

What is Coercive Control?

Coercive control is a type of domestic/family violence – just like physical and emotional abuse are types of domestic/family violence.



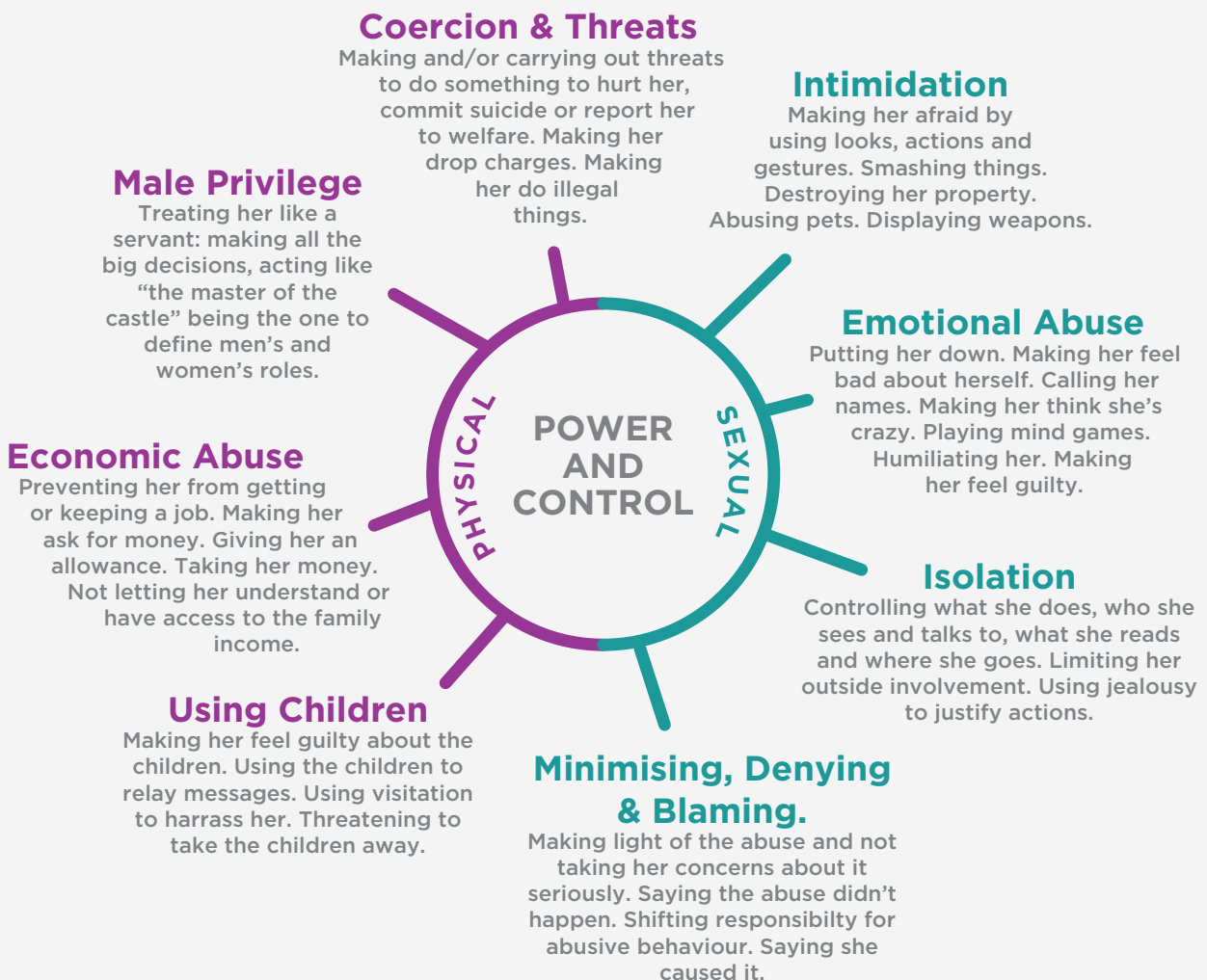
WARNING: SOME OF THE INFORMATION IN THIS FACT SHEET MAY BE DIFFICULT TO READ. PLEASE TAKE YOUR TIME AND FIND ASSISTANCE IF YOU FEEL YOU NEED TO.

Coercive control is a form of ongoing oppression and ‘terrorism’ that is used by abusers in a strategic way to make you scared of them.

The abuser will use tactics such as monitoring who you talk to and what money you have access to, in order to control you. Whilst anyone can be a victim of coercive control, it is almost always used by men towards

women, because of male privilege and misogyny. Most women who get help for domestic/family violence are experiencing, or have experienced, coercive control.

Coercive control can also be depicted as a ‘cycle of violence’:



What are the signs?

The following list of the signs of coercive control is not exhaustive and your experience may be different. It is also important to note that whilst your partner may show only a few of the signs in this fact sheet, if it is part of a pattern of behaviour, it is coercive control.

