

COERCIVE CONTROL

Background: Coercive control enables a perpetrator to maintain or regain control of a partner, ex-partner or family member. **Controlling behaviour:** range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources & capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance & escape & regulating their everyday behaviour. **Coercive behaviour:** a continuing act or pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim (Home Office 2015).

Why it matters: Victims often say that the coercive and controlling behaviour rather than physical violence is the worse part of domestic abuse. Though victims often suffer terrible physical acts of violence, it is the fear of what the perpetrator will do which ultimately traps them in an abusive relationship. The impact on children is also very damaging, not only because being a victim of control can lead to poor parenting, but also because witnessing that level of control presents children with a very frightening and distorted picture of the relationships between their parents and of relationships in general.

Questions to consider: Do you adopt an understanding, non-judgemental, supportive attitude? Do you provide opportunities for safe, conversations? Do you know the services available to victims? Do you know enough about coercive and controlling behaviour to recognise it, its impact and how victims may present? Are you clear about the impact on children as well as adults?

[An introduction to coercive control | Safelives](#)

What to do: Be proactive in asking about domestic abuse (in a safe space). Record-keeping is particularly important: record the abusive behaviour & then the impact that it has had/is having on the person? Have they changed their routine, diet, medication, given up work? Are they experiencing insomnia, depression, anxiety? Record demeanour. Never use blaming language. Always write verbatim.

[Domestic-abuse-guidance-for-professionals-April-2020-1.pdf](#)



Information: Coercive control seeks to make a person dependent by isolating them from support, exploiting them, depriving them of their independence and regulating their everyday activity through fear and intimidation. Four major tactics are: physical/sexual violence; isolation; control; degradation, intimidation and stalking

Further sub-tactics:

- Communication: control victim's channels of communication, going through drawers, diary, phones
- Surveillance: monitoring time, mileage, turning up at work, attending all appointments
- Degradation: degrading insults, denying self-respect
- Sexual control: when, how, where, withholding or rape, threats to get elsewhere
- Ownership/Marking: tattoos, bite marks, burns, facial scars – marks 'ownership'
- Micromanaging

Separation often produces neither safety nor freedom with perpetrators continuing & intensifying their coercive control post-separation. Child contact provides abusers with opportunities to continue their abuse of children and ex-partners. Children can experience acute fear, distress, physical ill health and abuse by perpetrators during contact visits. To maintain control and punish ex-partners post-separation, perpetrators often manipulate both children and professionals.