CHAPTER 10

Purpose, Joy & Life Beyond Adoption

Adoption may shape our lives, but it does not have to occupy every part of them. Purpose can grow through relationships, creativity, work, learning, spirituality, community, play, contribution and ordinary moments of joy. Moving beyond survival does not mean forgetting the past; it means allowing life to become larger than what happened to us.

Check in with myself

- ☐ What makes me feel alive, curious or absorbed?
- ☐ Do I have parts of life that are not organised around adoption?
- ☐ Am I able to enjoy good moments without guilt or waiting for the next loss?
- ☐ What values do I want my choices to reflect?
- ☐ Do I have a goal or experience I look forward to?
- ☐ What strengths have helped me create the life I have now?

Ways to strengthen this area

1. **Name what matters now.** Choose three values — such as honesty, creativity, family, freedom, justice, learning, care or adventure — and identify one action that reflects each.
2. **Schedule joy rather than waiting for it.** Make regular space for music, sport, art, humour, nature, travel, food, friendship, play or rest.
3. **Develop an identity beyond adoption.** Invest in skills, relationships and interests that belong to you whether or not adoption is being discussed.
4. **Set a small future-facing goal.** Choose something achievable within a month that gives you movement, anticipation or a sense of agency.
5. **Celebrate survival without romanticising it.** Acknowledge the creativity and determination that helped you continue, while remembering you should not have had to endure everything you did.

More support may be useful when...

- Life feels permanently narrowed to survival or adoption-related distress.
- You cannot identify pleasure, purpose or future possibility.
- Perfectionism or fear of failure prevents you from beginning.

♥

My past is part of my story, not the limit of my future.

My next step

One small action I will take:

A person or service that could support me:

What might get in the way — and how I can make the step easier:

I will check in with myself again on:

Back to contents ↑

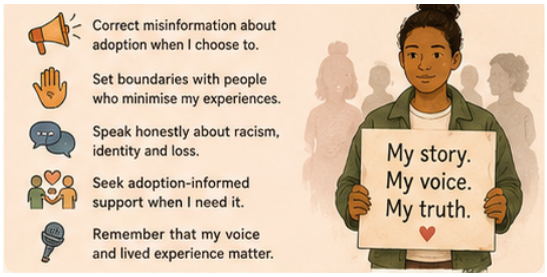
CHAPTER 11

Advocacy, Meaning & Sustainable Boundaries

Advocacy can transform isolation into meaning, expose injustice and create community. It can also involve repeated trauma stories, emotional labour, conflict and pressure to be constantly available. Sustainable advocacy protects the advocate as well as the cause. Stepping back, changing roles or choosing not to advocate are all valid.

Check in with myself

- ☐ Does advocacy currently energise me, drain me, or both?
- ☐ Am I taking responsibility for more people or problems than I can safely hold?
- ☐ Do I consume traumatic adoption content beyond my capacity?
- ☐ Can I say no, take leave or let others lead without guilt?
- ☐ Do I have support for debriefing and conflict?
- ☐ Is there enough joy, rest and life outside advocacy?



Advocate for myself

Ways to strengthen this area

1. **Check capacity before commitment.** Consider time, emotional load, family, work, health and recovery — not only whether the issue matters.
2. **Define your role and limits.** Be clear about what you can offer, what you cannot hold, response times, confidentiality and when responsibility transfers to someone else.
3. **Share the work.** Use teams, referrals, co-facilitation, supervision and succession planning. Collective change should not depend on one person staying exhausted.
4. **Plan recovery after heavy work.** Debrief, rest, limit additional content, reconnect with ordinary life, and notice signs of compassion fatigue or secondary trauma.
5. **Let advocacy change with your life.** Leadership, quiet support, research, art, mentoring, donations, voting, rest and living well can all be meaningful forms of contribution.

More support may be useful when...

- Advocacy is causing burnout, intrusive thoughts or relationship strain.
- You feel personally responsible for preventing every harm.
- Conflict, public exposure or traumatic material is affecting safety.

♥

I can care about change without sacrificing my wellbeing to prove my commitment.

