



Controlling or coercive behaviour help guide

We're on your side



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This guide has been developed with the aim of raising awareness of controlling and coercive behaviour.

It gives practical advice to anyone who has a suspicion that either they or someone they know may be a victim of controlling or coercive behaviour, including the signs that they should look out for.

You will be believed.
You will be listened to.
You can get support.

What is coercive control?

Controlling and coercive behaviour is at the heart of domestic abuse. It is a deliberate and calculated pattern of behaviour and psychological abuse designed to isolate, manipulate and terrorise a victim into complete, fearful obedience.

It's abuse if you feel frightened of your partner and you're worrying about the consequences of what externally might be relatively minor things. If he or she gets angry at the slightest thing. If you have to do everything their way. If you're worried and feel like your behaviour will set them off.

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for person gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.

The law on coercive control, which was introduced at the end of 2015, enables charges to be brought in domestic abuse cases where there

is evidence of repeated controlling or coercive behaviour. It recognised for the first time that abuse is a complex and sustained pattern of behaviour intended to create fear.

The coercive control offence, which carries a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment and a fine, can be invoked if a victim suffers serious alarm or distress that impacts on their day-to-day activities, or if they fear violence will be used on at least two occasions.

The perpetrator and victim have to be personally connected when the incidents took place, meaning that at the time of the incidents took place they were in an intimate personal relationship (whether they lived together or not), they lived together and were family members, or they lived together and had previously been in an intimate personal relationship. If they were not personally connected, or the incidents took place after a relationship/cohabitation, stalking and harassment legislation may apply.



Recognising coercive control

This list can help you to recognise if you, or someone you know, are in an abusive relationship. They include:

Pressure tactics

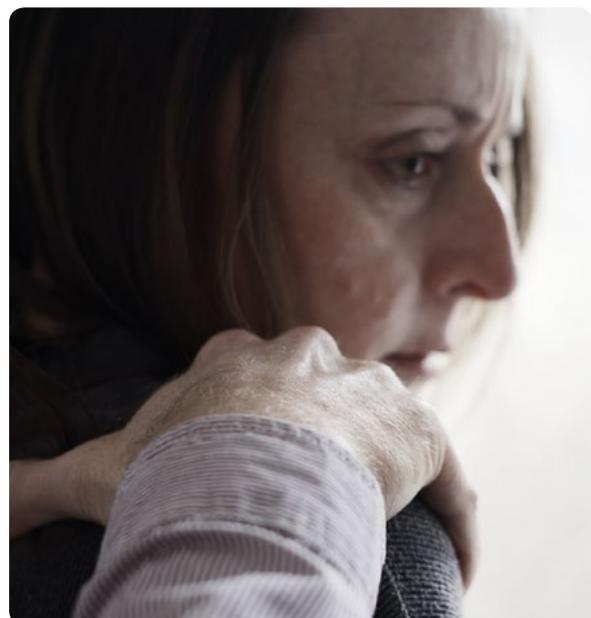
- monitoring your time
- controlling your finances, such as taking your wages or benefits or only allowing you a small allowance
- preventing you from working or studying or controlling your ability to go to work or a place of study
- controlling what you wear
- preventing you from having access to transport
- controlling when you can sleep
- disconnecting the phone and internet
- taking away or destroying your mobile, tablet or laptop
- controlling when and what you can eat.

Isolation

- isolating a person from their family and friends
- telling you where you can and cannot go
- preventing you from seeing friends and relatives
- not letting you use your car
- shutting you in the house.

Stalking

- monitoring you via online communication tools or using spyware
- following you
- checking up on you
- not allowing you any privacy (for example: opening your mail, going through your laptop, tablet or mobile)
- repeatedly checking to see who has phoned you
- embarrassing you in public
- accompanying you everywhere you go.



Denial

- saying the abuse doesn't happen
- saying you caused the abuse
- saying you wind them up;
- crying and begging for forgiveness
- saying it will never happen again.

Degradation

(also known as malicious name calling or bullying behaviour)

- repeatedly putting you down such as telling you that you are worthless
- enforcing rules and activity which humiliate, degrade or dehumanise you
- buying clothes that are purposefully too small for you to 'diet' into
- making you wear clothes that are baggy and worn.



Threats

- making angry gestures
- using physical size to intimidate
- shouting you down
- destroying your possessions
- breaking things
- punching walls
- wielding a knife
- threatening to kill or harm you and the children
- threatening to kill your family and friends
- threatening to kill or harm family pets
- threats of suicide.

