



Coercive Control

Fact sheet

What is Coercive Control?

Coercive control is a pattern of abusive behaviour used to control someone within a relationship of trust through manipulation, pressure and fear.

- It can create a severe **imbalance of power**.
- While it is commonly associated with intimate partner relationships, **it can be perpetrated by anyone**, including adult children, friends, neighbours, or carers, and can even occur in residential aged care.

How does it work?

- Coercive control is **often hidden, doesn't always involve physical violence and grows gradually over time**, making it difficult to recognise.
- The abuse is often inconsistent, mixing controlling actions with **loving and conciliatory behaviour**.
- It frequently starts subtly under the guise of care or protection—such as offering to “help” an older person—but eventually escalates to strict control that **strips away a person's independence**.
- Everyday examples include a person taking complete control of finances, demanding domestic or sexual compliance, belittling the victim, or forbidding them from seeing friends and family.

Why does it happen and why is it hidden?

- The ultimate goal of coercive control is to **make the victim feel isolated, powerless, and helpless** to escape the abuse.
- Perpetrators often use coercive control under the **cover of “simply providing care”**, which makes it incredibly difficult for outsiders to spot.
- Victims, particularly older adults, may not speak up because they **fear the consequences of complaining**. They may be threatened with being sent to an aged care home, losing visitors, having practical help withdrawn, or they may simply feel they are a burden.

How can technology be involved?

Technology-facilitated coercive control occurs when a perpetrator uses digital tools to monitor, constrain, and abuse a person. Examples include:



Digital surveillance

Forcing a person to wear tracking devices, using GPS apps for constant location monitoring, or installing home cameras to eavesdrop on private conversations and routines.



Restricting access

Changing passwords, removing devices like phones, or denying a person access to their own online bank accounts or social media to isolate them.



Harassment

Sending multiple threatening text messages, logging into the victim's accounts without permission, or posting abusive messages online.

What you can do to respond

- **If you are experiencing it:** Try to safely maintain communication with trusted friends and keep notes about the concerning behaviours. **Seek help safely**, ensuring you use a safe device, such as a friend's phone.
- **If you suspect someone else is being controlled:** Ask them gentle questions without passing judgment, listen to their experiences, and be prepared to help them find professional support.
- **Reach out to support services:**
 - **1800 RESPECT** (1800 737 732)
 - **1800 ELDERHelp** (1800 353 374)
 - **Older People's Advocacy Network** (1800 700 600)
 - **Relationships Australia** (1300 364 277)
 - **13 YARN** (13 92 76) for culturally safe support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
 - **Family Relationship Advice Line** (1800 050 321)
- **In any emergency, always call 000.**



Language support

Help, support and advice about elder abuse is available on www.compass.info in many languages.

compass an EAAA project
GUIDING ACTION ON ELDER ABUSE

Help starts here

If you or someone you know needs help tackling elder abuse, visit www.compass.info or call **1800 ELDERHelp** (1800 353 374)