My next step

One small action I will take:

A person or service that could support me:

What might get in the way — and how I can make the step easier:

I will check in with myself again on:

Back to contents ↑



CHAPTER 12

Lifelong Healing & My Wellness Plan

Healing is not a destination, a performance or a point at which adoption no longer affects us. It is an ongoing practice of understanding ourselves, expanding choice, building safety, seeking truth, grieving honestly, receiving support and creating a life that feels authentic. A personal plan makes support easier to use when we are tired or overwhelmed.

Check in with myself

- ☐ What already helps me feel safe, connected and hopeful?
- ☐ Which domain in this toolkit most needs attention now?
- ☐ What are my early signs that I am becoming overloaded?
- ☐ Who do I trust with different parts of my story?
- ☐ What professional, cultural, peer or legal support might I need?
- ☐ What is one realistic step I can take this week?

Ways to strengthen this area

1. **Recognise existing protective factors.** Name the knowledge, relationships, values, routines, humour, creativity and survival skills already supporting you.
2. **Choose priorities, not perfection.** Select one or two domains. Strengthening wellbeing is easier when the task is specific and achievable.
3. **Prepare for difficult periods.** Plan for anniversaries, family conflict, reunion developments, media stories, legal processes or other known stressors.
4. **Review the plan regularly.** Update contacts, supports and strategies as your life, identity and needs change.
5. **Include hope in practical form.** Write down future experiences, people, places, goals and values that help you stay connected to life.

More support may be useful when...

- You know what you need but cannot begin alone.
- Several domains are deteriorating at the same time.
- Your current supports do not understand adoption, race, culture or trauma.

♥

Healing does not require me to become someone else. It can help me become more fully myself.

My next step

One small action I will take:

A person or service that could support me:

What might get in the way — and how I can make the step easier:

I will check in with myself again on:

Back to contents ↑



My Personal Wellness Plan

Use this page as a brief summary. It does not need to be complete before it can be useful.

Strengths and survival skills that have helped me

Examples: persistence, humour, observation, independence, creativity, adaptability, truth-seeking, care for others.

Signs that I am becoming overloaded

Changes in sleep, withdrawal, anger, numbness, panic, overwork, substance use, hopelessness or difficulty functioning.

Things that help me return to myself

People, places, routines, movement, culture, nature, music, food, creativity, faith, rest or professional support.

People in my circle of support

Someone for honesty; someone for practical help; an adoptee peer; cultural connection; professional or crisis support.

What I want professionals to understand

Adoption, race, culture, first family, records, reunion, trauma, identity, language, legal or citizenship concerns.

My next three small steps

1.

2.

3.

A date to review this plan

Back to contents ↑



CLOSING

The Strengths That Brought Us Here

Intercountry adoptees have often had to adapt before we had words for what was happening. We learned to read rooms, cross cultures, manage difference, survive separation, live with uncertainty, and make meaning from stories that were incomplete or told by others.

Some of the qualities that helped us survive — vigilance, independence, compliance, humour, achievement, emotional distance, care for others, or relentless truth-seeking — may still be visible in how we live today. We can honour why these responses developed without requiring them to carry every part of our future.

Resilience does not mean that harm was acceptable, that loss should be minimised, or that systems and adults are relieved of responsibility. It does not mean we must keep enduring more. Our resilience is evidence of resourcefulness and life-force — not permission for others to expect silence, gratitude or endless strength.

Resilience can also look like...

asking for help • telling the truth • resting • setting a boundary • grieving • reconnecting with culture • changing our mind • building chosen family • seeking justice • creating joy • surviving one more day

Wellness is not the completion of healing. It is the gradual expansion of choice: more ways to understand ourselves, more people with whom we can be real, more safety in our bodies and relationships, more access to truth, and more room for joy alongside grief.

We do not need to become less affected, more grateful or easier for others to understand. We are allowed to become more fully ourselves — with all the identities, questions, relationships, losses, anger, tenderness, humour, culture, purpose and hope that belong to us.

We have already carried ourselves this far.

We can recognise the survival skills that protected us.

We can strengthen the support, truth and connection we deserve now.

Our lives are larger than adoption and larger than loss.

Our stories are still unfolding.

Wherever you begin, you belong here.



Daily reminders

Back to contents ↑

A page to keep

