

COERCIVE CONTROL

EXPERIENCED BY MOTHERS



Refuge

pour les femmes de l'Ouest de l'île

West Island Women's

Shelter

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COERCIVE CONTROL



Conjugal violence affects victims far beyond their romantic relationships. As you have discovered, it infiltrates the parenting role of the victimized mother, her parental authority, and her relationship with her children. In addition to all the forms it can take, conjugal violence can directly impact your ability to protect your children, be available for them, be a positive role model, etc. The abuse experienced also brings its share of consequences on the children, the sibling relationships, and the family dynamics.

Beyond the violent acts your partner uses, there may also be a set of rules and dynamics imposed by him. These strategies allow him to maintain his power over you and the children. It creates, despite yourself, invisible bars around you as if you are caught in a cage: you doubt yourself and your abilities as a mother; you are deprived of freedom. These tactics used by him are what we call all coercive control.

We believe this exercise can help you identify and describe the types of strategies used by your partner.

The first part of this exercise is about coercion (tactics used to hurt and intimidate you), and the second part is about control (tactics used to isolate and maintain power over you).



1 - COERCION

First, let's explore what coercion is. It involves using force or threats to provoke a reaction from a person. It is something tangible and, therefore, easier to recognize. This is the first coercive control strategy established by the abusive partner.

Coercion can take different forms, and we tend to classify them according to the five types of conjugal violence: psychological, verbal, financial, physical, and sexual. We also include post-separation violence, which primarily affects mothers who decide to end their abusive relationships.

The examples can be endless, and we have included a few for you. In addition, empty lines are added so you can write your own.

PSYCHOLOGICAL COERCION

It targets your sense of worth and confidence as a mother. Frequently, these behaviours can make you perceive yourself as a "bad mother," make you question your abilities as a parent and leave you in a state where you feel unable to make appropriate decisions for your child's well-being.

- He criticizes you as a mother.
- He criticizes the children.
- He humiliates you in front of the children.
- He calls you degrading names in front of the children (stupid, incompetent, lousy mother, etc)
- He openly tells the children or implies that you don't love them.
- He ignores you when you speak, or he ignores the children.
- He asks the children to ignore you or not to speak to you.
- He accuses you of wanting to destroy the family.
- _____

VERBAL COERCION

By using verbal abuse, he tries to make you fear for your safety or that of your child(ren) by keeping you in a constant state of fear and physical insecurity:

- He threatens to call Youth Protection and make you lose custody of the children.
- He threatens to take the children and never let you see them again.
- He threatens to kill himself, you, or the children.
- He yells at you in front of the children.
- He yells at the children and threatens them.
- _____



FINANCIAL COERCION

This form of violence allows him to ensure that you depend on him and do not gain autonomy. It is a form of violence that is little known but highly prevalent in abusive relationships:

- He makes you dependent on him for any family-related expenses.
- He holds you responsible for all expenses related to the family or the children.
- He controls all family income; any family allowance must be deposited into his account.
- He must approve any expense for the children or you.
- He gives you little or no money for the children's well-being and activities.
- He refuses to tell you about the family income and expenses.
- He tells you that without him, you would be unable to provide for the children's material needs.
- _____

PHYSICAL COERCION

The abusive partner may use specific forms of physical violence to maintain fear and control in the family:

- He is physically violent with you in front of the children.
- Without being in front of them, the children hear the punches and screams coming from another room or at night.
- The children witness bruises or visible wounds on you.
- He intimidates you physically while you have a child in your arms.
- He physically prevents you from reaching for or going to see your child.
- He grabs, hits, pushes, or strangles you while you have a child in your arms.
- He uses physical punishment or forces you to use it with the children.
- He is physically abrupt with the children, making you worry about their safety.
- _____



SEXUAL COERCION

Some mothers who are victims of conjugal violence may be assaulted in different ways in relation to sexuality or their body:

- He tells the children you're a whore, a slut, a prostitute.
- He tells the children that you cheat on him or that you have cheated on him in the past.
- He prevents you from using birth control pills or other contraception.
- He forces or prevents you from having an abortion.
- He prevents you from giving birth the way you want (e.g., with or without pain relief, etc.).
- He touches you inappropriately in front of the children and without your consent.
- He exposes the children to pornography, sexual acts, or comments.
- _____

POST-SEPARATION VIOLENCE

Despite popular belief, violence rarely ends when the relationship ends. This form of violence is even more present when the two former partners have children together. In fact, following the separation, the aggressor tends to change his abusive strategies because he no longer has the same access to his victim(s).

Unfortunately, manipulating and exploiting the children is an effective tactic for violent men to maintain their power over their ex-partners.

