

# What is Coercive Control?

Domestic abuse isn't always physical. Coercive control is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation that are used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

## WHAT IS COERCIVE CONTROL?

Coercive control does not describe any single form of abuse, but instead includes behaviours such as physical, sexual, psychological, emotional or financial abuse and intimidation. It can be a precursor to intimate partner homicide.

Anyone can experience coercive control and it can often be hard to know when you're a victim due to the fact the perpetrator is often highly manipulative. Likewise, the perpetrator will hide his actions from outsiders and often attempt to distance the victim's friends and family members. There are, however, some signs to look out for.:

### 1. Monitoring

Abusers will often try to be omnipresent. They can do this by inserting cameras or recording devices in the victim's home, racking their phone, car or handbag, or sometimes using two-way surveillance to speak to the victim you at home during the day.

### 2. Isolation

A controlling partner will try and cut the victim off from friends and family preventing help and support they need. They might achieve this by:

- Moving the victim far away from their family so that it's hard to visit them.
- Fabricating lies about the victim to their support network.
- Monitoring phone calls with family and friends and removing access if anyone tries to intervene
- Convincing the victim that their friends and/or family is against them and don't want to talk to them.

### 3. Denying freedom

To try and maintain their control, a perpetrator might try and control the victim's freedom of movement and independence. They can do this by:

- Not allowing them to go to work or school.
- Restricting access to transportation (the abuser will usually drive).
- Stalking the victim's every move when out of the home.
- Taking the phone and changing the passwords so the victim has to ask to gain access to it.

### 4. Gaslighting

Gaslighting is a manipulation tactic often wielded by emotional abusers. They use gaslighting as a way to gain and maintain power and control in a relationship.

### 5. Name calling & put downs

The abuser will likely bully their victim by using hurtful words and malicious put-downs to lower the victim's self-esteem. This tactic is designed to make the victim feel unimportant and deficient.

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## WHAT IS COERCIVE CONTROL?

### 6. Limiting access to funds

Controlling the finances is a way of restricting the victim's access to freedom and ability to leave the relationship. They can exert financial control by:

- Placing the victim on a strict budget.
- Limiting (or denying) access to bank accounts.
- Hiding financial resources.
- Preventing the victim from having their own bank account or credit card.
- Rigorously monitoring what the victim spends.

### 7. Reinforce traditional gender roles

Men are the main perpetrators of coercive control all over the world. Abusers will usually attempt to reinforce roles that women are homemakers and mothers, while men are the breadwinners. In using these stereotypes, they may coerce the victim into taking full responsibility of all "domestic" duties such as the cleaning, cooking, and childcare.

### 8. Gaining support of children

If there are children in the household, the abuser often tries to turn the children against the victim by telling them that the mother is a bad parent or by regularly denigrating them in front of the children.

### 9. Controlling aspects of the body

An abuser will monitor and control how much the victim eats, sleeps or even time spent in the bathroom. The abuser may require the victim to count calories after every meal or adhere to a strict exercise regimen. They might also control which medications the victim is allowed to take, including birth control.

### 10. Regulating the sexual relationship

Abusers might make demands about the amount of sexual activity each week and the kinds of activities the victim performs. They may also demand to take sexual pictures or videos of the victim or refuse to wear a condom.

Some supportive advice from victims who have left an abusive relationship include:

#### 1. Maintain communication with friends and/or family

Even if it enrages the abuser, a victim should try and keep communications with friends and family whenever possible. Ask them to check-in with you regularly.

#### 2. Call a domestic violence hotline

Keep track of where your nearest public phone is – or pick up a cheap phone without the abuser knowing – and periodically weigh your options with a professional. **1800RESPECT** is open 24 hours a day to support people impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse.

**Call 1800 737 732.**

#### 3. Practice how to escape safely

If there are children, teach them to identify a safe place such as a friend's house or the library, where they can go to for help and teach them how to call the police.

#### 4. Have a safety plan for yourself

When deciding to leave, ensure you have a plan of where to go and who to stay with.

If you're in immediate danger **call 000**.

If you don't have access to a phone, try to physically remove yourself by getting to a neighbour's house or nearby business.

If you know someone who you believe is living with a controlling or abusive partner, the contacts below will be able to provide advice.

**DVConnect Womensline:** 1800 811 811

**DVConnect Mensline:** 1800 600 636

**Sexual Assault Helpline:** 1800 010 120

**Kids Help Line:** 1800 55 1800

**Lifeline:** 13 11 14

## HOW TO ESCAPE

Getting out of an abusive relationship can be complex, even more so when children are involved.

## FIND OUT MORE