

Loyalty, Control, and Reclaiming Identity after Familial Trafficking

Presented by:
Fenix McClay

a question to begin



What is Familial Trafficking?

Scenario 1:

The *“Perfect Family”*

Lie



What is Familial Trafficking?

Scenario 2:

It's a *"Family Business"*



What is Familial Trafficking?

Scenario 3:

“That kid is just a runaway”

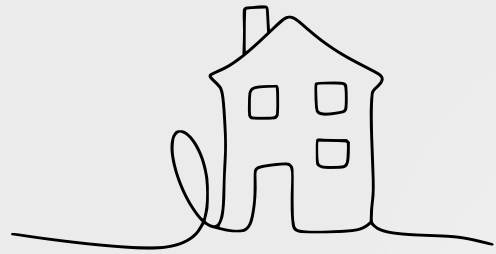


Today's Presentation

When a child is exploited by their family members, love and fear become closely intertwined creating loyalty, dependence, and a silencing that often lasts till adulthood.

This presentation will increase your knowledge on these dynamics and will give you the tools to walk alongside survivors leaving these exploitative situations.





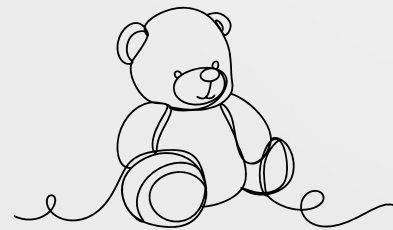
Love and loyalty - trauma bonding and child development within familial trafficking scenarios, the foundation of dissociation, fragmentation and traumatic memory.



Fear and control - maintaining secrecy in order to prevent disclosure through torment, intimidation, gaslighting and control. Cementing the loops that will maintain control over their victim through every stage of their life cycle.



Disclosure and Loss - finding voice at a great cost to survivors and how to support them through this stage



Moving Toward Identity - walking with survivors as they learn who they want to be and the identity development stage of recovery within supportive structures.



About the Presenter

Fenix McClay has ten years of experience in the anti-human trafficking field, which includes work with taskforces, non-profits, boards, research, training, and program evaluation. They are the current CEO of Mosaic Consulting Co LLC, a coaching and consulting firm working with anti-human trafficking organizations to improve services and sustainable growth.

What We do Know

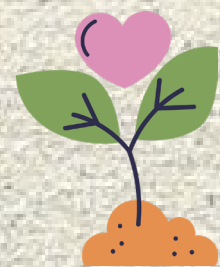
- Familial Trafficking is often hidden and hard to identify
- Often familial trafficking is misidentified as child sexual abuse or other crimes.
- Children may still attend school, be involved in church or other normal activities
- Dissociation is high in this population (DID, DDNOS ect..)
- Many children come from family systems that have strong heteronormative and patriarchal systems of belief.
- Familial Trafficking victims exploitation begins often in early childhood.
- The International Organization of Migration suggests 41% of child sex traffickers are the children's own family member/caretaker.
- The majority of these children are used in pornography and by pedophilic groups.

Love and Loyalty

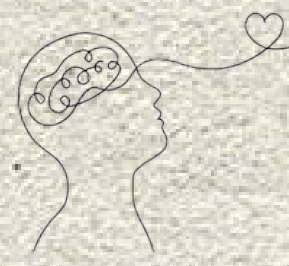
Providing



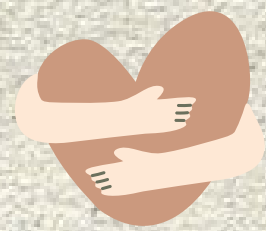
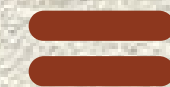
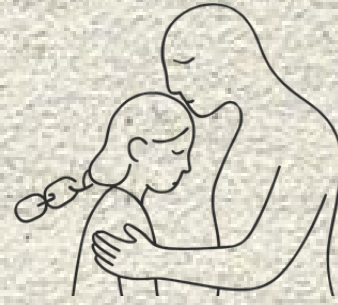
Nurturing