Isolating you from your support system

An abuser who is controlling will try to cut you off from, or limit your contact with, your friends and family so that you are unable to get help from them. They do this in many ways, and some are more obvious than others.

- Does your partner tell you that you should share social media accounts and/or phones because it is 'convenient'?
- Have they made or suggested that, you move to a new house in an area that is far away from your friends and family which would make it hard (or impossible) for you to see them?
- Do they make up lies about you to other people?
- Do they monitor your phone calls with your friends and family? Do they listen in or make you put the call on loudspeaker? Are you not allowed to talk to family when they are not there?
- Have they convinced, or tried to convince you that your friends and/or family hate you and do not want to talk to you?

Monitoring your activity

Abusers use coercive control by making themselves always present. They may install cameras in your house and install spyware software on your phone, tablet and/or computers. Sometimes, abusers install surveillance equipment in the bedroom or bathroom so that you have no privacy. They do this so that you are constantly reminded that they are always watching and therefore you are unable to 'get away' with anything.

Denying you autonomy and freedom

An abuser who is using coercive control may try to control and minimise your independence and your freedom.

- Your partner does not allow you to go to work or to school.
- Your partner does not allow you to have access to transportation or only allows access on their terms.
- Your partner may stalk you whenever you leave the house.
- Your partner may take your phone and go through it to see what you have been doing, who you have been talking to, and/or they may change your passwords.

Gaslighting

Gaslighting is an especially effective form of emotional abuse that can leave you questioning reality, your feelings, instincts, and sanity which in turn gives your abusive partner power and control over you. Gaslighting can also be used to make sure that you do not leave the abusive relationship by making it hard for you to trust your own perceptions. Gaslighting tends to start out slowly with the abuser's actions seeming harmless at first. There are several gaslighting tactics that an abuser may use, including:

- **Withholding:** in this tactic the abuser pretends that they do not understand and/or they refuse to listen. They might say things like "I don't want to hear this again" or "you're just trying to confuse me."
- **Countering:** during this tactic, the abuser will question your memory of events, even when you are remembering correctly. They could say something like "you never remember things properly."
- **Blocking/Diverting:** they will question your thoughts and/or change the topic, saying things like "you're only saying that because your [friend or family member/s] put it in your head" or "you're imagining things."
- **Trivialising:** they will make your feelings and/or needs seem unimportant by saying things like "you're too sensitive" or "are you going to carry on over that?"
- **Forgetting/Denial:** they may deny having made promises to you and/or pretend to have forgotten what occurred by saying things like "you're just making stuff up" or "I don't know what you're talking about."

They insult you

Put-downs, name-calling, and constant criticism are all forms of behaviour that are bullying and are intended to make you feel as though you are lacking and are not important.

Financial control

An abuser will control the finances so that your ability to leave the relationship is restricted. They may do this by

- Giving you a budget that is so strict you cannot afford food and clothes.
- Making access to bank accounts hard or impossible.
- Hiding money.
- Not allowing you to have a credit card.
- Heavily monitoring how much you have spent and on what.

Using male privilege

By reinforcing traditional gender roles, an abusive man may make you do all the cooking, cleaning, and childcare.

Turning your kids against you

They might try to turn your kids into tools of abuse that they can use against you by undermining your parenting, telling them that you are a bad parent, and/or by belittling you in front of them.

Making jealous accusations

They might jealously complain about how much time you spend with your friends and family or constantly accuse you of cheating on them.

Regulating and/or controlling your sex life

They might control how many times per week you have sex and the kinds of sexual activities that you take part in. They may demand/force you to have sex without protection and take photos and/or videos of you having sex. The abuser makes sure that you know that if you do not comply, there will be consequences.

Threatening your children and/or your pets

This can look like:

- Violent threats of harm to the children and/or pets.
- Threatening to call child protection to tell them that you are neglecting or abusing your children when you are not.
- Threatening to make important decisions about your kids without your consent to intimidate you, and.
- Threatening to take your children away from you and/or get rid of your pet.

How to leave a coercively controlling relationship

You should only leave, or attempt to leave, an abusive relationship if it is safe to do so.

If you feel that it is safe to end the relationship, the following tips can help:

- **Keep in regular contact** with a domestic violence hotline and/or face-to-face service.
- **Practice ways to leave safely** and do so regularly. If you have children, teach them where a safe place is (such as their friend's house or a public library), where they can go for help, and how to call the police.
- **Have a safety plan** – leaving an abusive relationship is one of the most dangerous times in an abusive relationship.
- **If possible, maintain your communication with friends and family.** You should make sure they have your contact details and that you check in regularly. It would also be useful to have a 'safe word' that your friends and family know means that you need to get out now.

Further Information

Yemaya Women's Support Service

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Please note that all information contained within this fact sheet is to be used as a guide only. If you require further information or assistance please contact Yemaya Women's Support Service.