



Young People and Relationships: Identifying Coercive Control

A Guide for Parents, Guardians and Adults that Work with Young People

It's important that adults understand and can talk about coercive control with the young people they are close with. Trusted adults are in a unique position to help young people understand what healthy relationships look like and navigate their relationships. You don't have to be an expert, but you can make a real difference to the young people in your life.

What is coercive control?

Coercive control is when someone uses patterns of abusive behaviour against another person. Over time this creates fear and takes away the person's freedom and independence.

Coercive control can involve physical and non-physical abuse, and can occur in-person or online. All abuse can cause lasting damage that builds up and gets worse over time.

Coercive control can be used against anyone in any relationship, but is mostly used by men against women. It can also continue after a relationship has ended.

Many people who experience coercive control feel trapped and afraid. Their self-esteem and confidence may have been worn down, making it difficult to leave a relationship or get help.

What are the signs?

Early in a relationship the young person's partner may:

- Be overly affectionate, constantly flatter them, shower them with gifts or say "I love you" very early on
- Want to spend all of their time together and be in constant communication.

This is sometimes called 'love bombing'

Over time their partner may start to:

- Control who they see, what they wear and where they go
- Closely monitor their social media or track their location
- Interrogate them about who they've been with
- Get jealous easily and accuse them of flirting or cheating on them
- Regularly criticise or put them down
- Pressure or force them to have sex or do sexual things.

Their partner might:

- Take little or no responsibility, or blame you or other people, for their behaviour
- Have sudden mood swings, from sweet and loving to angry or violent
- Be manipulative, for example by saying things like 'If you loved me you would...'



Recognising the signs

Coercive control is often subtle, making it hard to recognise. Young people may not see it as abuse, either due to a lack of understanding of healthy relationships or because the abuser normalises the behaviour.

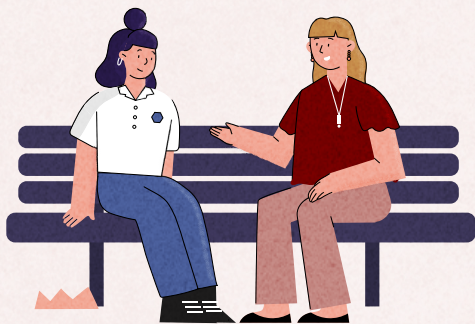
You might notice the young person:

- Having to ask their partner's permission, check in or always be available
- Changing their appearance or behaviour
- Constantly worrying about how their partner will react
- Withdrawing from social or family events
- Excusing their partner's behaviour.

These are just some of the signs that someone might be experiencing coercive control.

What can I do?

Having open conversations with young people can help them recognise coercive control. Let them know they can talk to you or another safe person about anything, and that the abuse is not their fault.



Give them time to talk and choose a safe place to have the conversation. It may be hard for them to open up, and they might feel scared or ashamed.

These conversations could include:

- Talking to a young person about feeling safe and comfortable in their relationships
- Mentioning things that you have seen or heard, or expressing your concerns

- Saying things like "I'm worried about you, I don't see you much anymore."
"Are you okay? You seem unhappy lately."
- Offering to help them contact a support service.

It is important to listen and believe what they tell you.

Help and support

In an emergency, **call 000**.

If you think a young person may be experiencing coercive control, reaching out to a support service is a good first step.

For support contact:

1800RESPECT

Call 1800 737 732 (available 24/7)

Text 0458 737 732

Or use the online chat at 1800respect.org.au

Kids Helpline

1800 551 800 (available 24/7)

Men's Referral Service

1800 943 539

ntv.org.au/mrs

For more information about coercive control and the National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence go to ag.gov.au/coercivecontrol

