



/guide



Your questions answered

WHAT IS COERCIVE CONTROL AND WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?

The purpose of this Stowe guide is to give you an understanding of what coercive control is and what you can do about it from a legal perspective.

If you are at danger or feel threatened by your partner please call the police.

The difference between a healthy relationship and an abusive one isn't always noticeable – especially when the lasting impact isn't as visible as a bruise.

But abuse is not always physical and mental abuse is just as damaging.

Coercive control has been defined as:

“Domestic abuse isn't always physical. Coercive control is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.” (Women's Aid, 2020)

OR

“a purposeful pattern of behaviour which takes place over time in order for one individual to exert power, control or coercion over another” (Home Office, 2013).

And it is, sadly, too common.

- 17,616 offences of coercive control were recorded by the police in the year ending March 2019, compared with 9,053 in the year ending March 2018. (ONS, 2019).
- 1,177 offences of coercive and controlling behaviour in an intimate or family relationship where a prosecution commenced in the year ending March 2019.
- A study by Barlow et al., 2018 identified that common abusive behaviours included coercive control, 63% of coercive control case featured physical violence.

So, what are the signs of coercive control?

Coercive control describes someone's need for total emotional control over their partner, and it's often gained through subtle or sneaky tactics.

Here are the top 8 signs to look out for:

- Isolating you from your friends or family
- Depriving your basic needs

- Monitoring your time
- Monitoring any form of communication you may have
- Controlling your everyday life such as where you go, what you wear and who you see
- Depriving you of medical services,
- Controlling your money
- Degrading and humiliating you repeatedly

Is coercive control a crime?

Absolutely yes!

On the 25th December 2015, we saw the introduction of the Serious Crime Act which created an offence which made **controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship where the behaviour has a serious effect on the victim a criminal offence.**

However, coercive control is a relatively new crime and still widely misunderstood. In fact, many people in a relationship subject to coercive control do not recognise that **it is a crime and that it should be reported** (Stark, 2013).

In the same research, Stark emphasises that **a victim of coercive control may become and feel captive in an unrealistic world;** leaving the victim to feel trapped with confusion and fear.

These toxic relationships often start with love bombing (an attempt to influence a person by demonstrations of attention and affection) and charm to draw the victim in.

Once into the relationship and the victim is emotionally invested, **gaslighting is a common technique used, as part of coercively controlling behaviour,** to erode the victim's sense of self, confidence and self-esteem.

So, what is gaslighting?

Gaslighting is **a dangerously subtle form of one-to-one control;** often so much harder to spot because it wears the charming face of your friend, lover, colleague or relation – and it'll tell you it only wants the best for you.

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Gaslighting refers to **convincing someone they're wrong about something when they are not.** This includes frequently disagreeing with someone and refusing to listen to their point of view.

Refusing to hear what your partner has to say - even if they are in the RIGHT is also gaslighting, which shows an unwillingness to be proven wrong. (Relate, 2020).

Gaslighting can also be used deliberately as a form of control.

What are the effects of gaslighting?

Gaslighting can be a real form of abuse when it is done repeatedly over a long period of time and has **far-reaching emotional effects** including:

- Making someone doubt their ideas and even question their sanity.
- Negatively affect a person's confidence and self-esteem.

Is gaslighting dangerous?

Yes, Yes, Yes... it **undermines a person sense of self-belief,** leads to them **feeling insecure or less confident** and they then believe they must be in the wrong if they are being told so.

Need some help and support regarding coercive control or gaslighting?

If you feel like you're **dealing with a relationship where there's coercive control,** it's time to start considering your options.

For some people talking to your partner about **making a few changes to bring more balance into your relationship** can help, particularly if they did not realise they were toxic.

However, in some relationships, this approach will not work and if you are looking to leave the relationship, **reach out to a friend, family member, or professional for help.**



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