

Coercive Control Definitions

1. **Using Male Privilege** is defined as attitudes and behaviors representative of a male-dominated patriarchy. Males who use this tactic are motivated by the belief that they are superior to women; they have all the answers for women; and know what is best for them and their children. They assert this attitude through their behavior motivated by control and if that does not work escalating coercion to force a woman to do their bidding. This attitude may best be explained by patriarchal comments, such as, "a man's home is his castle"; "I can do whatever I want in my home and law enforcement (society) , cannot tell me what is the approved behavior and what is not". Male privilege also encompasses the attitude that I am omnipotent in my home.
2. **Using Children** to coercively control his partner is defined as attitudes and behaviors that provide the abuser with permission to objectify them and give him ownership of them. An abuser develops the attitude his children are property. He places his needs, wants, and desires above those of his children even to the point of using them as pawns to get back at or take revenge on their mother. He shows no concern or empathy for the impact of his attitudes and behaviors on the lives, growth and development of his children. He is unaware of the impact of his attitudes and behaviors on his children.
3. **Using Minimization, Denial, and Blaming** is defined as refusal to take responsibility for any coercive control tactics. The abuser makes light of his attitudes and behaviors and projects his responsibility onto the victim implying she is too sensitive; can't take a joke; and discounts the emotional and physical pain she experiences. With minimization, the victim's responses are discounted by the abuser in denial, the abuser shows irresponsibility and lack of empathy for the impact of his attitudes and behaviors on the victim and/or the children. He feels justified in his attitudes and behaviors because he presents himself as knowing that he would never do anything wrong, hurtful, or mean. The abuser uses blaming to place all responsibility on the victim for why he behaves in a hurtful, spiteful, and/or angry/violent way toward her. Basically, he says. "It is all her fault, she made me do ____", thereby, absolving himself of any responsibility.
4. **Economic/Financial abuse** is purposefully creating financial dependence of the victim on the abuser. This type of coercive control is motivated by gaining financial control over the victim and children. This control and dependency is designed to prevent the victim from gaining economic and financial independence to care for herself and her children. This is demonstrated by interference by the abuser in the victim's ability to acquire and keep gainful employment; acquire and use higher education; manage finances and provide financial resources to support her children.
5. **Intimidation** is defined as attitudes and behaviors used to invoke fear of harm at the hands of the abuser. They are used to gain power over the victim and manipulate the victim to respond as the abuser desires even if this is counter to the victim's desires. The victim is often caught in a Catch-22 with the abuser when she attempts to comply with his demands because he changes his demands so she can never respond correctly.
6. **Using Emotional Abuse** is any kind of abuse that attacks the other person emotionally or mentally without any physical contact. Emotional abuse involves any type of verbal abuse and constant criticism to more subtle tactics, such as, repeated disapproval or even the refusal to be pleased about anything about the other person. It is a constant wearing down of self-esteem, self-confidence, sense of self-worth or sense of identity. While there is no physical contact, there is still the sense of being hit internally.
7. **Threats and Coercion** are attitudes and behaviors used to force the victim into doing what the abuser demands under threat of loss of something or someone special to the victim or threat of bodily injury. These attitudes and behaviors are used to gain power over the victim and force the victim to respond to the abuser's desires without question. The problem is the consequences may be life-threatening or lead to death.
8. **Using Isolation** is defined as attitudes and behaviors designed to restrict your movements and maintain physical and emotional control of you. The abuser focuses on detaching you from contact or communication with anyone who is supportive or involved in your life. The purpose of isolation is to monopolize your attention and keep you occupied with only the information and input you receive from him.

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His focus is on keeping you away from your family, friends, or other supportive people in your life. He may prevent you from making friends or keeping friends. He may take up all of your time and energy so you are unable to spend time with anyone else.

9. **Spiritual Abuse** involves attitudes and beliefs that interfere with or keep you from practicing your religion or spiritual beliefs, or imposing the abuser's beliefs on you and requiring you to follow his belief system. The abuser places himself in the position of being the all-knowing one in your life. He may even challenge your understanding of God and put himself above God as being omnipotent or godlike. These attitudes and beliefs are meant as a form of mind control to coerce you into blindly following his lead.
10. **Using Litigation Abuse** is the use of all phases of the legal process in family court to delay, extend, manipulate, and coerce a protective mother into complying with the abuser's demands. The purpose of Litigation Abuse may be to punish, take revenge on, or keep the protective mother from revealing the extent of the abuser's abusive behaviors during the relationship. The abuser floods the protective mother with legal paperwork (Paper Abuse) after she leaves and continues to overwhelm her with words on paper when he no longer has access to the protective mother to lecture her directly. These lectures often end with threats to take her back to court if she does not agree to his demands.
11. **Using Court-Appointed Professionals** involves added professionals in the custody or parenting time process. These professionals are used to humiliate, intimidate, and deny the parental qualities of the protective mother after separation that were acceptable prior to separation. By inserting court-appointed professionals in the custody process, the abuser/father gains the opportunity to portray himself as a "good enough" parent.
12. **Using Family Court Judges** involves attitudes and behaviors the abuser uses to: (1) encourage the court to believe lies about his former partner; (2) put his behaviors onto his former partner to make the former partner look as if she is attempting to interfere with his parental relationship with the children; and (3) manipulate the courts into thinking the abuser is the stable, responsible parent. The purpose behind the abuser's behavior may be to retaliate or take revenge on his former partner for leaving, and/or to have access to the children to instigate child abuse or continue child abuse, or to reduce the amount of child support he is required by law to pay.
13. **Using Non-physical Sexual Abuse** is attitudes and behaviors designed to control your sexuality within your relationship. A coercive controlling partner often expresses these attitudes by making comments about how you look, behave, and respond to your partner's questions and comments concerning your body and your sexuality. The purpose of non-physical sexual abuse is to maintain control over your body. This may include your appearance, your dress, and any sexual responses you may have.
14. **Physical abuse/violence** is "an act carried out with the intention, or perceived intention, of causing physical pain or injury to another person" (Straus & Gelles, 1986). This is behavior intended, at a minimum, to cause temporary physical pain to the victim. It includes relatively "minor" physical actions like slapping with an open hand up to severe acts of violence that lead to injury and/or death. It may occur just once or infrequently in a relationship, but in many relationships it is repetitive and chronic, and it escalates in frequency and severity over time. Physical abuse/violence is what most people think of as "domestic violence." By now, you know that physical abuse/violence is only one of many types of coercive control.
15. **Sexual abuse** involves attitudes and behaviors that are motivated by the abuser's feelings of entitlement and rights to be physically sexual with their partner or spouse whenever, however, and wherever they feel like it. Sometimes abusers show sexual respect to their committed relationship partner prior to marriage.
Sometimes, it is only after marriage abusers engage in sexual coercion and abuse. In an abuser's mind, sex is now his right and he is entitled to sex because he has a certificate of marriage. His interpretation of this certificate is that he now owns you, and your choices are no longer his concern.
As long as the marriage contract is in place, or you have committed to a monogamous relationship (only having sex with him), he shifts to an entitlement position where he asserts his possessiveness of you. The abuser no longer views you as a separate person with a separate identity. He now considers you his property to do with as he pleases. At this point, he demands sexual compliance, which he defines as consensual sex.

Excerpted from Eyes Wide Open: Help! With Control Freak Co-Parents Debra Wingfield, Ed.D., LPC

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