

What Is Coercive Control?

A comprehensive guide to helping
you understand coercive control

Coercive control refers to any pattern of behavior an abuser uses to dominate their partner and limit their freedom.

It can include physical abuse and emotional abuse, but often, coercive control is more subtle. Abusers use coercive control tactics to control their partners through isolation, gaslighting, monitoring and more. And the practice is present in almost all cases of domestic abuse.

This toolkit will provide you with these insights and more. Inside you'll find:

- Helpful Articles
- Recommended Books
- Lists
- Danger Assessments
- In-Depth Videos
- Survey Results
- Support Communities
- How to Find Help



There are hundreds of articles on [DomesticShelters.org](https://www.DomesticShelters.org) covering the many facets of domestic violence. Here are links to those that will help you answer the question, “What is coercive control?”

[Abuse That's Hard to Recognize: Coercive Control](#)

Intimate partner abuse that is often disguised as love.

[What is Coercive Control?](#)

A Q&A with author, activist and professor Lisa Aronson Fontes, PhD about coercive control.

[Recovery After a Controlling Relationship](#)

From fear and despair towards happy in eight steps.

[Perspecticide: Erased by Your Partner](#)

The harsh reality of "perspecticide" in a coercive control relationship.

[From Romance to Isolation: Understanding Grooming](#)

Anyone can fall for the clever manipulations of an abusive partner.

[Controlling Your Partner Is Illegal, But Not in the U.S.](#)

British victims are better protected.

[Normal Jealousy or the Start of Abuse?](#)

How to tell the difference in your relationship.

[What Is Sexual Coercion?](#)

Just because it's not rape, doesn't mean it's not abuse.

[The Silent Treatment: An Abuser's Controlling Tactic](#)

Ignoring another person is a strong communication of control.

[Ask Amanda: I Live With a Controlling Husband](#)

A pattern of increasing control by a partner is abuse, and has the potential to escalate.

[Abuse Almost Always Escalates](#)

If you're trapped in a cycle of abuse, it's most likely going to only get worse.

[What Is Domestic Violence?](#)

A comprehensive guide to helping you understand domestic violence and abuse.

[8 Ways Controlling Men Make Mothering Even Harder](#)

Children suffer fear, uncertainty and trauma.

[When No One Believes You](#)

Have you tried to tell someone you're being abused, only to be accused of lying?

[My Experience With Coercive Control](#)

Anyone can become a victim of coercive control.

[Ask Amanda: My Abusive Pastor-Husband Has Dementia](#)

Leaving someone with a disease presents even more guilt, challenges.

[How Not to Fall into a Caregiving Trap With an Abuser](#)

Safely and discreetly getting support in quarantine and beyond.

[The Mind-Trip That Is Emotional Abuse](#)

How to recognize the signs of an abuse that leaves no bruises.

[You Can Call a Hotline Even If You Don't Want to Leave](#)

10 questions you can ask an advocate that have nothing to do with shelter.

[What Is Emotional Abuse?](#)

A comprehensive guide to understanding emotional abuse.

[When They're Not Ready for Help](#)

How to help someone who's being abused even if it seems they're not listening.

[5 YA Novels About Dating Violence for Teens and Adults](#)

As these stories reveal, dating abuse doesn't always leave behind bruises.

[More About Coercive Control](#)

Why women are most likely to be victims of this type of abuse and why they stay.

[Survivor Story: From Homeless, Abused to Meeting Oprah](#)

A rough childhood and an abusive husband were no match for Delores' faith that she was meant for something bigger.

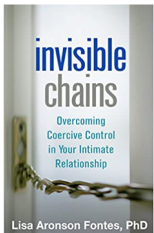
[He's Threatening to Call CPS](#)

Pregnant and afraid, her husband's threats are a form of emotional abuse.



Reading books can be a helpful way to understand if you're a victim of abuse and understand the abuser's behavior.

