

COERCIVE CONTROL

Coercive control is a persistent and deliberate pattern of controlling and threatening behaviour by a romantic partner over a prolonged period of time. This control is designed to achieve obedience and create fear.

Domestic abuse and coercive control are all about making a person's world smaller – trapping them, restricting their independence and freedom. All the time chipping away at their confidence and destroying their self-respect. It does not have to be physical to be abuse.

Coercive control can have a serious impact including the fear of violence, cause serious alarm and distress and can result in someone giving up work, changing their routines, losing contact with family and friends. Coercive control can damage a person's physical and emotional well-being.


It includes all or some forms of domestic abuse (emotional, physical, financial, sexual including threats). It can trap a person in a relationship and can make it feel impossible or dangerous to leave.

Coercive control is a criminal offence in Ireland. It is hoped that the maximum sentence for assault causing harm will increase from five years to ten years – this is one of the most common charges in cases of domestic abuse. This measure will be included in the Criminal Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill which will be enacted by the end of the year.

The Domestic Violence Act


Domestic abuse can occur in varied forms; physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, financial and psychological abuse. Victims of domestic abuse can be anyone of any gender including children. Their relationship with the offender can be that of spouse, cohabitant, parent or those in an intimate relationship.

The Domestic Violence Act came into law on the 1st of January 2019. This legislation brought about significant changes as follows:



1. Extension of those who can apply for Safety Order and Protection Orders:

A Safety Order is an order of the court which bans a person from committing or threatening to commit acts of violence against another person (the one who applied for the Safety Order). The order will also prohibit persons from following or communicating (including by electronic means) with the person in fear.



2. Emergency Barring Order:


A Barring Order requires the violent person to leave the home and prohibits further use or threats of violence.



3. Coercive Control:


The offence of Coercive Control is the most significant change to the Domestic Violence Act 2018. It is a criminal offence.

A spouse, Civil partner or a person in an intimate relationship with the alleged abuser can make a complaint to the Gardaí if they believe an offence has been committed



The first conviction, by Jury, for the Offence of Coercive Control in this State was at Dublin Circuit Criminal Court in November 2020. The Gardaí commended the victim for their bravery, encouraging other victims to come forward.

Following the case the Chief Superintendent commented that.....



it is illegal, it is criminal, if you come to the Garda station and tell your story, you will receive a sympathetic hearing



Types of Abuse

The examples below will help you recognise the signs of an abusive relationship. Not all methods of abuse are listed here but if you are nervous, frightened, or anxious around your partner, then the relationship may not be equal. You are the best judge of your own situation, trust your instinct.



Any one of these signs is serious. You do not need to experience several, or all of them for your relationship to be abusive. Sometimes behaviour like this can be normalised but it is not normal, and you do not have to put up with or accept this kind of behaviour from someone in your life.

If it feels wrong, it probably is.