



What is coercive control?

Coercive control is, a pattern of behaviour aimed at dominating or controlling another, and which has the effect of trapping and isolating victim-survivors.

Why is it important to understand?

- It is common.
- It is not widely recognised in the community as domestic violence.
- It is not easy for victim-survivors to articulate what is happening or to show injuries (unlike if there is physical violence).
- It is a risk factor for homicide.
- It causes significant harm even after separation

Is there a single legal definition?

There have been many definitions of coercive control.

As of 1 August 2023, the Queensland law (Domestic and Family Protection Act 2012 (Qld)) seeks to address coercive control by defining domestic violence to include “a pattern of behaviour” that “may occur over a period of time” and may include multiple acts which “when considered cumulatively is abusive, threatening, coercive or causes fear” and is considered looking at the whole context of a relationship.

Coercive control will also be a criminal offence in Queensland if the behaviour occurred after 26 May 2025. This criminal offence includes patterns of abusive behaviour that can be physical and/or non-physical, or a combination of both, and is used to hurt, humiliate, isolate, frighten or threaten a victim-survivor.

A person who is an adult commits a coercive control offence if :-

- (a) the person is in a domestic relationship with another person (the other person); and
- (b) the person engages in a course of conduct against the other person that consists of domestic violence occurring on more than one occasion; and
- (c) the person intends the course of conduct to coerce or control the other person; and
- (d) the course of conduct would, in all the circumstances, be reasonably likely to cause the other person harm.¹

Who perpetrates and experiences coercive control?

Coercive control is usually perpetrated by an intimate partner but may also be perpetrated by a family member.

Coercive control can be experienced by anyone. One Australian study found that, amongst the women surveyed, those who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; culturally and linguistically diverse; or had a long-term health condition were more likely to report experiencing coercive control.

What does coercive control look like?

A list of examples of behaviours is provided below. It is important to understand that the context of the behaviour is important when considering what coercive control looks like. Behaviour which may seem harmless to an observer, may feel controlling, coercive or abusive to the victim-survivor because of the context the behaviour is experienced in.

Coercive control generally escalates over time. There may be an intense period of attention and courtship followed by gradual increases of controlling behaviour in both severity and frequency over time.

It may include an incident of physical violence but not always.

It may include any combination of the below behaviour:

- Threats (explicit threats to harm the victim-survivor or their children, warnings to the victim-survivor about the perpetrator's capacity to harm).
- Belittling, degradation or humiliation.
- Menacing or intimidatory behaviour or gestures directed strategically at the victim-survivor including angry verbal outbursts, staring, silence, ignoring, withdrawal of affection.
- Monitoring, stalking or surveillance via mobile phone technologies.
- Sexual coercion, including unwanted or forced sex, being made to feel guilty for saying no, denying choice in contraception, forced abortion.
- Preventing a person from making or keeping connections with their family, friends or culture, including cultural or spiritual ceremonies or practices, or preventing the person from expressing the person's cultural identity.
- Sleep deprivation.
- Jealousy, or accusations of cheating.
- Isolating the victim-survivor from friends, family, and/or support systems, and sabotaging social outings. Restricting the victim-survivor from leaving the residence.

- Controlling the victim-survivor's appearance or clothing choices.
- Threatening to spread rumours of mental illness or otherwise humiliate the victim-survivor
- Requirements to answer calls from the perpetrator for monitoring purposes.
- Strangulation, choking or pinning up against a wall by the neck.
- Restricting access to finances, or monitoring of finances or spending.
- Coercing the victim-survivor to sign a power of attorney, contract for finance, loan, credit card or guarantee.
- Restricting the use of a car or phone.
- Restricting the victim-survivor from pursuing education or job opportunities.
- Restrictions and rigid rules about where the victim-survivor can eat or sleep.
- Threats or warnings to cancel a spouse visa or deportation.
- Threats or warnings of harm to extended family members.
- Threats or warnings to tell community members sensitive information about the victim-survivor.
- Threat of suicide or self-harm.
- Causing or threatening to cause the death of, or injury to, a pet.
- Damaging or threatening to damage a person's property as a means of control.

How do victim-survivors report feeling?

