

Cut Your Strings: Controlling and coercive domestic abuse

There is an average of 459 reports of domestic abuse a month in Dorset. But we know that domestic abuse is often under reported and victims suffer in silence. In some cases, victims may not realise or acknowledge that what they are enduring is abuse.

Legislation to make controlling and coercive behaviour a criminal offence was introduced in December 2015. This closes the gap in the law around patterns of controlling or coercive behaviour which amounts to psychological and emotional abuse, but stops short of physical abuse.

We need to ensure victims of controlling and coercive behaviour are made aware that they do not need to suffer and be subjected to sustained patterns of abuse, which can lead to total control of their lives by the perpetrator. There is help and support available.

Cut Your Strings

This newsletter features images from short animated videos that have been created by Bournemouth University students to raise awareness of some of the most common forms of controlling and coercive behaviour. Visit www.cutyourstrings.co.uk to watch the videos.



The Cut Your Strings animations were made by Bournemouth University students in collaboration with the Dorset High Sheriff John Young, Dorset Police, Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner, Wessex Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and Safer Poole Partnership.

What is controlling and coercive behaviour?

Domestic abuse is more than just physical or sexual abuse. It includes controlling and coercive behaviour which is psychological and emotional abuse, and is a criminal offence.

Controlling behaviour is: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour.

Coercive behaviour is: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish, or frighten their victim.



Some examples of behaviour:

- Monitoring someone's time, tracking their movements, their online communications or watching them via spyware.
- Isolating a person from their friends and family, depriving them of their basic needs and access to support or medical services.
- Taking control over aspects of their everyday life - such as where they can go, who they can see, what to wear, how long they take in the bathroom and when they can sleep.
- Repeatedly putting them down such as telling them they are worthless; enforcing rules and activity which humiliate, degrade or dehumanise the victim.
- Threatening to hurt or kill, threats to a child, threatening to reveal or publish private information.
- Forcing someone to do something they don't want to do like take part in criminal activity.
- Other crimes which could be used to control and coerce include criminal damage - such as destruction of the house or your personal things, assault and sexual assault or rape.

The above list is not exhaustive and other behaviours could amount to controlling and coercive behaviour but the offence only applies when the behaviour takes place repeatedly or continuously, on an ongoing basis.

The pattern of behaviour has to have a "serious effect" on the victim - where they have been caused to either fear that violence will be used against them, or they have been caused serious alarm or distress which has a substantial adverse effect on the victim's usual day-to-day activities.



What can you do?

In the course of your professional work you may suspect that a person or family is affected by domestic abuse. Look beyond what you are seeing or dealing with, don't accept things on face value, be curious and ask questions to get the full picture. Children can also be seriously affected by domestic abuse taking place between others in the household.

Please take responsibility for any safeguarding concerns of children or adults by raising them with your manager or senior staff, and ensure they are reported to social care or the police.



Ensure you know how to direct victims to support and help. Some abuse may not reach a criminal threshold or a victim may not want the police involved, but victims need to be encouraged to access support to stop abuse before it continues or worsens.

Details of support options can be found by visiting www.cutyourstrings.co.uk or www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/dvahelp