

7 Signs You Have An Intense Emotional Bond With A Toxic Person

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When you're in an unhealthy relationship, the best and obvious thing for you to do is leave. But sometimes that's easier said than done. If [you're in a trauma bond](#), therapists say it will make leaving that situation even harder. "A trauma bond is an intense emotional bond between people that usually forms as a result of a toxic or abusive dynamic," [Samantha Waldman, MHC](#), an NYC-based therapist who specializes in trauma and relationships, tells Bustle.

A past history of abuse or exposure to it can make a person more likely to form trauma bonds. For instance, people who experienced some form of [neglect or abuse from childhood](#) may normalize this behavior as an adult because it's what they "learned." As Dr. Connie Omari, clinician and owner of [Tech Talk Therapy](#), tells Bustle, trauma bonding includes the tendency for a person to connect with others based off the needs of their own traumatic experiences. "Because trauma involves some unmet emotional or psychological need, the relationship serves as a way to meet this need, even when it's not done so appropriately," she says. "It looks very dysfunctional and typically includes one or more forms of abuse." These bonds aren't limited to romantic relationships. You can form a trauma bond with friends, family members, and even co-workers. When you're in a trauma bond, you'll find yourself continually drawn to someone even though they [cause you significant pain](#).

It's easy to mistake unconditional love for something more toxic like a trauma bond. So here are some signs you may be in a trauma bond with a toxic person, according to experts.

1. "Crumbs" Of Love And Affection Make Your Day

"When we find ourselves in relationships where we feel starved for love and support, small and rare instances of affection, what some call 'crumbs of love,' can feel deceptively satisfying," Waldman says.

For example, if a toxic person typically belittles their partner, a compliment from them would feel meaningful and special. The "affection-starved" partner would then hang on to these singular instances hoping that they will experience it again. These little crumbs of affection basically keep them hooked.

2. There's A Predator-Prey Dynamic In Your Relationship

A relationship built off a trauma bond usually resembles a game of "predator and prey." According to Dr. Omari, the "predator" or abusive person will intentionally seek out and exploit the vulnerable one's need for connection. Because of this, some form of abuse may be present in the relationship such as psychological abuse, sexual abuse, or [financial manipulation](#). "The abused person may or may not even be aware of the abuse," Dr. Omari says. "But they will maintain the relationship because they falsely think it satisfies their need for connection no matter how unhealthy it is."

3. You Secretly Crave The Drama Your Relationship Provides

"More recent research shows that the bonding actually occurs because [we can become addicted](#) to the hormonal and emotional roller coaster our abuser has put us on," [Kati Morton, LMFT](#), licensed therapist and author of *[Are u ok?: A Guide to Caring for Your Mental Health](#)*, tells Bustle. So even if the abuse is bad, the love and attention you get afterward feels good to the point that it makes you forget. According to Morton, your brain can get so used to this "up and down emotional ride" that it starts craving it. "The rush of the stress hormone cortisol, and a flood of the feel-good chemical dopamine can trigger the reward center in our brain, which can cause you to think you're in love with your abuser," she says. This is more likely to happen when younger or less mature.

4. You Feel Like You Can't Leave Them

When you're in a trauma bond, you'll feel stuck in the relationship and won't see any way out of it.

According to Morton, when you try to leave, you'll feel an intense longing to see that person again. "The pain of that longing will always bring you back," she says. While it may be difficult, it could be worth it to speak to a professional or loved ones to help you out of the relationship.

5. You Worry About Doing Things That Will Set Them Off

If there's abuse involved, you may find yourself walking on eggshells around them. According to Morton, one major sign of a trauma bond is worrying that you may do or say something to set them off. Even if you know this person is doing hurtful things to you, leaving is difficult because you're afraid they may not only hurt you but themselves. Once again, talking to a professional or loved ones can help you get out of this situation safely.

6. You Stay Because You Feel Like Your Partner Is The Only One Who Can Fulfill Your Needs

Trauma bonding can feel like love because you're so attached to this person regardless of what they do to you. But as Dr. Omari says, it's very different. "The motivation for trauma is intended to serve the unmet need in the victim involved," she says. You're so attached to this person that you feel like you can't get your needs met anywhere else. You're validated by your partner's "approval."

7. You Brush Off Their Bad Behavior Even If It Causes Others Concern

"Your friends and family may be disturbed by some things that your partner has said or done to you, but you don't think it's that big of a deal," Morton says. If people around you have mentioned that you need to get out of the relationship, but you ignore them or pretend to not know what they're talking about, you're likely in a trauma bond.

"A person can break the cycle of trauma bonding by being honest with themselves and setting boundaries," Dr. Omari says. "Unfortunately, this is very difficult to do alone. If you find yourself in a relationship that's based off your own trauma, you should be diligent about trying to end that relationship and to work on yourself." A [trauma-focused therapist](#) can be a great resource. It may not be easy to break out of the cycle, but you can do it.

Editor's Note: If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic abuse, call 911 or the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1(800) 799-SAFE (7233) or visit thehotline.org.