



Trauma-informed support for survivors rebuilding after abuse

What Is Coercive Control?

Coercive control is a pattern of behaviour used to dominate, manipulate, isolate or emotionally control another person.

It is not always obvious.

Many people imagine abuse only as physical violence, but coercive control often happens through subtle emotional, psychological, financial or behavioural patterns repeated over time.

These behaviours can slowly affect:

- Confidence
- Emotional safety
- Independence
- Self-trust
- Mental wellbeing
- Nervous system regulation

Many survivors do not recognise coercive control immediately because the behaviour often develops gradually.

1. Coercive Control Is Often About Power

Coercive control is not usually about love, protection or care.

It is often about maintaining emotional power, access or control.

This can happen through:

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- Intimidation
- Emotional manipulation
- Isolation
- Monitoring
- Criticism or humiliation
- Financial control
- Unpredictability or fear

Over time, many survivors begin adjusting their behaviour in order to avoid conflict, criticism or emotional punishment.

2. What Coercive Control Can Look Like in Everyday Life

Coercive control is often made up of repeated behaviours that may seem “small” individually but become emotionally harmful over time.

This may include:

- Monitoring where someone goes or who they speak to
- Becoming angry about time spent with friends or family
- Repeatedly criticising appearance, behaviour or choices
- Using guilt to control decisions
- Making someone feel responsible for another person’s emotions
- Controlling finances, salary, bank accounts, rent, etc
- Creating fear around conflict or disagreement

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- Ignoring boundaries or privacy
- Making someone feel emotionally unsafe expressing themselves

Example:

Someone may slowly stop seeing friends, expressing opinions or making independent decisions because conflict or emotional reactions feel too stressful.

3. Emotional Manipulation & Self-Doubt

Many people experiencing coercive control begin doubting themselves over time.

This may happen through:

- Gaslighting
- Blame-shifting
- Minimalizing feelings
- Silent treatment or emotional withdrawal
- Repeated criticism
- Being told they are “too sensitive” or overreacting

Over time, many survivors:

- Second-guess themselves constantly
- Feel anxious expressing feelings
- Apologise excessively
- Lose confidence in their own judgement

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Example:

A person may begin questioning whether their emotional reactions are “wrong” even when they feel deeply hurt or unsafe.

4. Walking On Eggshells

Many survivors of coercive control describe constantly walking on eggshells.

This may include:

- Monitoring moods or tone carefully
- Fear of saying the wrong thing
- Overthinking conversations afterwards
- Trying to prevent conflict constantly
- Feeling emotionally tense all the time

The nervous system may become highly alert to signs of emotional danger.

Over time, this can lead to hypervigilance, burnout and emotional exhaustion.

5. Isolation & Loss of Independence

Some controlling behaviour may involve gradually reducing someone’s independence or support network.

This may include:

- Creating conflict around friends or family
- Making someone feel guilty for spending time away

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- Criticising support systems constantly
- Encouraging emotional dependency
- Monitoring communication or social activity

Over time, some survivors feel increasingly isolated, disconnected or emotionally dependent.

6. Financial & Practical Control

Coercive control may also involve:

- Monitoring spending
- Restricting access to money
- Creating financial dependence
- Interfering with work or education
- Making practical independence more difficult

Financial control can increase fear, stress and feelings of being trapped.

7. Why Coercive Control Can Be Hard to Recognise

Many survivors struggle recognising coercive control because:

- The behaviour often develops gradually
- Positive moments create confusion and hope
- There may be no physical violence

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- Emotional manipulation can feel difficult to explain
- Others may minimize the experience

Some survivors only recognise the full impact once they begin feeling emotionally exhausted, anxious or disconnected from themselves.

8. Trauma Responses & Emotional Impact

Living with coercive control can create significant emotional and nervous system stress.

Many survivors experience:

- Hypervigilance
- Anxiety and overthinking
- Emotional shutdown
- Burnout
- Fear of conflict or rejection
- Loss of confidence and self-trust

These are common trauma responses to long-term emotional stress and control.

9. Rebuilding Safety & Self-Trust

Recovery often involves:

- Rebuilding confidence and independence
- Reconnecting with emotionally safe people

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- Learning healthy boundaries
- Understanding trauma responses
- Reducing shame and self-blame
- Relearning emotional safety gradually

Healing takes time.

Many survivors need support and understanding to reconnect with themselves again.

If This Feels Familiar

You are not weak or overreacting because repeated emotional control affected you deeply.

Coercive control can slowly change the way someone feels, behaves and experiences emotional safety over time.

Understanding these patterns can help reduce shame and support healing.

Support & Further Resources

You deserve relationships and environments where your safety, independence and emotional wellbeing are respected.

WeAreUnmuted

Turning silence into understanding through lived experience.

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