Withholding



Dependence



Care



Protection



Abuse-Betrayal



Cognitive Dissonance and
the splitting of the self

Fear and Control

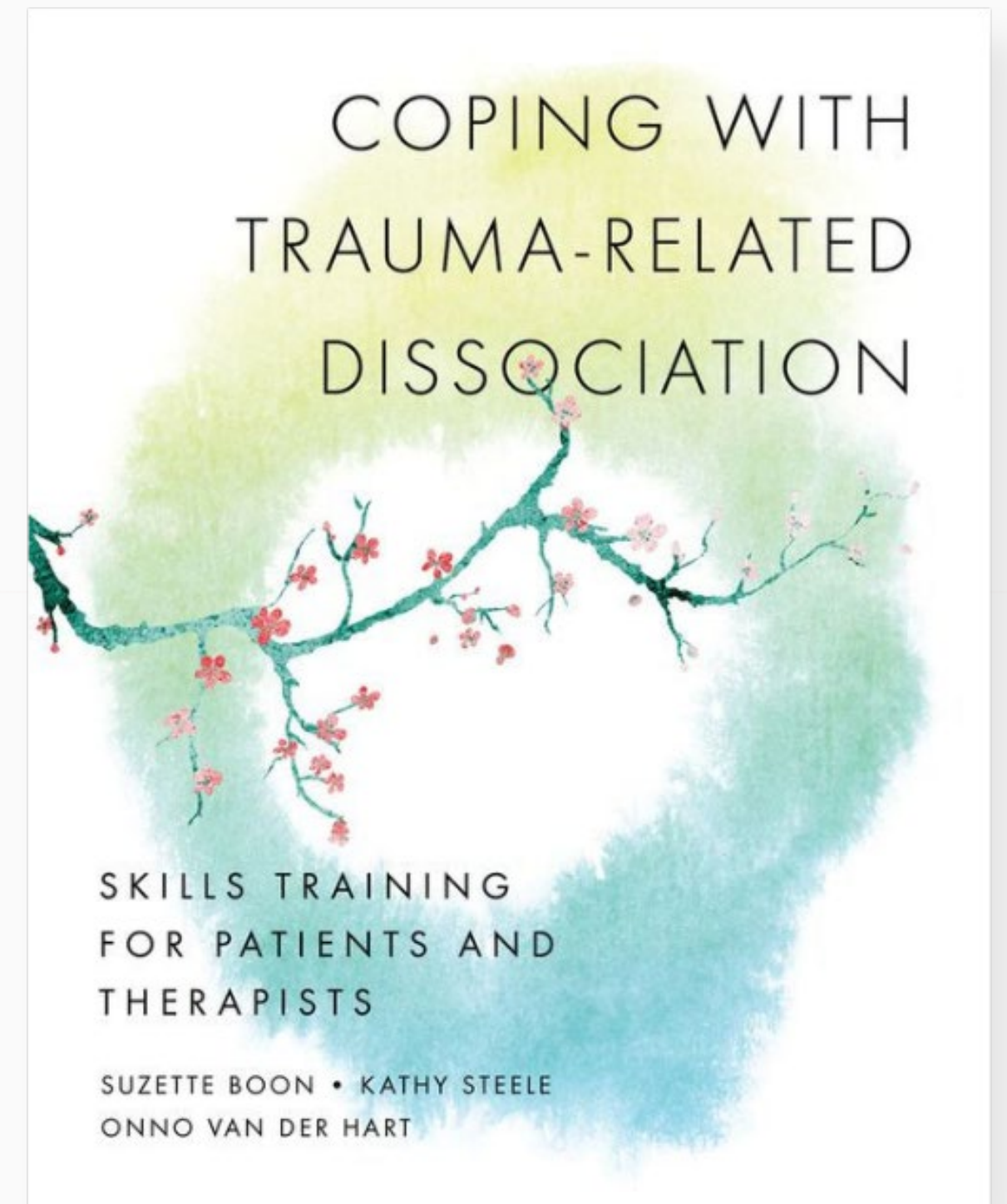
Many survivors of familial trafficking to keep them silent experience:

- Elements of torture or ritualistic type abuse
- Brainwashing, manipulation, trauma bonding and direct threats of harm toward self, pets, and those they love.
- Intentional deception and causing dissociation/memory fragmentation
- Repeated experiences of abuse cause dissociation and disconnection from the self



Helping Create Inner Pathways of Reconnection

To the... Body, Emotions, Dissociated Parts of the Self
Resource of Note - Coping with Trauma Related
Dissociation by Suzette Boon, Kathy Steele and Onno
Van Der Hart



A Time to Connect Within: Individual Activity

We all have different parts of ourselves that are arrested and in various developmental stages, perform different roles, or are not even allowed to be present in our body because it is too hard and painful.

