Birmingham City Council

7-Minute Learning

Understanding Coercive Control

BIRMINGHAM COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP

1 What is coercive control?



A pattern of behaviours used to intimidate, humiliate, isolate, control or frighten a person, in order to take away their independence, choice and freedom.

2 Key characteristics

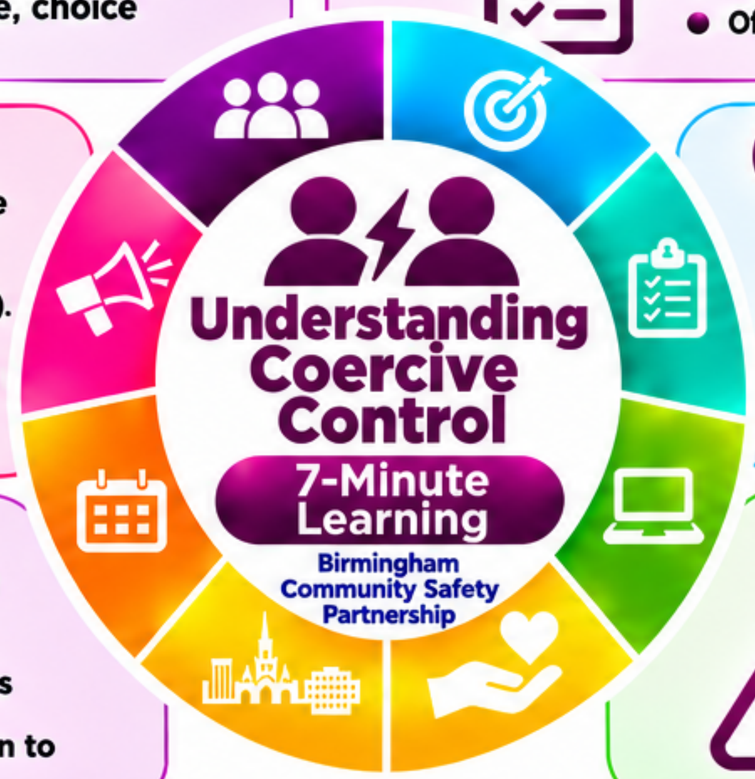


- A pattern of behaviour, not a one-off incident.
- Ongoing and deliberate, designed to gain and maintain control.
- Can be physical, emotional, psychological, financial, digital or social.
- Often escalates over time and can exist without physical violence.

7 Key takeaways



- Coercive control is a criminal offence (Serious Crime Act 2015).
- It can happen in any relationship (e.g. intimate partners, family members).
- It is about control, power and harm.
- Early recognition and a trauma-informed response can prevent escalation and increase safety.



3 Examples of coercive control



- Isolating a person from family, friends or support.
- Monitoring calls, messages, location or online activity.
- Controlling finances or access to money.
- Dictating everyday choices (e.g. what to wear, where to go, who to see).
- Using threats, intimidation or manipulation (e.g. "If you leave, I'll take the children").

6 Impact on victims



- Loss of confidence, self-esteem and independence.
- Increased anxiety, stress and fear.
- Feelings of being trapped, powerless and constantly 'on edge'.
- Can lead to physical harm, escalation to serious violence or homicide.

4 Signs to look for



- A person appears anxious, withdrawn or fearful.
- They may seek permission for everyday things.
- They have limited contact with others.
- They show signs of being controlled around the perpetrator.
- They may minimise, excuse or feel unable to leave.

5 The law and our response



The law

Coercive control is a criminal offence under Section 76 of the Serious Crime Act 2015, carrying a maximum sentence of 5 years' imprisonment.

Our role

Recognise the signs, respond safely, and ensure the person is offered appropriate support and referral.

Support

Take a trauma-informed, non-judgemental approach, listen, believe and validate their experience.

Safety

Consider risk, safety planning, and referrals to specialist domestic abuse and VAWG services.



Working together to safeguard people and end violence against women and girls in Birmingham.