The victim-survivor may report feeling like they are:

- Under constant pressure
- Walking on eggshells
- Worried
- On high alert
- Anxious
- Nervous
- Tired or exhausted
- Embarrassed or ashamed
- To blame for the perpetrator's behaviour and/or needing to make excuses for the perpetrator's behaviour

What can service providers do?

In the early stages of working with a client who is experiencing, or has experienced, coercive control:

- Be aware that they may not have the words to easily articulate what is happening or what has happened.
- Treat them with kindness and without judgement.
- Provide concise targeted resources to clients to assist them to identify that they may be experiencing, or may have experienced, coercive control.
- Take care not to overwhelm them with too many brochures, referrals or information.

When speaking with a client who is experiencing, or has experienced, coercive control:

- Try not to rush them.
- Victim-survivors value kindness, acknowledgment and feeling believed.

Ask questions about the impact of the behaviour as clients may find this easier to articulate than specific abusive behaviour. For example:

- “Can you tell me what a typical day is like for you?”
- “How often do you see or speak to your family and friends?”
- “What typically happens if/when you disagree with your partner?”

If you identify a client may be experiencing coercive control you may:

- Undertake a risk assessment (you can refer to the [National Risk Assessment Principles](#) by ANROWS which includes a list of lethality/high-risk factors).
- Consider providing assistance even when the victim-survivor appears to have high levels of capability or financial resources.
- Provide coordinated and ongoing support to assist victim-survivors to navigate the systems they may become involved with, including the legal system. Victim-survivors may have identified that they were already stressed with their situation, and it may be overwhelming to have to contact another service that they have been referred to.
- Provide (or organise for) safety planning – link them with their local DV Service or [DV Connect](#).
- Make fewer and targeted referrals as they may be feeling overwhelmed.
- Consider prioritising assistance for people who have been misidentified as the respondent in domestic violence matters. Victim-survivors that are misidentified are already under enormous stress and may be vulnerable to consenting, which may expose them to further coercive control.

What legal remedies are there?

If you or someone you care about has experienced coercive control, there are legal options that may be available both to protect a victim-survivor and to hold a perpetrator accountable for committing coercive control offences.

Domestic Violence Protection Orders

Domestic violence Protection Orders can be granted by Magistrates Courts. An application can be made by police or 'privately' by the victim-survivor.

You can see our domestic violence information sheet for further [general information about domestic violence orders](#).

If you are a service provider assisting someone to apply for a domestic violence order where there has been coercive control, **it is important to remember:**

- Your client may need to provide a lot of detail to address the criteria in the legislation.
- If you have already recorded a lot of detail in writing you could provide this to the client to minimise the need for your client to repeat themselves when dealing with other service providers.
- Avoid generalisations if you are helping them write the application such as "I am experiencing coercive control all the time".
- Avoid unnecessary detail, try instead to help them focus on specific examples with particulars including:
 - When something happened;
 - What actions or words were used;
 - How it made them feel.
- Encourage your client to obtain legal advice prior to filing the application as addressing the criteria correctly can be complicated.

Women's Legal Service Queensland ("WLSQ") can assist eligible women with free legal advice and assistance regarding domestic violence protection orders if you or someone you care about are experiencing or have experienced coercive control.

Women can self-refer by contacting the WLSQ Helpline on 1800 957 957, Monday to Friday 9:00am to 4:30pm.

Services can refer women for assistance with domestic violence protection orders as a result of coercive control by completing the WLSQ online [online referral form](#).

Gold Coast Community Legal Centre (“GCCLC”) can provide free legal advice, assistance and social work services to eligible individuals across the Gold Coast region regarding a range of legal issues including domestic violence protection orders.

Enquiries can be made by:

- contacting GCCLC by phone on (07) 5532 9611, Monday to Friday 8.30am to 4pm, excluding public holidays; or
- submitting a call back request at <https://www.gcclc.org.au/request-a-call-back>.
- GCCLC can also be contacted by email at office@gcclc.org.au, including for enquiries or facilitated referrals from other service providers.

Reporting Coercive Control Criminal Offences

If you are in immediate danger or need immediate medical help, please call ‘000’.