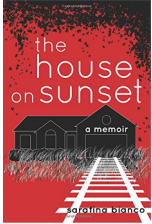
Here are our recommended reads:



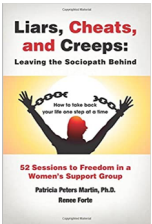
Invisible Chains: Overcoming Coercive Control in Your Intimate Relationship. Showered with attention? It can feel incredibly romantic and can blind you to hints of problems ahead. What happens when attentiveness becomes domination? The desire to control can lead to jealousy, threats, micromanaging, even physical violence. If you are trapped in a web of coercive control, this book provides answers, hope, and a way out.



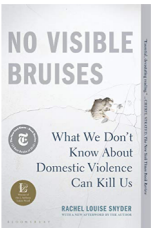
Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life (Interpersonal Violence). Studies show that most abused women seek help because their rights and liberties have been jeopardized, not because they have been injured. The coercive control model resolves three perplexing challenges posed by abuse: why these relationships endure, why abused women develop a profile of problems seen among no other group of assault victims, and why the legal system has failed to win them justice.



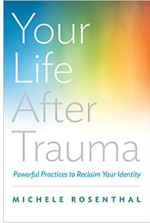
The House on Sunset. Sarafina Bianco was once a teacher with dreams far outside the classroom. When her boyfriend cheated on her, Sarafina eventually looked online for his replacement. She met Mike. This memoir puts to rest a broken home. Each chapter is a different glimpse into the cycle of domestic violence, where honeymoon phases and traumas coexist. Everyone could fall victim to abusers.



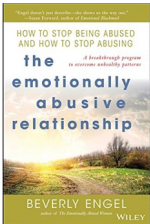
Liars, Cheats, and Creeps: Leaving the Sociopath Behind: 52 Sessions to Freedom in a Women's Support Group. This book was written as a lifeline for women who are involved with men who lie, cheat, and mistreat their wives or girlfriends. Readers join a support group of four smart, educated women with careers and families who were lied to and devastated by the people who promised to love, honor, and protect them--their husbands. This book is the next best thing to attending a support group.



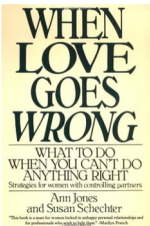
No Visible Bruises: What We Don't Know About Domestic Violence Can Kill Us. In No Visible Bruises, journalist Rachel Louise Snyder gives context for what we don't know we're seeing. She frames this urgent and immersive account of the scale of domestic violence in our country around key stories that explode the common myths--that if things were bad enough, victims would just leave; that a violent person cannot become nonviolent; that shelter is an adequate response; and most insidiously that violence inside the home is a private matter, sealed from the public sphere and disconnected from other forms of violence.



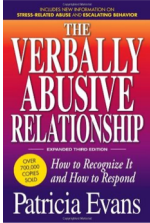
Your Life After Trauma: Powerful Practices to Reclaim Your Identity. Now a professional coach helping trauma victims rebuild their lives, Michele Rosenthal struggled with the effects of medically-induced post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for over 25 years before reaching a full recovery. Today, she is 100% free of PTSD. She applies her personal experience and professional wisdom to offer readers an invaluable roadmap to overcoming their own trauma.



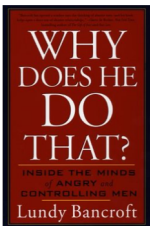
The Emotionally Abusive Relationship: How to Stop Being Abused and How to Stop Abusing. Whether you suspect you are being emotionally abused, fear that you might be emotionally abusing your partner, or think that both you and your partner are emotionally abusing each other, this book is for you. In this breakthrough book, Beverly Engel, one of the world's leading experts on the subject, shows us what it is and what to do about it.



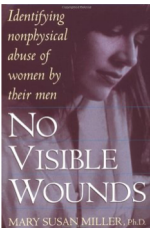
When Love Goes Wrong: What to Do When You Can't Do Anything Right. Too many women find themselves in abusive relationships and don't know what to do, or even what's wrong. She may feel anxious, inadequate, intimidated and on eggshells, and find herself trying harder without success. The authors bring their experience with survivors to offer an eye-opening analysis of controlling partners and empowering information for women seeking change.