- He asks the children about you (for example, your dating life, your job, or studies, etc.).
- He forces the children to watch you and report all the details of your daily life to him.
- He brings the children back from visits: tired, dirty, and hungry.
- He constantly talks to them about the possibility of them coming to live with him.
- He gives them false hope about the family reuniting.
- He victimizes himself and says you're the reason the family broke up.
- He destroys your parental authority by being very lenient (no limits or discipline at dad's place).
- He abuses the justice system to increase his custody time or access rights.
- He makes false accusations about you to Youth Protection.
- He insists on taking charge of the children and then leaves them under someone else's responsibility.
- He refuses to give you information related to the children's well-being.
- He does not respect the legal judgment of the custody agreement.
- He stretches out the time or takes advantage of the custody exchanges to keep you close or to harass you.
- _____



2 - CONTROL

Control is the second strategy used by a violent man. It allows him to force you into submission by indirectly using different tactics which oblige you and the children to obey him. These imposed rules must be respected at all times, even in his absence.

These tactics are not violent or criminal acts, but their accumulation allows him to gradually increase his control over his victims. Violent men have multiple strategies at their disposal. In this section, we have listed eight tactics that we believe are the most common.

STRATEGY 1: BY RESTRICTING CONTACT WITH FAMILY, FRIENDS/OTHERS (ISOLATION)

- He makes you feel guilty about leaving the house alone or with the children.
- He won't let the children have a phone, which prevents you from contacting them.
- He won't let the children learn your mother tongue.
- He constantly accuses you of cheating in front of the children.
- He prevents you from using the car for the children's activities.
- He refuses that you accompany the children to important events.
- He starts an argument with you or the children when you need to go out.
- _____

STRATEGY 2: BY CRITICIZING

- He makes you feel like you're doing everything wrong as a mother.
- He "micromanages" everything in the home and related to the children.
- You feel like you need to walk on eggshells because you expect him to criticize you in front of the children.
- He treats you like a child.
- _____



STRATEGY 3: THROUGH MOTHER-CHILD AND SIBLINGS RELATIONSHIPS

- He wants to decide how you interact with your children.
- He insists that you not comfort the children when they are not well.
- He prevents the children from coming to see you when you cry.
- He constantly belittles the children and sometimes singles one of them out.
- He manipulates the children so they report everything about your actions to him.
- He uses inappropriate educational methods that make you worry about their safety.
- He accuses you of not having the right priorities regarding your family and children.
- He constantly speaks ill of you when you are away.
- He creates conflicts between you and the children.
- He seems to favour one child over the other.
- He never agrees with you and constantly says the opposite of what you say to the children.
- _____

STRATEGY 4: THROUGH MOODS, ANGER, AND THREATS

- You and your children are constantly on edge because you never know what will trigger his anger.
- He expects you and your children to guess what he wants, and he's furious when you can't.
- His emotions always dominate the environment and influence the emotions of others.
- When he gets very sad, you and the children must go to great lengths to cheer him up.
- You're afraid of what could happen to you and the children if you left him.
- _____

STRATEGY 5: BY THE MEANS OF MONEY

- He makes you feel guilty if you spend on the children or yourself.
- He forces you to ask family and friends for money to take care of the children.
- He refuses to buy new clothes for the children, even if they are damaged or too small.
- He refuses to pay for school activities or other outings.
- He refuses to pay for school supplies or all other essentials.
- He spends the family's money and then forces you to double your efforts to find a way to feed the children or pay for the rent.
- He refuses to pay child support.
- He lies about his income to avoid having to pay child support.
- _____



STRATEGY 6: THROUGH "PROTECTIVENESS" AND "THOUGHTFULNESS"

- He buys costly gifts for the children. He says you would never be able to give them such beautiful things.
- He doesn't like you or the children going out because he says he worries about you.
- He constantly calls the children, even if they're at school.
- He insists that you and the children share your whereabouts with him at all times.
- He won't let you leave the house alone with the children because he's worried about your safety.
- _____

STRATEGY 7: BY DENYING YOUR PERCEPTIONS (GASLIGHTING)

- He says he will take care of the children, but then he forgets or refuses to, forcing you to reorganize your plans.
- He accuses you or the children of imagining problems.
- He makes a list of your weaknesses and asks the children to participate.
- He insults you, and when you answer, he tells the children to look at their "crazy" mother.
- He assaults you, and when you defend yourself, he tells the children that you're the violent one.
- _____

STRATEGY 8: BY NOT RESPECTING YOUR RIGHTS, NEEDS AND OPINIONS

- At all times, his needs must be prioritized above yours and those of your children.
- When you take care of the children, he accuses you of no longer loving him and preferring the children over him.
- He punishes you and the children by cutting off the water, electricity, and bathroom access.
- He forbids you and the children from having access to certain rooms in the home.
- When you express an opinion, he makes fun of you in front of the children.
- _____