If you are not in immediate danger but want to report a crime, including coercive control behaviours occurring on or after 26 May 2025, call PoliceLink on 131 444, [report the crime online](#) or go to your local police station in person.

It is important to remember that only the Police are able to investigate and/or charge a person with the criminal offence of coercive control.

Getting legal advice if you have charged with a coercive control offence

- When a person has been accused of or charged with a coercive control offence it is important for them to obtain legal advice from a criminal lawyer as soon as possible.
- A criminal lawyer can explain the law and legal process and can help the person understand their options and the potential outcomes of the matter.
- When police ask a person to participate in a police interview, they can ask to speak to a criminal lawyer for legal advice first, to help them decide if they should engage in the interview.
- People charged with a coercive control offence must attend court. They will be notified of the court date by the police. If they do not attend, a warrant may be issued for their arrest and/or they may be charged with ‘failing to appear’. It is important to take note of any court dates and ensure attendance.
- The details of the charge and the police version of what occurred leading to the charge will be set out in a police document called a QP9. A copy of the QP9 can be obtained from the Police Prosecutor on the first court date.

Coercive Control

- Duty lawyers may be available at court to provide free legal advice and duty lawyer assistance. The court or Legal Aid Queensland can be contacted before the court date to find out if a duty lawyer service is available.
- There are circumstances when a court may decide to keep a person charged with a criminal offence in custody until their matter is decided. Alternatively, bail may be granted allowing the person to remain living in the community until the final court date, including conditions that may be set. These conditions must be followed as it a criminal offence to contravene bail conditions.
- A person charged with a coercive control offence must ultimately decide whether to plead guilty or not guilty to the offence. It is important to obtain legal advice from a criminal lawyer before deciding whether to plead guilty or not guilty to a charge of coercive control.
- The maximum penalty that may be imposed by a court for a coercive control offence is 14 years imprisonment. This reflects the serious nature of the crime.
- There are defences to the coercive control offence. For example, it is a defence to prove that the course of conduct for the coercive control offence was reasonable in the context of the relationship between the person and the other person as a whole. A criminal lawyer can provide legal advice about defences.
- Only adults can be charged with coercive control.
- Criminal law is complex and going to court in criminal matters can be daunting. Receiving comprehensive legal advice early in a matter can help people to be informed and understand what to expect.
- In addition to legal advice, people may wish to engage with non-legal support services to help look after their wellbeing throughout the legal process.

What can service providers do?

- If your service is assisting someone who has been accused of or charged with a coercive control offence, you should encourage the person to obtain legal advice as soon as possible.
- You may wish to assist by making a direct facilitated referral to a legal service provider, if the person authorises you to do so.
- It is helpful for the person to have all the information and documents relevant to the matter with them for their legal advice appointment. This helps the lawyer to better understand the matter and provide fulsome legal advice.
- The person may wish to make notes of any questions they have or important information to tell the lawyer before their appointment.

Who can help?



Support Services

If you or someone else you know are in immediate danger, call 000.

Social Support

DV Connect – 1800 811 811

Legal Support

- Women’s Legal Service Queensland – 1800 957 957
www.wlsq.org.au
- Gold Coast Community Legal Centre – (07) 5532 9611
- Community Legal Centres Queensland – (07) 3392 0092
www.communitylegalqld.org.au
Including a search tool to find a local community legal centre -
<https://www.communitylegalqld.org.au/find-legal-help/>
- Legal Aid Queensland - 1300 65 11 88
- Including information pages and guides relating to criminal law which can be found online at <https://www.legalaid.qld.gov.au/>
- Victim Assist Queensland – information, support and referrals for victims of crime, including information about victims’ rights and applications for financial assistance
 - Email VictimAssist@justice.qld.gov.au
 - Phone 1300 546 587 (9:00am – 4:30 pm Monday to Friday)
 - <https://www.qld.gov.au/law/crime-and-police/victim-assist-queensland>
- Queensland Law Society - to find a private lawyer
<https://www.youandthelaw.com.au/>

This fact sheet has been co-produced with Gold Coast Community Legal Centre and WLSQ acknowledges the contribution of NQWLS.

This factsheet includes general information only and is not a substitute for legal advice.