



One minute guide

Coercive Control

September 2019

What is coercive control?

Women's Aid define coercive control as "an act or pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim". Coercive control is designed to isolate victims, deter them from seeking help, and make them dependent on their abuser. Victims are not able to take action or ask for help because they live in a world of fear and control.

What does this mean for adults with care and support needs?

Research tells us that men and women with care and support needs experience high levels of domestic abuse (DA), attributed to the additional barriers this group can face in obtaining help along with levels on dependency on others – sometimes the abusers. Where perpetrators of coercive control are also 'carers' this dependency could be significant, as they may provide food, personal care and medication.

What might coercive control look like by perpetrators against adults with care and support needs?

- Perpetrators saying victims they can't cope without them, or saying they are 'mad' or 'confused'
- Not allowing them to go anywhere alone because they are the 'carer'
- Telling them they're a bad parent and threatening to tell social care
- Deliberately misleading or confusing a person
- Withholding medication or over medicating
- Undermining disclosures by blaming learning difficulties, disability or mental health conditions
- Falsely suggesting victims don't have capacity to make their own decisions
- Monitoring a victim by use of spyware, tracking software or online communication tools
- Threatening or intimidating the victim
- Taking control of aspects of daily living, such as controlling food, drinks, sleep and where the victim goes or who they see and what they wear

This is not an exhaustive list and there are many more forms coercive control can take

What does the legislation say?

Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015 created a new offence of controlling or coercive behaviour. The offence carries a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment and a fine. The legislation closes a gap around patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour in relationships between:

- intimate partners
- former partners who still live together
- family members.

This does not relate to a single incident. It is a pattern of behaviour that takes place over time, for one person to exert power, control or coercion over another. The perpetrator knows, or ought to know, that the behaviour will have a serious effect on the victim

To read more about the legislation, please see here <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/9/section/76/enacted>

What can you do?

Consider mental health in isolation from any abuse someone is disclosing

Don't be ageist – never assume someone is too old to start over!

Avoid using stigmatising labels and a medical model of intervention and/or support

Consider arrangements for alternative care to interrupt any abuse

Assess capacity at every relevant decision point

Be understanding – for older people abuse may have been taking place over decades, and disclosure could mean distressing change for them

Remember to see the whole person in the context of their diversity and individual situation – for example:

- Carers can also be abusers – looking like a 'saint' could be a tool for professional manipulation
- Disabled people experience higher levels of DA than non-disabled people. In particular, disabled women have reported feeling less likely to be 'seen' or believed, which can lead to long term abuse

Key Contacts and Further Information

Coventry Safeguarding Adults Board - <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/csab>

Women's Aid - <https://www.womensaid.org.uk>

Research in Practice for Adults - <http://coercivecontrol.ripfa.org.uk/>