

Coercive control



**This isn't
love ...**

**... this is
control.**





REGROUPEMENT DES MAISONS
POUR FEMMES VICTIMES
DE VIOLENCE CONJUGALE

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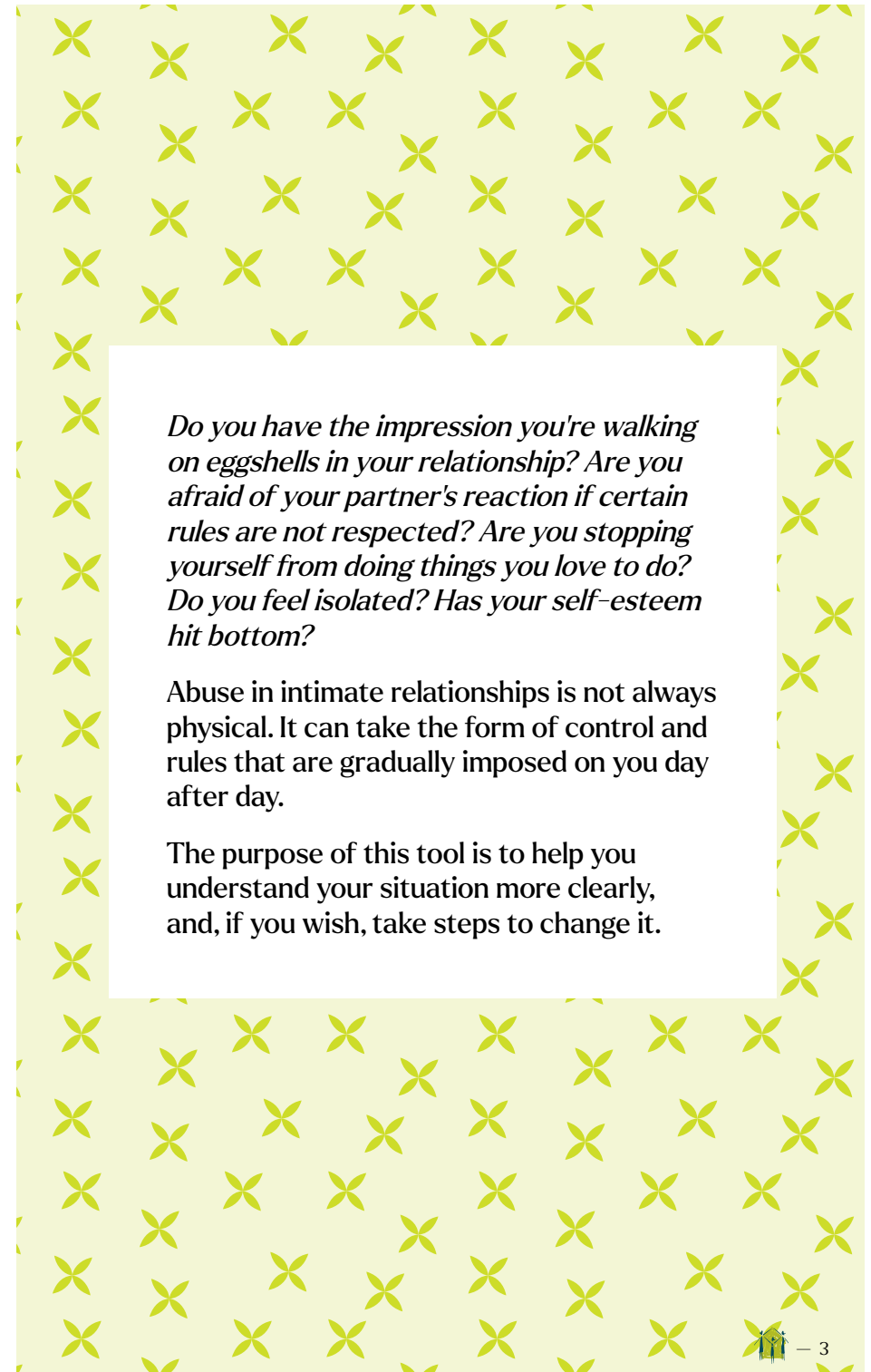
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Québec 



Do you have the impression you're walking on eggshells in your relationship? Are you afraid of your partner's reaction if certain rules are not respected? Are you stopping yourself from doing things you love to do? Do you feel isolated? Has your self-esteem hit bottom?

Abuse in intimate relationships is not always physical. It can take the form of control and rules that are gradually imposed on you day after day.

The purpose of this tool is to help you understand your situation more clearly, and, if you wish, take steps to change it.

What is coercive control?

A series of tactics and controlling behaviours implemented gradually by a partner or ex-partner to isolate, control, terrorize and deprive his partner of her freedom.

Examples of coercive control include surveillance, interrogation, isolation, harassment, financial abuse, blaming, humiliation, threats, sexual violence, and abuse using technology.

These abuses are often subtle, and sometimes invisible to people outside the relationship. Combined, these behaviors can make you feel as though you were trapped in an invisible cage. Fear, doubt, anxiety, hypervigilance and loss of confidence are the daily reality for those who live under this kind of control.



