

Maternal Love That Claims the Child:  
*When love asks too much*  
Video Course  
Dr Brooke Laufer

Video Course  
CPD hours: 2



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Love is not just an intention.  
It is an atmosphere.

And some children grow up inside forms of maternal love that quietly take more than give.

Some grow up inside love that is **intense and consuming**.

Love that struggles with separation.

Love that is jealous of other attachments.

Love that competes — subtly or overtly — with friends, partners, or the child's own emerging life.

Others grow up inside love that **demand loyalty**. Love that must be prioritised. Love that is offered generously, but carries an unspoken expectation in return: availability, gratitude, emotional closeness. Love that is given as a favour rather than a foundation.

There is love that suffocates rather than shelters.

Love that confuses closeness with ownership.

Love that leans on the child for reassurance, steadiness, or meaning — often without ever naming that this is what is happening.

**Many mothers love fiercely while carrying their own unmet needs, fears of abandonment, or histories of having had to survive without support.** But when a child grows up inside love that **claims them**, that love shapes who they are allowed to become — how much space they feel entitled to take, and whether they ever quite feel able to breathe freely.

Children adapt — not because something is “wrong” with them, but because adaptation is how children survive relationships they cannot leave.

They learn when to stay close and when not to pull away.

They learn how to soften themselves, manage moods, and prevent rupture.



They learn that separation has a cost, and that independence can feel like betrayal. They learn that being needed may feel safer than being free.

These adaptations often look like strengths. Many of them are strengths. But they often shape the way a person learns to live.

As adults, people who grew up inside these emotional climates often describe a familiar inner landscape: **a chronic sense of obligation; difficulty resting without guilt; a reflex to prioritise others over themselves; discomfort with need or desire; and a persistent feeling that life is something to be managed rather than inhabited.** Relationships can feel charged with responsibility. Freedom can feel oddly destabilising. Saying no can feel like it leaves the emotional room without air.

For some, the toll is more visible: anxiety that never quite settles, depression that feels difficult to explain, patterns of disordered eating or addiction, or repeated relational collapse. **Not because a mother “caused” these outcomes, but because a child who had to organise themselves around another person’s emotional gravity often carries that organisation forward into adult life.**

Brooke Laufer has spent more than fifteen years listening to these stories — the ways people speak about their mothers, and the quieter patterns that shape how they love, separate, and take up space. In this talk, she lays out the maternal climates many of us will recognise instantly, even if we have never had language for them.

This is not a conversation about blaming mothers or diagnosing families. It is an invitation to think more honestly about the emotional weight children can carry inside loving relationships — and how early closeness, loyalty, and care quietly shape identity across a lifetime.

#### **Format & why this is worth your evening**

This is a **live, two-hour online conversation**, designed to unfold at a slower, more reflective pace than a standard public lecture. There is time here — to follow an idea properly, to sit with complexity, and to let recognition land rather than rush past it.

*nscience* is known for hosting long-form conversations with leading psychological thinkers — not soundbites or stage performances, but evenings that allow ideas to breathe. This event draws on that same pedigree, translated for an intellectually curious public audience who want depth rather than diagnosis.

No background in psychology is needed. Just curiosity, and a willingness to look closely at something most of us recognise.

Sometimes the most useful thing is simply to see clearly what has been quietly shaping your inner life.

Not to fix it.

Not to forgive it.

Just to see it clearly — and to know that you’re not the only one.

#### **About the speaker**

**Dr Brooke Laufer, Psy.D.** is a clinical psychologist, writer, and educator whose work explores the psychological realities of motherhood — particularly the aspects that are culturally idealised, quietly burdensome, or rarely spoken about.

With over fifteen years of clinical experience, Brooke brings a rare capacity to speak about maternal love, fear, devotion, and ambivalence with both intellectual rigor and emotional honesty. She is the author of a 2024 Routledge book examining motherhood at its most extreme and taboo, asking what personal, cultural, and symbolic forces shape maternal experience when it reaches its breaking point.



Known for her clarity and compassion, Brooke creates spaces where complex and unsettling material can be explored thoughtfully — without moralising, and without simplification.

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