Useful questions

- Has your partner tried to keep you from seeing your friends or family?
- Has your partner prevented you or made it hard for you to continue or start studying, or from going to work?
- Does your partner constantly check up on you or follow you?
- Are you ever afraid of your partner?
- Has your partner ever hurt or threatened you or your children?
- Has your partner ever kept you short of money so you are unable to buy food or other necessary items for yourself and your children or made you take out loans?
- Has your partner ever tried to control you by telling you that you could be deported because of your immigration status?
- Has your partner ever tried to prevent you leaving the house?

If you answered YES to one or more of the above questions, this indicates that you may be experiencing coercive control.

How can coercive control be proven?

Evidence will focus on the wide pattern of behaviour and on the cumulative impact. The following is a non-exhaustive list of the types of evidence that could be used to prove the offence of controlling or coercive behaviour:

- copies of emails
- phone records
- text and voicemail messages
- evidence of abuse over the internet, digital technology and social media platforms
- 999 tapes or transcripts
- CCTV
- body-worn video footage
- records of interaction with services, such as support services
- medical records
- witness testimony, for example family and friends may be able to give evidence about the effect and impact of isolation from them
- local enquiries: neighbours, regular deliveries, postal, window cleaner etc.
- bank records to show financial control
- previous threats made to children or other family members
- diary entries
- evidence of isolation, such as lack of contact between family and friends, victim withdrawing from activities, perpetrator accompanying victim to medical appointments
- GPS tracking devices installed on mobile phones, tablets, vehicles etc.

What is the punishment for an offender?

The most serious perpetrators of coercive control can be sentenced to five years in prison. In other cases, it is more likely that there will be a short prison sentence or a fine.

The perpetrator will only be prosecuted for this crime if there is some evidence that it has happened on at least two occasions. There must also be evidence that the victim has feared that violence will be used against them, or that they have suffered serious alarm or distress which has affected their daily life.

Case study

He knocked me out twice. He cut all the phone lines. He made me wear his clothes. I woke to find his hands around my throat. This was my life. I thought it was normal. It isn't.

I met my husband when I was 19 and the first ten years were ok. I had my first child when I was 26. He said I didn't need to go to work anymore. He smashed all of my make-up. My second child was born two years later.

The problems really began after I'd had my third child. He began to get more aggressive, isolating me more and more. My doctor advised me against having any more children as each pregnancy had made me more ill. Being pregnant and having children was just another way to isolate and control me. By the time I was 37, I had five children under 11.

It was like walking on eggshells. He wouldn't let me go anywhere apart from walking the children to school and back, but if I was more than five minutes late he would accuse me of sleeping with other men. He did not help with the children and if I wanted to nip to the shop for a loaf of bread I would have to take all five children with me. Another way to control me.

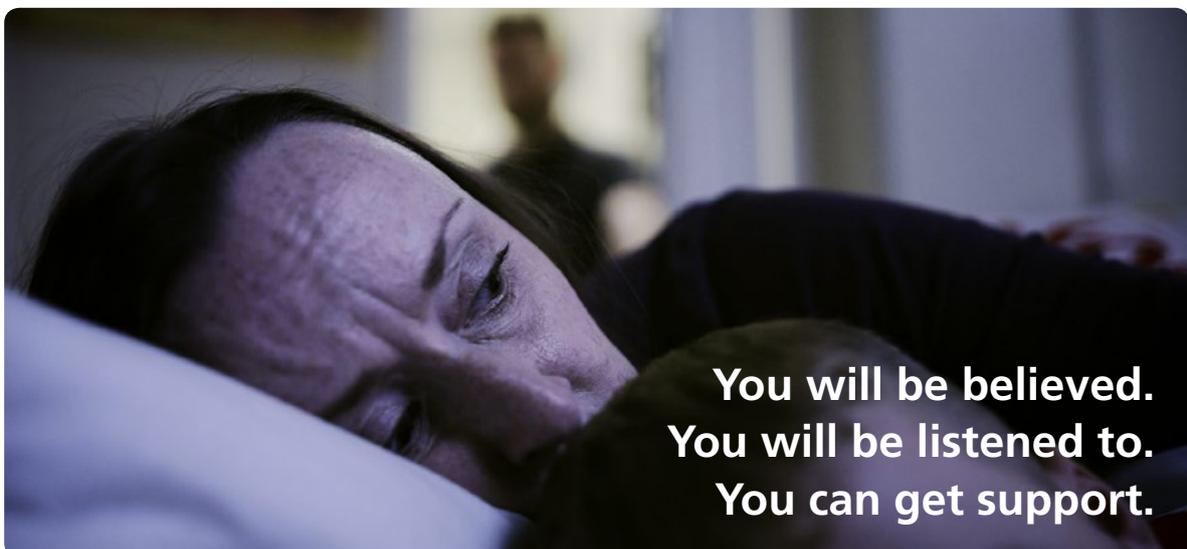
No-one knew what was going on. I was frightened of telling anyone because of the repercussions.

