

Domestic Abuse and Coercive control Policy

Introduction

Domestic abuse is defined by government in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk) as ‘any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those **aged 16 or over and** who are **personally connected** to each other’.

This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

- psychological
- physical
- sexual
- economic
- emotional

Two people are “**personally connected**” to each other if any of the following applies—

- they are, or have been, married to each other;
- they are, or have been, civil partners of each other;
- they have agreed to marry one another (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- they have entered into a civil partnership agreement (whether or not the agreement has been terminated);
- they are, or have been, in an intimate personal relationship with each other;
- they each have, or there has been a time when they each have had, a parental relationship in relation to the same child
- they are **relatives** (defined as are defined as mother, father, daughter, son, brother, sister, grandmother, grandfather, granddaughter, grandson, aunt, uncle, niece, nephew, or first cousin whether of the full blood or of the half blood, this includes in law or step family relationships)

The definition also includes **forced marriage, so called ‘honour based’ abuse and female genital mutilation.**

Coercive Control

Coercive control or controlling behaviour is a very common feature in abusive relationships. In most cases of domestic abuse, coercive control is present. It can include domination without acts of violence and usually involves a range of economic, emotional and other forms of pressure designed to dominate an intimate partner (or ex-partner). People who have experienced coercive control say it can be more damaging than physical abuse and can greatly undermine their confidence and self-esteem. It can sometimes be described as ‘walking on eggshells’

Coercive control is complex and although it is most often perpetrated by a male towards a female it can also be perpetrated by females and can happen in the context of **adult family violence** or in LGBTQ+ relationships. Coercive control is also often a feature of **post separation abuse.**

***Coercive** behaviour is an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim*

Controlling behaviour is a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour

Types of abusive behaviour

Coercive control in an intimate or family relationship can include a pattern of threats, humiliation and intimidation. For example:

- Stopping or changing the way someone socialises
- Controlling whether they go to work or not
- Controlling their finances and making them account for every penny they spend or preventing them from accessing their own money
- Repeatedly putting them down such as telling them they are worthless and humiliating and embarrassing them and undermining their ability to make their own choices and decisions
- Gaslighting them (manipulating them using psychological methods into questioning their own sanity)
- Controlling their social media accounts
- Isolating them from their family and friends or limiting and monitoring their contact with family and friends
- Controlling and limiting their access to support and preventing them from seeking help
- Controlling medication or denying care
- Dictating what they wear or how they look
- Monitoring them e.g. via tracking apps on mobile phones or tracking devices on cars
- Micromanaging all aspects of their lives so that victims are left isolated and with little to no 'space for action'.

The harm caused by coercive control can be serious and long lasting, it is an indicator for high-risk domestic abuse and is very often a feature in Domestic Homicide Reviews, more so than incidents of physical violence.

A recent Serious Incident Review in Sheffield also showed that there are 'hidden' victims of **modern slavery** and **forced marriage** who are also victims of **coercive control**. Where this is suspected, professional curiosity should be used and appropriate information sharing/safeguarding policies followed.

■ Coercive Control and the Law

Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015, which came into force in December 2015, makes it an offence if controlling or coercive behaviour causes someone either:

- to fear that violence will be used against them on at least two occasions, or
- serious alarm or distress which has a substantial effect on their usual day-to-day activities.

The offence carries a maximum of 5 years' imprisonment, a fine or both.

The offence of **coercive control** enables the **pattern of behaviour** to be prosecuted. It takes the emphasis off 'the incident of physical violence' and puts it on living entrapped within an abusive relationship and the psychological damage, trauma and long-lasting harmful effects of being controlled by someone else.

■ The Care Act statutory guidance

The new offence relating to coercive control is reflected in the [Care Act statutory guidance](#). This means that a local authority's duty to make (or ask others to make) safeguarding enquires and determine what action is needed to protect an adult at risk is triggered by reasonable cause to suspect that an adult with health and social care needs is experiencing coercive control (where their needs prevent them from protecting themselves).

What to do if you have concerns

Domestic abuse is a pattern of behaviour, so it is very unlikely that an incident is a one off. And separation does not ensure safety and can often mean risk is increased.

