



10 ways to spot coercive control



Teelan & Silwal
FAMILY LAW

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Coercive control can be more damaging than physical abuse

Coercive control is a pattern of deliberate abuse, over time, leaving you intimidated, dependent and isolated. This can mean isolation from sources of support like friends and family, or exploiting your resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving you of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating your everyday behaviour.

A coercive partner does not have to hit you to keep you under control. Quite often, they will act in a charming manner and behave as if whatever they are doing is in your best interest. The perpetrator may often apologise or say things that you would like to hear after carrying out an abusive act, for example, “But you know I love you.” This could often lead you to believe that your partner would never intentionally harm you. In the words of Evan Stark, “Not only is coercive control the most common context in which [women] are abused, it is also the most dangerous”. This is because it is extremely difficult for a victim to establish when a partner is being coercive or controlling.

A coercive partner may make comments such as, “But you make me lose my temper”, “It’s your fault”, “Don’t wear that dress”, “I don’t like the sound of those heels”, or “Why are you talking to him/her” and these remarks can be signs of controlling behaviour. There is a fine line between ‘care’ and ‘control’ and it is often misunderstood when in a toxic relationship. It is difficult to establish the difference between the two and it may come across as though the perpetrator is attentive and always looking out for you. Unfortunately, the victim in these relationships often comes out not knowing who they are anymore. It is almost as if their identity has been ripped away from them and they become something that just exists for their partner. Stark described controlling behaviour as “akin to terrorism and hostage taking” and he is not wrong.

Are you being “gaslit”?

Gaslighting is a tactic in which a person gradually manipulates another person in the hope of acquiring power and control over them. Anyone can be the victim of gaslighting. The perpetrator will make you doubt yourself, question your memories and decisions and even question your sanity over a period of time. Someone who is gaslit will lose confidence in their own abilities and judgement and thereby rely more on the perpetrator, allowing the perpetrator to manipulate them and control them still more.

The term comes from the 1944 film, *Gaslight*, in which the husband makes his wife believe that she is going mad so as to keep her from discovering his murderous past. It is the flickering of the gaslights, which she is made to think she has imagined, caused by the husband’s turning on lights in the attic, which gives rise to the film’s name.

Danger signs to watch out for

It is important to remain vigilant when forming a relationship and look out for the first signs of control and coercion. It may be that each individual incident alone is hardly noteworthy or serious in isolation, but becomes so when looked at as a pattern of repeat behaviour.



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These are ten signs you should watch out for and use to measure if your partner may be controlling and coercive:

1. Does he/she isolate you from your family and friends?
2. Does he/she deprive you of your basic needs, like warmth/clothing/food/use of a bathroom ever?
3. Does he/she monitor your time?
4. Does he/she monitor you via online communication tools or by using spyware?
5. Does he/she try to control aspects of your everyday life, e.g. where you can go/whom you can meet/what you can wear/when you can sleep?
6. Are you repeatedly put down and told that you are worthless?
7. Are you controlled financially and only given a punitive allowance, relative to his/her income?
8. Have you ever been deprived of medical services or support services?
9. Does he/she control your ability or a child's ability to attend a workplace or school?
10. Has he/she ever made any threats to hurt or kill you, or any threats to harm a child?

If you feel you are a victim of coercion and control, where your partner has displayed a pattern or series of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten you, then please contact us at Teelan & Silwal Family Law so we can help you find an escape from this situation.