He constantly threatened that social services would take the children away. He smashed everything of sentimental value to me. I was allowed to have a Facebook account but I couldn't be friends with any men and he would check it constantly.

The last two years were the worst. He was increasingly violent. I woke up one day to him spitting in my face. I slept with my children for my own safety and I felt trapped upstairs. He threatened to kill me, to have me run over and to kill my parents.

One day, he shouted at me for being five minutes late back. That was the final straw. I left with my children. I lost everything else. He would not let me have my birth certificate and I had no form of identification.

He got three months' imprisonment and a full non-contact order. I got to rebuild my life.



Dr Jane Monckton-Smith

Forensic Criminologist, University of Gloucestershire



“Coercive control is a pattern of behaviour which is more than merely unpleasant, it is strongly linked to the most serious harm and homicide. In fact, controlling behaviours and stalking are better predictors of serious harm than any other single factor, including violence. Domestic homicide is about a breakdown of control, usually after or during a separation.

“It is crucial that we recognise controlling patterns of behaviour and take them very seriously. When someone kills their partner it is rarely the result of an immediate provocation - in other words the killers do not ‘just snap’. We need to re-think what we believe we know about domestic abuse and understand that patterns of control not only create a toxic and traumatic environment for victims and children, they are dangerous.”

Dickie James

Chief Executive, Staffordshire Women’s Aid

“Coercive control is central to domestic abuse, whether or not there is physical violence. It is an abuse of power which can operate 24-hours-a-day, so that victims may live in fear and anxiety for years. Often, it is invisible to other agencies and those outside of the dynamics of the relationship.

“It can also lead the victim to feel that they are somehow responsible for the abuse. Recovering after such a relationship can be complex, and regaining self-esteem and trust is key to this process. We understand the damage this can cause, and we work to help increase safety, rebuild confidence, as well as helping victims to understand their rights within the criminal justice system.”



Sarah Hammond

Senior District Crown Prosecutor, Crown Prosecution Service West Midlands Area



“The police and CPS now work together to gather evidence and build robust cases which focus on the wider pattern of behaviour. Certain behaviours can sometimes be dismissed as insignificant by complainants themselves, friends and family so it is essential that the cumulative impact on a person is considered. Controlling or coercive behaviour can incorporate acts which amount to criminal offences in their own right, or acts which fall short of criminal proceedings but nevertheless have a ‘serious effect’ on someone.”

Where to go for help

If you are a victim of coercive control, or know someone who is, and there is an emergency that is ongoing or life is in danger, **dial 999**. In non-emergency cases and for general advice, please **call 101**.

Local organisations in Staffordshire

Arch North Staffs

01782 205500

(10am – 3pm Mon – Fri)

Pathway Project

(Burton/Lichfield/Tamworth)

01543 676800

talktoeve.pathway@virgin.net

Staffordshire Women's Aid

0870 2700 123

www.staffordshirewomensaid.org

National organisations

National Domestic Violence Helpline

0808 2000 247

www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk

Freephone 24-hour helpline, run in partnership by Women's Aid and Refuge. It is a national service for women experiencing domestic abuse, their family, friends, colleagues and others calling on their behalf.

Men's Advice Line

0808 801 0327

www.mensadviceline.org.uk

info@mensadviceline.org.uk

A helpline providing advice and support from men experiencing domestic violence and abuse from a partner or ex-partner.

Women's Aid

www.womensaid.org.uk

A national charity for women and children, working to end domestic abuse.

Respect Phonenumber

0808 802 4040

www.respectphonenumber.org.uk

A confidential and anonymous helpline for anyone concerned about their violence and/or abuse towards a partner or ex-partner.

National LGBT Domestic Abuse Helpline

0300 999 5428

www.galop.org.uk/domesticabuse/

help@galop.org.uk

Emotional and practical support for LGBT people experiencing domestic abuse.