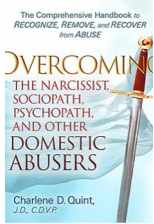
The Verbally Abusive Relationship, Expanded Third Edition: How to recognize it and how to respond. Learn why verbal abuse is more widespread than ever, how to recognize and deal with it safely, and most important, how to lead a happier, healthier life. Also, outside stresses driving the rise in verbal abuse, mitigate the effects on relationships, levels of abuse (insidious put-downs, tantrums of name-calling, screaming, and threats that can escalate into physical abuse).



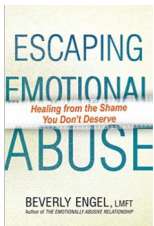
Why Does He Do That?: Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men. From the perspective of the director of the first U.S. program for abusive men, the author offers early warning signs, ten abusive personality types, and the abusive mentality, and dispels 17 myths about abusive personalities, sheds light on the origin of the abuser's values and beliefs, which he believes is a better explanation of abusive behavior than reference to psychological problems.



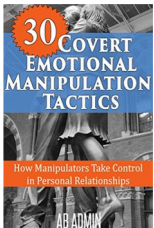
No Visible Wounds: Identifying Non-Physical Abuse of Women by Their Men. With one out of 11 high school students experiencing physical abuse, this book is an important read for teenagers who have questions about abusive dating relationships, helps them understand the causes and consequences of their situation, learn what they can do about it, find help from parents and other adults, and discover how to build healthier relationships.



Overcoming the Narcissist, Sociopath, Psychopath, and Other Domestic Abusers: The Comprehensive Handbook to Recognize, Remove and Recover from Abuse. Overcoming the Narcissist, Sociopath, Psychopath, and Other Domestic Abusers is a ground-breaking comprehensive handbook that contains everything a woman needs to know about how to recognize abuse, break free, and thrive.



Escaping Emotional Abuse: Healing from the Shame You Don't Deserve. In *The Emotionally Abused Woman*, therapist Beverly Engel introduced the concept of emotional abuse, one of the most subtle, yet devastating forms of abuse within a relationship. Now Engel exposes the most destructive technique the abuser uses to break our spirit and gain control--and guides readers on how to free themselves from the shame that can keep them from the life (and the love) they deserve.



30 Covert Emotional Manipulation Tactics: How Manipulators Take Control In Personal Relationships. Learn the manipulator's game, so they can't play it with you. Identifying covert manipulation is tricky. This short but powerful 33-page book will teach you how to identify the 30 tactics manipulators use to get what they want. You'll also learn to spot the warning signs within yourself that expose covert manipulation is taking place, even if you can't identify the specific tactics being used.



Sometimes lists are easier on the mind because they are uncluttered and to-the-point. If you'd rather read a few items versus articles or books, these lists are for you.

To view all list items at once, click the SEE ALL button located below the list text.

- [25 Relationship Red Flags](#)
- [25 Risk Factors for Domestic Violence](#)
- [18 Things Abusers Do When They're Gaslighting](#)
- [18 Warning Signs That You're Being Gaslighted](#)
- [19 Myths About Domestic Violence](#)
- [35 Ways to Recognize Emotional Abuse](#)
- [19 Myths About Domestic Violence](#)
- [20 Things Abusers Say](#)



There are three well-known, free, online assessment tools available that can help you understand the level of danger that may be present, but not always obvious.

The Danger Assessment

The free tool helps determine the level of danger an abused person has of being killed by an intimate partner.

MOSAIC

Using a series of questions, this tool assesses how similar a situation is to other situations that have gotten worse.

Ontario Domestic Assault Risk Assessment

A risk assessment designed to be used by professionals that calculates how a man who has assaulted his female partner ranks among similar perpetrators with respect to the likelihood that he will assault a female partner again in the future.



