




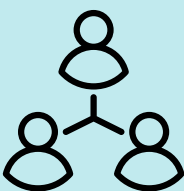
Hear survivors of labor trafficking discuss what traumatic bonding is and why trauma bonds are such a powerful tool for traffickers and why victims often feel they have no choice but to acquiesce to the demands of those exploiting them.

**Trauma Bonding:** a phenomenon in which people who have experienced a form of trauma or harm form a dysfunctional attachment with their abuser. Common in domestic and sexual violence situations and amongst victims of human trafficking because the crimes are prolonged over a period of time or happen on a regular an ongoing basis.

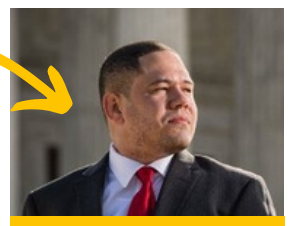
**What makes us vulnerable to forming a traumatic bond with traffickers ?**



**What dynamics do traffickers prey upon?**



## Introduction by James Dold



**Moderator**  
Founder & CEO of Human Rights for Kids

### ➤ Prolonged period of grooming

Grooming can happen over a period of months before other elements are introduced like sexualization, violence, and psychological coercion. During the grooming period, victims can be isolated from friends and family and slowly over time, become willing to give more and more of themselves, their own sense of free choice and free will.

### ➤ It's a different form of love

It's an intense sense of loyalty or love or even a sense of compassion for people who have done terrible things. Survivors might do anything to show how much they care and love their abuser because they think this is the only person in the world that really cares for them.

**taking love and twisting it in a way that allows people to exert control over others.**

### ➤ Intergenerational exploitation can make us more accepting of exploitative behavior

When the people close to you care for and have relationships with people that are actively exploiting them, you believe that that exploitation is normal. You justify that it's normal to work for free since it's for family, friends, the Constable, or someone in authority.

### ➤ Childhood trauma and attachment problems start with our primary caregivers

When people are exposed to that negative attachment it creates an emotional deficit. This becomes a sort of magnet for traffickers, who know how to manipulate and how to groom, how to validate the pain you're going through. People will then easily respond to that because they are functioning out of a deficit at a young age. Younger minds are fragile and might not really know the difference between love and pain.

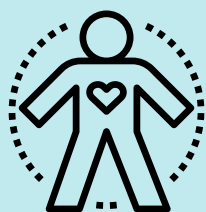
### ➤ They can use your family against you

Traffickers can use your family's culture and traditions against you, for example, if premarital sex is frowned upon in your family, your trafficker can manipulate you into keeping your sexual abuse a secret. They can also use how your family sees you against you, for example, if your family sees you as young and innocent. They can also use your role in your family against you, for example, if you are the caretaker in your family, you might keep your abuse a secret to seem strong for your family.

### ➤ They can use your situation against you

If you are on a visa or living abroad in general, you might need help to navigate the new country, which traffickers might use against you. If you lost your parents or lost any other support network, a trafficker might provide care to gain your trust. People want somebody to talk to that has their best interests at heart, which when coupled with whatever might be going on in the background of your life, can be used by a trafficker to wedge themselves in and exploit that vulnerability.

## What is the emotional, psychological, and bio physiological impact of trauma bonding on labor trafficking victims?



## How do victims break out of their bond with their trafficker and how long does that take?



## What should people know about trauma bonding among victims of labor trafficking?



### ➤ It can feel like an addiction

You can seek and crave the impact your trafficker had on you, which leaves a trace on your brain, heart, and body. In a workplace, it can look like overcompensating, overworking, and this sense of chronic professionalism can turn into obsessive disorders. You might have this fear that if you don't get it right, you'll be beaten, fired, or not get the promotion. Many survivors are unable to leave because of their commitment to the organization and loyalty to the mission; they see it as their duty to fix whatever deficit that the system has.

