



What is Coercive Control?

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Control is the ultimate goal of intimate partner violence. Control is the dynamic that defines abusive relationships, but it can be difficult to recognize, especially when it's not physical. The term "coercive control" describes this dynamic in intimate partner relationships.

What is coercive control?

- It's a pattern of physical and non-physical behaviours of abuse with the purpose of micro-regulating the victim's freedom and sense of self by instilling fear, humiliation, exploitation, or domination in their daily life
- Includes emotional, verbal, and/or financial abuse
- More difficult for bystanders or outsiders to recognize since it may not involve physical violence and consists of a mix of tactics
- Not defined by episodes, but rather an ongoing dynamic that is always present
- Potential early indicator that the relationship will lead to physical violence or femicide
- Children can also be victims, not merely witnesses, in coercive control

Warning signs and abuse tactics

- Isolation from friends and family
- Surveillance of activity and whereabouts (including using GPS)
- Stalking and cyber-stalking (including making fake accounts to access victim's social media)
- Threats, belittling, humiliation
- **Gaslighting**
- Restricted access to money, food, social media
- Sexual coercion ("If you don't give me sex, I won't give you grocery money")
- Threat of suicide or harm to children/pets if the person leaves the relationship
- The **Power & Control Wheel** was created to describe some of the most common abuse tactics

Legislative and judicial protections in Canada

- Coercive control is not officially recognized in Criminal Code
- Jurisdictions around the world are beginning to [recognize coercive control in legislation](#)
- Coercive control is recognized in Ontario's Children's Law Reform Act, which offers guidance to the courts on how to handle survivors and assess each case in the best interest of the child
- Most risk assessment tools for police focus on physical violence, consequently under-recognizing the severity of coercive control in an abusive relationship
- Records of communications with the abuser (texts, verbal communication, notes) can assist in obtaining a protection order for the victim