



PARTNER ABUSE: Looking Beyond Physical Assault to Coercive Control¹



DEFINITION: Coercive control is a **deliberate and systematic** pattern of behavior designed to **limit a person’s freedom and ability to act on their own needs, values, and desires** and to **create a threat of harm** to compel compliance.

1 in 4
women



and

1 in 20
men



experienced physical assault, stalking or rape by a partner and were afraid

Many victims do not use the terms “partner abuse” or “domestic violence” and many victims will not have marks from physical assault. Look for clues for further screening such as:



Fear or concern for safety, anxiety and trauma symptoms, sleep deprivation, depression, and emotional exhaustion



Change in routine activities, isolation and withdrawal, work or school disruption, and changes in work or school schedules or accommodations



Injuries, stress-related health symptoms, substance use and frequent medical visits



Hesitancy to speak or talk about certain aspects of home life or relationship. A dominating partner or a partner that seems to be monitoring the other partner’s time and behavior

LOOK FOR PATTERNS OF:



Isolation: Limiting access to outside relationships because of partner control or jealousy or by undermining relationships with others



Regulation: Strategies and tactics employed to ensure compliance with abusers’ demands like monitoring, interrogating, and stalking



Exploitation: Intrusive oversight of victims’ money, work, household related activities, and other resources



Degradation: Constantly criticizing and personally attacking, administering punishments and doling out privileges, undermining parenting or other meaningful roles and actions, “outing” or publicly disclosing something private, increasing trivial demands, and objectifying/dehumanizing their partner



Deprivation of freedoms: Micro-regulating or controlling the conduct of every day life including depriving someone of personal privacy, dictating how someone spends their time, depriving someone of making their own personal choices and acting on opportunities, deciding how someone can express themselves, and controlling access to basic resources



Physical and sexual violence: Committing minor or moderate violence in the context of coercive control and any level of severe violence such as beating, kicking, choking and raping. Sexual abuse/coercion is rarely acknowledged but is a common tactic of coercive control



Intimidation: Making or implying threats to harm others close to the victim, threats to harm others close to the victim, or threats to harm self (e.g., suicide) as well as property destruction, and forced confrontations

CAREGIVER ABUSE/NEGLECT: If the patient is dependent on the abuser for care due to mental or physical limitations or disabilities, the abuser may neglect the victim’s needs and use the caregiving relationship to control and dominate the victim

¹ TK Logan, Ph.D. (April 2017). For more information email tklogan@uky.edu or visit www.CoerciveControl.com.

? WHEN ASKING:

- **Frame question in a non-threatening way**
 - Example: “We have started talking to everyone about safe and healthy relationships because it can have such a large impact on on health.”
- **Be direct, kind, non-judgmental and private**
 - Questions can be direct or indirect depending on the situation:
 - How are things at home?
 - What happens when your partner gets angry?
 - What happens at home when you tell your partner no or change your mind about something you agreed to?
 - Do you often feel like you are “walking on eggshells” at home?
 - Have you ever felt afraid or concerned about your safety because of your partner (or ex-partner)?
 - Have you felt humiliated or emotionally hurt by your partner?
 - Sometimes partners use physical force. Is this happening to you?
 - Has your partner ever physically threatened to hurt you?
 - In the past year have you been forced to have any kind of sexual activity by your partner?

- **Respond in a caring way**



DO say:

- This is not your fault
- No one deserves to be hit, hurt, or put down constantly, turned into a servant or humiliated
- You are not to blame. Abuse is widespread and happens in all kinds of relationships. Once it starts, it tends to continue
- I am concerned about your safety and your well-being
- Abuse can affect your health and that of your children in many ways



DON'T:

- Ignore the disclosure.
- Make blaming comments like: Why don't (can't) you just leave? What did you do to make him/her so angry? Why do you go back?
- Tell them what to do like suggesting she/he leave the relationship or try couples counseling. Leaving an abusive relationship and/or joint counseling may place the victim in greater danger



KEY QUESTION

Is it safe for you to go home? Are the children safe? Do you have a place to go if the abuse escalates?



I'VE ASKED, NOW WHAT?



Document injuries and responses to your questions



Assess victim's safety



Review options and provide referrals



ENCOURAGE THE VICTIM TO:



See it/acknowledge it as abusive behavior (coercive control) and/or stalking



Avoid minimizing or downplaying safety concerns and threats



Preserve evidence and document the abusive behaviors in a safe way



Plan for safety by thinking through specific threats and vulnerabilities



Seek support through trusted friends, family, or victim advocates



CHECK OUT

The **National Domestic Violence Hotline** at www.TheHotline.org (1-800-799-7233); the **National Health Resource Center on Domestic Violence** at www.NRCDOV.org/dvrn; the **Stalking and Harassment Assessment and Risk Profile (SHARP)** at www.StalkingRisk.com; **Other Resources** (www.CoerciveControl.org and www.OutrageUs.org).