Take a moment to reflect:

What are the different parts of you saying *right now*? (Jot down what you are feeling in your body, what phrases come across your mind, notice the emotions that are most present and the ones that feel uncomfortable.)



Disclosure and Loss

- How you respond to an individual's disclosure is a deeply impactful experience for the survivor. (A child does not have the words that an adult has later in life to understand and contextualize their experiences)
- Coping with complicated and lasting grief
- Separation or Re-unification?
- Leaving their family means losing everything and having to rebuild without the innate support system that family units provide



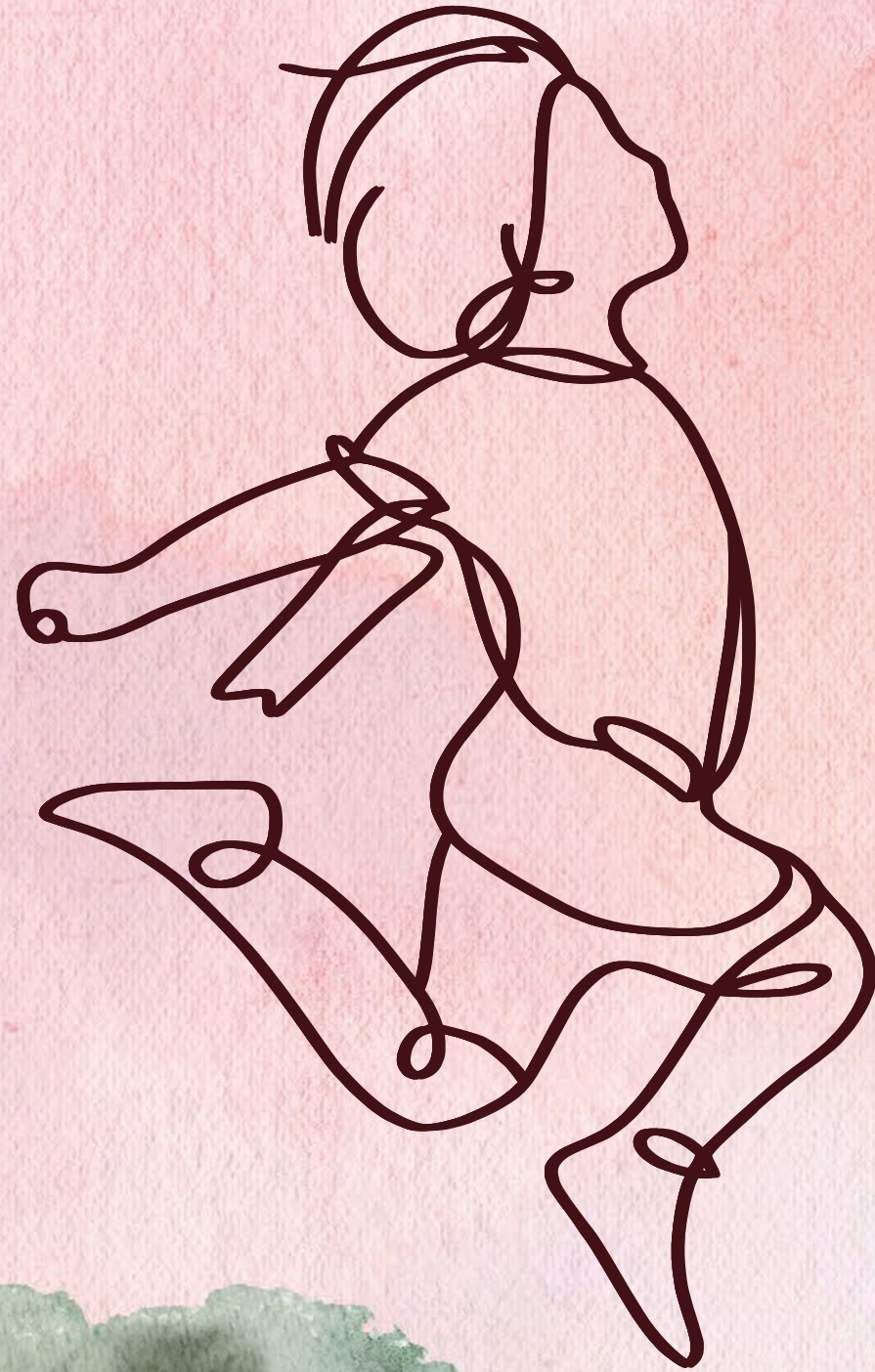
Moving Toward

Identity

- Reconnection with oneself and safe community
- Risk within contexts that support them when there are challenges
- Rebuilding trust



Committing to the Journey not
the Destination



Relevant

References

Boone, S., Steele, K., Van Der Hart, O. (2011). *Coping With Trauma Related Dissociation*. W.W. Norton and Company: New York, NY.

Casassa, K., Knight, L., & Mengo, C. (2022). Trauma bonding perspectives from service providers and survivors of sex trafficking: A scoping review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 23(3), 969-984. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838020985542>.

Edwards, E. E., Middleton, J. S., & Cole, J. (2024). Family-controlled trafficking in the United States: Victim characteristics, system response, and case outcomes. *Journal of Human Trafficking*, 10(3), 411-429.

Godoy, S. M., Hall, W. J., Cal, T., Bath, E. P., Abrams, L. S., Goode, R. W., ... & Chapman, M. V. (2025). Children's pathways into commercial sexual exploitation in the United States: A systematic review. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 26(5), 955-970.

Godoy, S. M., Bellatorre, Z., Clarke, A., McClay, F., Rose, T., Rozelle-Bennett, C. C., ... & Chapman, M. V. (2025). "This is the First Time I've Felt Seen": How Community-Engagement Can Improve Human Trafficking Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 24, 16094069251339086.