### ➤ Trauma bonding in the non-profit sector

As the third largest work sector in the U.S, a lot of survivors turn to it to find peace. Those spaces are not always trauma-informed, but many will accept and justify the abuse because it is for a good cause. Even though it might be too emotionally triggering. But employers that exploit survivors, just so that they can say their organization is survivor lead, are not trauma-informed.

Employers can exploit a survivor's past exploitation for their benefit by saying the right words, in the right tone and leveraging the survivor's feelings of guilt and empathy. Your race or gender identity can be leveraged against you to make you feel responsible for failing your clients. Then your work-life boundaries get blurred, and you give your personal number to clients because they can't get through the crisis line, so they have to call you. They live in crisis mode, which in turn makes the service provider live in crisis mode. You rationalize your abuse because there's not enough staff or they're cutting the funding. Until you realize only your funding gets cut.

### ➤ It's not all black and white

Breaking those bonds is very hard, especially when you have such fond memories. Your relationship with your trafficker might be filled with both feelings of love and resentment, but you have to remember to create strong boundaries for yourself and to be strict with them. Look for jobs that allow for flexibility and won't make you constantly triggered.

### ➤ Complex PTSD

You can question your identity because you don't understand why you can't disrupt these patterns. You have to slow down and understand that PTSD is complex, and there are numerous forms of therapy to try. There aren't a lot of studies done on survivors of labor trafficking, but we might notice that our brain responds the same way as someone who survived domestic violence, for example. Try the therapy developed for them until you find something that works. The most devastating part is feeling like you have like 1000 steps to go, but what happened to you is multilayered, and your trauma cannot become your identity.

### ➤ See us as a whole person

When you keep labeling us and funneling us into this little portion of who we are, you lose the other 99.9% of us. Our worth is not our exploitation, but how we got through it.

### ➤ What message are you sending?

Are you truly open to criticism and are you open to working with survivors who give you their feedback?

### ➤ Stop the hierarchy between sex and labor trafficking

Organizations make us fight for the same resources that we're both entitled to.

Human trafficking is just that, whether it's sex or labor. If you've experienced trafficking in any way, we're here for you, instead of having to fight a fellow survivor. We've already been through enough, we can't be pitted against each other, because that's actually what our abusers did.

**Q. What are ways that service providers can communicate with survivors or interact with survivors who are still captive in that trauma bond and are working towards healing.**

**A.** trauma bonding is the struggle to make cognitive dissonance. You don't know what's real and what's not, so I think service providers need to be as transparent as possible. You say you support survivors, but you might be limited in your capacity, but to a survivor that might look like you are contradicting yourself. Find healthy ways of engaging survivors so they are not again struggling with that cognitive dissonance.

**A.** Respect their decision. We don't know why a person chooses to stay in their situation. Just because we don't agree with their lifestyle and don't agree with them staying in that situation, doesn't mean you should judge them. They may have a trauma bond and that trauma bond should be diagnosed by somebody who knows about it, and not just heard about it. What I may think is safe for me may not necessarily be safe for someone else.

**A.** Understand that trauma bonds don't just end overnight. It's a long sort of process and you kind of go through withdrawals. Addiction is a great metaphor because you might be able to leave, but you go back to that sense of love and belonging. So it's important to have people that provide that love and compassion and support and belonging that the survivor is looking for. We really need to support survivors in their healing journey because everyone's on a different path everyone's along a different place in their trajectory and just being there to provide support is absolutely key.

**Q. Is there potential to repair ruptured key relationships, such as with caregivers or parents?**

**A.** Even if the relationship is repairable, sometimes the only way to heal the trauma bond is by breaking and by repairing your own child and going back and re-parent yourself. But forgiveness and acceptance are daily choices where you look and understand that there are certain environmental conditions that prevented your caregivers from protecting you.

**A.** There's no blanket answer. You can care and love for someone from a distance that doesn't mean they need to have access to your life and be an active part of your life. In order to fully heal you don't need to forgive them necessarily, but forgive yourself first.

To learn more about Framework or to request training, technical assistance, or individualized support on labor trafficking, visit us on our website.

[www.frameworkta.org](http://www.frameworkta.org)