



# One minute guide

## Coercive Control Offence

141, September 2022

### What is coercive control?

Coercive control is a strategic pattern of behaviours abusers use to exploit, control, create dependency and dominate their victims. Over time, coercively controlling behaviour erodes the victim/ survivor's sense of self, their confidence and self-esteem. It correlates significantly to serious harm and can be a pre-indicator of homicide, even after the relationship has ended.

Coercive control is present in most abusive relationships. It can include domination without acts of violence, and usually involves a range of financial, emotional and other forms of pressure designed to control and dominate an intimate partner, ex-partner or family members.

Many victims may not recognise coercive control as a form of abuse and may minimise their experiences to both professionals and their support networks. Those that do report coercive control have said that it has been more detrimental to their health and wellbeing than physical abuse.

### What is the coercive control offence?

The Coercive Control Offence falls under [Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015](#), which came into force in December 2015. Victims who experience coercive control can report this to the police and, if there is enough evidence, they can seek prosecution. The offence carries a maximum of 5 years' imprisonment, a fine or both. The court may also award a restraining order to protect the victim.

In this offence, controlling or coercive behaviour causes someone either:  
To fear that violence will be used against them on at least two occasions; or  
Serious alarm or distress which has a substantial effect on their usual day-to-day activities.

This offence includes post-separation abuse, where ex-partners no longer live in the same house. It has also been expanded to cover family members who no longer live together with their abuser, such as children.

When looking at cases, prosecutors will be trained to look at the overall effect the controlling and/ or coercive behaviour has had on the victim. The consideration of the cumulative impact of controlling and coercive behaviour and the pattern of behaviour within the context of the relationship is crucial.

Practitioners should talk to people they are working with about the seriousness of coercive behaviour, the fact that it is a criminal offence and, where appropriate, help them to access relevant support. This may include assisting them to contact the police to report a crime.

## What kinds of abusive behaviour might be taking place?

This type of abuse in an intimate or family relationship can include a pattern of threats, humiliation and intimidation. This behaviour can include:

Isolating victims from family and friends;

Making threats, e.g. to harm or kill, to out someone's sexuality, or to deport someone with insecure immigration status;

Limiting or preventing access to important documents or finances;

Dictating what they wear, what they eat, where they go and who they speak to;

Monitoring a person via online communication tools e.g. tracking apps on mobile phones or controlling social media accounts;

Repeatedly putting them down, for example telling them they are worthless and humiliating and embarrassing the victim.

A carer always speaking for the victim to professionals or hiding their mobility aids or medication or taking control of their pension and benefits.

## Key contacts and further information

The key contact is Jude Roberts, Manager - Safeguarding and Domestic Violence Team—Safer Leeds. Email: [jude.roberts@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:jude.roberts@leeds.gov.uk)

For more information, you can read the statutory guidance framework: [Controlling or Coercive Behaviour in an Intimate or Family Relationship](#)

You can also read other one minute guides on subjects related to domestic violence and abuse: [Domestic Violence](#), [Domestic Violence in Young People's Relationships](#), [Leeds Domestic Violence Service](#), [Domestic Violence School Notifications](#), [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme](#), [Caring Dads Programme](#), [PACT](#), [Family Drug & Alcohol Court](#), [Front Door Safeguarding Hub](#) and ['Prevent, protect and repair' - report on domestic abuse JTAI inspections](#).