Greenbaum, J., Kaplan, D., Young, J., ABUSE, C. O. C., Haney, S. B., Sirotnak, A. P., ... & Shapiro, A. (2023). Exploitation, labor and sex trafficking of children and adolescents: health care needs of patients. *Pediatrics*, 151(1).

Miller, A. (2014) *Becoming Yourself: Overcoming Mind Control and Ritual Abuse*. Karnac Books: London, EN.

Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (OMCTP). Trauma bonding in human trafficking – United States Department of State. (n.d.). Retrieved March 24, 2023, from https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/TIP_Factsheet-Trauma-Bonding-in-Human-Trafficking-508.pdf.

Pacheco, E. L. M., Buenaventura, A. E., & Miles, G. M. (2023). “She was willing to send me there”: Intrafamilial child sexual abuse, exploitation and trafficking of boys. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 142, 105849.

Rodgers, A. (2006). *Unsayable: The Hidden Language of Trauma*. Random House.

Sidun, N., & Dryjanska, L. (2025). Familial Trafficking: History, Consequences, and Clinical Recommendations. *The Family Journal*, 33(1), 61-72. DOI: 10.1177/10664807241274993.



Sprang, G., & Cole, J. (2018). Familial sex trafficking of minors: Trafficking conditions, clinical presentation, and system involvement. *Journal of family violence*, 33, 185-195.

Voller, V. K., Maass, K. L., Weinfurter, E. V., & Martin, L. (2024). The Hidden and Misunderstood Problem of Familial Sex Trafficking of Minors in the United States. *Child Welfare*, 102(2), 145-180.

White, C. N., Robichaux, K., Huang, A., & Luo, C. (2024). When families become perpetrators: A case series on familial trafficking. *Journal of Family Violence*, 39(3), 435-447.



Books by Survivors of Familial Trafficking

My Life Now By: Mary Knight

Sunbeams Through Blankets: An Inspirational Guide to Surviving Familial Sex Trafficking By: Aidra James

The Lucky One: A Chilling True Account of Child Sex Trafficking and One Survivor's Journey from Brutal Captivity to a Life of Freedom
By: Jenni S. Jessen

A Diary From Hell (A Child Being Sold in America) By: Theresa Caldwell Jenkins

I Walked Through Fire to Get Here By: Megan Conner



Thank
you!

Want to engage with me further?

Email:

info@mosaicconsultingco.com