

# WHAT IS COERCIVE CONTROL?

**Coercive Control** is an ongoing pattern of domination where abusive partners engage in repeated psychological and emotional violence while using intimidation, deprivation, degradation, isolation and humiliation. It is present in the majority of Intimate Partner Violence/Domestic Violence situations.

It is an insidious form of violence that is constant, repetitive, deceitful, and aims to break a person down from the inside. It is overwhelmingly perpetuated by men against women.

**The primary outcome is a condition of hostage-like entrapment.**

**Coercive Control can include cycles of physical and sexual violence as well, but not always.**

**It can be broken down into two categories:**

- Coercive behaviour (i.e., physical/sexual violence, threats, intimidation, humiliation, gaslighting, surveillance, stalking/cyber)
- Controlling behaviour (i.e., isolation, financial control, tech surveillance, micromanagement of everyday household tasks, etc).

**Some examples of what Coercive Control may look like:**

- Controlling aspects of someone's everyday life - where they can go, who they can see, what to wear, what they can eat, when they can sleep
- Gaslighting - making a person question their reality/sanity by distorting the truth in order to confuse a victim and make them question their memory or perceptions
- Isolation - controlling when to talk to friends and family
- Withholding money and deprivation of basic needs (food, healthcare etc.)
- Pressuring someone to sign documents [to force them to sell things they don't want to]
- Technology surveillance to monitor survivor's activity
- Using the justice system to continue the abuse – filing frivolous claims, making false reports to child welfare authorities, claiming harassment, claiming sole custody, prolonging divorce, etc.

Sources: Understanding coercive control in the context of intimate partner violence in Canada: How to address the issue through the criminal justice system? <https://www.victimfirst.gc.ca/res/cor/UCC-CCC/index.html>

**WE'RE NOT WAITING ANYMORE.**

Coercive Control is a challenge to identify because it is often a long pattern of abuse – emotional, psychological, financial, and physical – and when viewed in isolation, some of the behaviours may simply look like a “bad marriage” to an outsider.

**Make no mistake. Coercive Control is extremely damaging and can be deadly.**

In Canada, **Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)** is often viewed as a single physical event. Because of this, Coercive Control is often not recognized. There is currently no tool for police in Canada to help assess non-physical situations and a general lack of understanding of the dynamics of Coercive Control to properly support survivors.

We must recognize the serious impact Coercive Control has over survivors. The extreme distress, fear, and mental torture survivors experience robs them (and their children) of their right to live freely and peacefully.

**We need to flip the switch from “Why don't they just leave?” to understanding Coercive Control.**

It can take survivors many attempts to finally leave abusive relationships. Yes, this is difficult to know. But recognizing this is the only way to support survivors holistically.

For more info and resources on GBV, including survivor support available in Canada, visit the **Relentless Resilience Hub to End Gender-Based Violence at: [aurafreedom.org/RelentlessResilience](http://aurafreedom.org/RelentlessResilience)**

"I couldn't even laugh at a joke without looking at him first to see if he was laughing, too. I was just a shell. Everything I had become was completely dictated by him. My clothes, my words, my likes and dislikes. There was physical violence sometimes, but it was the psychological control and the fear of experiencing violence that kept me in his prison."

*Survivor of Domestic Violence and Coercive Control in Toronto*

