



Understanding coercive control

Coercive control is when someone uses patterns of abusive behaviour against another person. Over time, this creates fear and takes away the person's freedom and independence. This dynamic almost always underpins family and domestic violence.

Coercive control can involve physical and non-physical abuse. Non-physical abuse is sometimes thought of as less serious, but this is not the case. All abuse can cause lasting damage that builds up and gets worse over time.

The negative impacts of coercive control can be physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, cultural, social and financial, or a combination of these.

Many people who experience coercive control feel trapped and afraid. Their self-esteem and confidence may have been slowly worn down by the repeated abuse, making it difficult to leave a relationship or get help.

Coercive control can happen in intimate partner relationships, even after they've ended. It can also happen in family relationships.

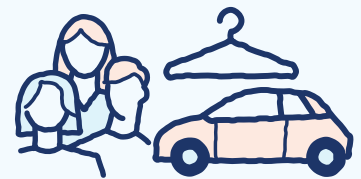
Coercive control can be used against anyone, but is mostly used by men against women.

Recognising the signs

The signs of coercive control can be hard to spot. People who use coercive control to get what they want can be good at hiding it from others, and their abuse can be subtle and targeted.

Some of the signs of coercive control include:

Controlling who a person sees, what they wear and where they go.



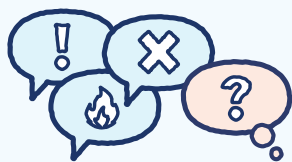
Monitoring or tracking everything a person does.



Controlling everyday needs, such as finances, medication, food or exercise.



Regularly criticising a person, or manipulating or blaming them so they doubt themselves and their experiences.



Forcing someone to have sex or do sexual things.



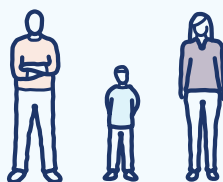
Stopping a person from following their religion or cultural practices.



Threatening a person, their children, family or friends.



Manipulating co-parenting arrangements or child support payments after relationship separation.



These are just some examples of behaviours that can be used as part of a person's pattern of abuse.

People experiencing coercive control may feel like they're walking on eggshells, or that it's difficult to disagree or say no.

They may not know they are being abused. This may be because:

- They may not realise that non-physical abuse is also family and domestic violence.
- They may think the abusive behaviour is a normal part of a relationship, especially if friends and family don't say or do anything to stop it.
- The person who uses coercive control may trick a person into doubting their own experiences, or blame them for the abuse.

The abuse does not always stop, and can even become worse, after a relationship ends.

What can I do?

If you think you might be experiencing coercive control, contacting a confidential support service for advice is a good first step.

If you're concerned that someone you know might be experiencing coercive control, or something doesn't seem quite right, you can help by choosing a safe place to talk to the person alone and letting them know you're worried about them.

Be willing to listen and take their fears seriously. Rather than telling them what to do, let them know there are organisations that can help.

For support contact:

1800RESPECT

1800 737 732 (available 24/7)

1800respect.org.au

For more information about coercive control and the National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence, go to **ag.gov.au/coercivecontrol**

