

You're not alone.

If you feel like your world is smaller than it was.

If you can't do the things you used to.

If you're afraid of what "just might happen".

If you think someone you know
is trapped and afraid.

There is help and professional support.

Nobody has to live with coercive control
and abuse.

We deserve better.

Contact your local domestic support service.

Go to safeireland.ie to find the service
closest to you.

Call the National Freephone Helpline
on 1 800 341 900

For more information on coercive control and
what the law says see safeireland.ie

Help make
her world
BIGGER
again

A quick guide to
the criminal offence
of coercive control



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



The Community
Foundation for Ireland

The Scheme to Support National Organisations is funded by the Government of Ireland
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The national social change agency working to
make Ireland the safest country in the world.

What is coercive control?

Coercive control is a crime. It is the very heart of domestic abuse. It does not have to be physical to be abuse.

It is a persistent and deliberate pattern of behaviour by an abuser over a prolonged period of time designed to achieve obedience and create fear.

It may include coercion, threats, stalking, intimidation, isolation, degradation and control. It may also include physical and/or sexual violence.

Coercive control is all about making a woman's world smaller – trapping her, restricting her independence and freedom. A controlling partner may shut out her friends and family, control her movements, micro-manage what she eats or wears, restrict her access to money – all the time chipping away at her confidence and destroying her self-respect.

It is not her imagination.

It is not her fault. It is not acceptable.



It's the law

If it happened after January 1st 2019, **coercive control is a criminal offence** in Ireland.

Section 39 of the new Domestic Violence Act 2018 sets out that:

(1) A person commits an offence where he or she knowingly and persistently engages in behaviour that

- (a) is controlling or coercive
- (b) has a serious effect on a relevant person, and
- (c) a reasonable person would consider likely to have a serious effect on a relevant person.

The legislation explains that behaviour has “a serious effect” if the “relevant person” – that is an intimate partner – **fears** that violence will be used against them or if it causes serious alarm or distress that has a “substantial adverse impact on usual day to day activities”.

This new law makes coercive control more serious precisely because it relates to tactics used **by an intimate partner – a spouse, non-spouse or civil partner – now or in the past.** You do not have to be in a sexual relationship for a partner to be an intimate partner.

Coercive Control has a terrorising pattern.

An abuser's actions may vary but the eroding impact is the same.

This is what women tell us...

I'M AFRAID OF THE 'OR ELSE'

Fear sets in. You are realising that you have been groomed. He loses his temper, lashes out, hits you. Then explains it away as a moment of madness. But the fear of the violence never goes away, even if it's not used. It's just there as that pit of your stomach dread of what might happen.

I'M GOING CRAZY

Mad things happen. Your mobile phone goes missing. You were sure you'd parked the car outside the house, but now it's around the corner. He accuses you of forgetting important things. Things that you are sure you were never told. You think you're going insane.

IT'S LIKE WALKING ON EGG SHELLS

The relentless abuse is aimed at what means most to you – your femininity, your role as a mother, how you look and dress, how you cook, how you parent maybe. You're living on your nerves. You might straighten the towels over and over. Make sure the dinner is on the table. Face the labels on the tins the right way. Whatever it is. You do it.

HE WAS SUCH A CHARMER

At first, it's a whirlwind. He can't buy you enough presents, give you enough time, shower you with enough compliments. Everyone thinks he's great. Dazzled with the intensity of the attention, you trust him with your secrets, your vulnerabilities, your soul. You have niggling doubts, but he brushes them aside.

I DON'T DO THE THINGS I USED TO ANYMORE

You don't see friends and family, and no longer do the things you used to. You can't remember the last time you went out with the girls. He tells you that your friends are using you anyway. And your mother doesn't like him. You don't have your own money. You don't have a bank account.

IF I DON'T ANSWER THE TEXTS I KNOW THERE'LL BE TROUBLE

You're in work and he knows where you are, before you even get there. You're with your friends for a rare night out and you get a phone call every 15 minutes. Your friends tell you to ignore him but you know you can't. It's easier to go home.

IT'S PROBABLY ME

You blame yourself. You can't make decisions about yourself or the children. You don't recognise yourself anymore. You can't even hear yourself, because the only voice you hear is his.