Click video thumbnail to watch





A lot of lessons can be taken from people who have been through it before. Check out the following survey results to learn from the experiences of others.

- [In which relationships have you experienced gaslighting?](#)
- [What was your last straw with an abusive partner?](#)
- [Did an abusive partner prevent you from voting in elections?](#)
- [Which abuser\(s\) have you encountered?](#)
- [Did an abuser ever use sleep deprivation as a form of abuse?](#)
- [If you have experienced domestic violence, how was it impacted by the summer season?](#)

- Did news, politics or current events impact the frequency of the abuse you experienced?
- Have you felt like your abuser has kept or tried to keep your children from you?
- Did you find verbal abuse more or less damaging, long-term, than physical abuse?
- How did you document the abuse you experienced?
- Which type of abuse did you experience first?



Online forums and chats can help you connect with others who are in or have faced similar situations and find support and ideas from the survivor community.

[AfterSilence.org](https://www.AfterSilence.org) aims to help victims become survivors and to communicate in the recovery of domestic and sexual violence. It offers an active message board and chat room for rape, sexual assault, sexual abuse, incest and molestation survivors. There are over 31,000 members and about 1,000,000 posts, including recent posts and many useful posts from days and months past.

[Pathways to Safety International](https://www.PathwaysToSafety.org) If you're an American overseas, your situation is different than 99% of your fellow countryman, and this site will be a wonderful resource for you. Among the services is a 24-hour response to emails, as well as international phone options.

DomesticShelters.org Facebook Page offers one of the most active places where domestic violence survivors connect. You'll find conversation, past experiences and unvarnished stories, and occasionally advice from professionals who have joined in on a topic.

DomesticShelters.org Facebook Group is a private group designed to be a safe space for domestic abuse victims, survivors, advocates and others affected by abuse to support one another through meaningful dialogue and helpful insight.

Fort Refuge is a clever grassroots site run by survivors for fellow survivors as a safe place to come together and discuss their struggles and victories in healing from various types of abuse. Though the forum and chat do not boast the same numbers as some of the larger organizations, they are one of the more active conversation places on the internet currently. They also add new content to their site regularly.

Love is Respect - National Teen Dating Helpline focuses on teen relationships and can be accessed by phone, text or live chat. It offers real-time, one-on-one support by trained peer advocates who offer information and advocacy to those involved in dating abuse. They also offer support to parents, teachers, clergy, law enforcement, and service providers.

National Domestic Violence Hotline offers confidential, private, one-on-one chats with advocates every day 24/7.

OnYourMind.net is a safe and anonymous place for teens to get information and support from other teens in an online chat room, covering topics such as relationships, school, depression, stress, suicide, parents, cutting, identity and health.

Pandora's Aquarium is an online forum with around 2 million posts and over 70,000 members, and is run by Pandora's Project, which provides information, support and resources to rape and sexual abuse survivors and their friends and family.

When accessing hotlines, chats or forums from a computer, tablet, or smartphone, please remember to take the necessary precautions to keep your activities confidential from your abuser. Learn more about how to stay safe online [here](#).

Also, keep in mind that local shelters may offer in-person or virtual support groups. You can find shelters in your area at [DomesticShelters.org](https://www.DomesticShelters.org).



Another way to determine if you're experiencing abuse is to contact a trained domestic violence advocate near you or through a national service.

To search for domestic violence program staffed with trained advocates, visit [DomesticShelters.org](https://www.DomesticShelters.org) and type either your city and state, or ZIP code, into the search bar at the top of the page. A list of organizations and contact numbers near you will be displayed. To reach an advocate, reach out directly by calling the phone number listed. Most are open 24/7.

To speak to an advocate at the National Domestic Violence Hotline, also 24 hours a day, seven days a week, call 800-799-SAFE (7233) or visit [thehotline.org](https://www.thehotline.org) to chat online.

It's important to know that your call is confidential and you can choose to remain anonymous when speaking with an advocate. To know what to expect when calling, read [this article](#).