Contact Sheffield's Domestic Abuse Services provided by IDAS:

- Freephone Domestic Abuse Helpline: 0808 808 2241 (Mon-Fri 8am – 8pm & Sat, Sun & Bank Hols 11am – 8pm)
- Email: info@idas.org.uk
- Website: www.idas.org.uk
- Webchat available 4-6pm every day at www.idas.org.uk and online referrals can also be made

More information about Sheffield's domestic and sexual abuse services can be found at www.sheffielddact.org.uk

■ Adult safeguarding and domestic abuse

We have a statutory duty under the Care Act to help safeguard adults with care and support needs from domestic abuse. Our statutory duty also applies to adults who do not meet the definition of an 'adult at risk' but may have adults at risk living with them, or who are impacted by domestic abuse.

If you work in Adult Social Care and have access to Liquid Logic please load your concern and discuss next steps with your line manager, following the new Safeguarding processes in the social care manual.

If you're a professional and you are worried that an adult is being abused or neglected, you can report it to the Council's First Contact Team:

- fill out the [Safeguarding adults concern form](#). Please provide as much detail as possible
- email it to asc.howdenhouse@sheffield.gov.uk

If you want to report a concern over the phone call 0114 273 4908. Please be aware that our phone lines are busy and you may have to wait some time before your call is answered.

Concerns are screened daily to assess initial risk. We may contact you and other people involved to ask for more information.

■ Implications for Practice

People experiencing domestic abuse and coercive control live in fear of the consequences of going against the rules that the person perpetrating the abuse has set up for them to follow. The question

is how to determine in the context of coercive control whether the decision is a capacitated one or not.

Use your professional skills to enable people to create the space to make their own decisions by:

- Asking questions sensitively about relationships, including rules that have to be followed, how decisions are made and norms and fears
- Building up a trusted relationship with the person, take a strength based, non-judgemental approach to this.
- Be very clear that you believe the person being abused and let them know you are worried about the harm the perpetrator is causing to them, rather than focusing on what might appear to be their 'unsafe' or 'poor' choices.
- Supporting them with safety planning
- Understanding legal tools (such as Domestic Violence Protection Orders)

■ Children's safeguarding

Adults at risk may also be parents or carers of children, or grandparents and relatives. Children who experience domestic abuse in their families are now recognised in the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 as victims of the abuse in their own right. This is in recognition that children experiencing domestic abuse and/or living with a parent/carer or relative who is being coercively controlled can cause significant and long-term harm. Children living in a home where domestic abuse is happening are more at risk of other types of abuse too. Children often feel angry, guilty, insecure, alone, frightened, powerless or confused and can go on to develop long term mental health difficulties, such as anxiety or developmental trauma.

Any professional who becomes aware of domestic abuse needs to ensure the safety of those involved, including any children or pregnant women. If children are in immediate danger contact the police. You MUST consider making a referral to [Sheffield Safeguarding Hub](#) in these circumstances.

■ Risk and sharing information

Domestic abuse in its extreme forms can lead to significant harm or death.

We use a locally agreed domestic abuse risk assessment tool which can be found here [DASH and MARAC Information and Forms | Sheffield Domestic Abuse \(sheffielddact.org.uk\)](#) to determine whether a person is at high risk of serious harm or homicide.

Information sharing is critical in high-risk domestic abuse cases. If you believe that a situation is high-risk, you must make a [Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference \(MARAC\)](#) referral. This is so agencies can share information and make a plan to help keep the person and any dependents safe.

■ Further information

- [Sheffield Drug and Alcohol/Domestic Abuse Coordination Team \(DACT\)](#)
- [Sheffield Domestic Abuse Pathway](#)
- [IDAS](#) (Sheffield's Domestic Abuse Services)
- Inspire to Change [Inspire to Change, South Yorkshire - Cranstoun](#) (Voluntary domestic abuse perpetrator programme)
- [SafeLives](#) (useful [Spotlights](#) series of briefings)

- There is a lot of useful information aimed at health and social care professionals on RiPFA's [Coercive Control](#) website.
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Document information

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