He kept me away from everyone. I was not allowed to have friends, he prevented me from communicating with my family or going to see them. When I wanted to go to the movies, which he hated, he first had to agree to my going. When I got home, it was an interrogation: who did I talk to, what about, etc.

I had to work 40 hours a week and continue my college education while being a perfect housewife and, most importantly, available whenever he wanted sex. I had to take care of everything in the house, especially him.

If he was watching TV, I had to watch too, I couldn't even read or do anything else, because my attention would not be focused on him.

When it didn't work out the way he wanted, he would break things, humiliate me, ignore me for days.

He never hit me, he didn't need to. The fear was there every day.



Behaviours that have an impact on the **whole family**

Your children do not need to witness coercive control directly to suffer the consequences of this abuse. The arbitrary rules and climate of tension and fear imposed on the family affect their well-being.

Your children grow up in a climate of permanent tension where they do not feel safe: they are afraid of your partner's reactions, they are afraid for you, they feel you are tense, anxious and preoccupied.

They may:

- **also be the targets of arbitrary rules:** limited access to food or clothing, controlled activities and movement, no access to friends, cousins or grandparents, obligation to keep the house quiet or tidy at all times
- **be used by him to get access to you:** forced to monitor you and report on your activities
- **be forced to participate** in your conversations and encouraged to take a stand against you.



Your (ex)partner may stand in the way of what you think is best for your child. You may end up:

- being prevented from taking care of your child(ren), breastfeeding them, buying them clothes, consoling them, helping them with their homework
- being less attentive, less patient, less available for your child(ren) because you are preoccupied by your partner or because your partner deprives you of sleep or food
- finding it more difficult to be a mother because you are put down, criticized for the way you care for your children.

Control that intensifies with **separation**

Is your ex-partner watching your comings and goings, bombarding you with text messages, multiplying or unnecessarily prolonging legal proceedings related to the separation, or manipulating and threatening your child(ren)?

Control tends to increase and change form when your partner feels he is losing his grip on you. This is especially true at the time of separation. If you have children, it is likely that he will employ additional strategies. You may feel exhausted, as it is usually much harder to break contact when children are involved.



Recognizing signs of coercive control in a relationship

Control, because it is embedded in the fabric of the relationship and "seemingly ordinary" behaviours, can be difficult to recognize. The following questions can help you determine if you are experiencing, or have experienced, coercive control with a partner.




In general:

What is it like at home when you don't agree to your partner's requests?

What happens if you say you want to go out by yourself? See friends or family? Buy certain things? Register for certain activities, sign up for a training session?

Does your (ex) partner:

- Ask you to report on your activities, account for being late, travel, etc.?
- Monitor your calls, emails and social media?
- Become jealous and possessive?
- Make hurtful or humiliating comments about the way you dress, your appearance, your children's education?
- Say you are wrong, no matter what you do?
- Call you repeatedly to find out what you are doing, where you are and with whom?
- Insist to the point where you can't refuse him sex?
- Throw objects or break things that belong to you?

-  Control your money and how you spend it?
-  Try to keep you away from your family or friends?
-  Decide what clothes you wear? How you do your hair and makeup?
- Threaten to report you to the police or authorities (immigration service, youth protection, etc.)?
- Make excuses (work stress, alcohol, unruly children, etc.) to justify his behaviour?

Do you:

- Feel like you are "walking on eggshells" in your relationship, worry about your partner's reactions?
- Feel isolated from your friends and family and have no one to talk to?
- Regularly feel stressed, anxious, because of your relationship?
- Feel you have lost confidence in yourself and your abilities?
- Fear that he will report you to the authorities?
- Stop yourself from doing things because you're afraid of how he will react?
- Feel you're being controlled?
- Feel that you are incompetent, clumsy, ignorant, that you never do the right thing?
- Fear for your safety, that of your child(ren) and your loved ones, here or in another country?
- Are you being physically abused or in fear of that happening?

Manifestations and examples of coercive control¹. How does it manifest itself in your life?

Monitoring and interrogation

- > Asks her who she met, when and why
- > Asks her to text where she is, texts on arrival and departure
- > Accompanies her wherever she goes

Threats

- > Threatens to leave with the children, to make her lose custody
- > Threatens to kill her or her loved ones
- > Threatens to take her to court or to alert social or immigration services

Sexual violence

- > Pressures her for sex or asks her to do humiliating things
- > Controls her contraception and pregnancies (keeping the baby or abortion)

Gaslighting

- > Throws tantrums, insults and assaults her, then when she confronts him about it, accuses her of exaggerating or making up stories
- > Tells her that she is imagining problems, that she exaggerates
- > Hits her and later asks her how she got hurt

Financial abuse

- > Controls budget and access to bank and credit cards
- > Threatens to deprive her of money and other essential items
- > Prevents her from having access to the shower, toilet or the marital bed

Spiritual violence

- > Mocks her religious or spiritual beliefs, or distorts them to make her feel guilty, belittle her or impose rules on her
- > Forces her to adopt practices and rituals that are not her own



Write down in your own words what you are going through. Extra space for your notes is provided at the end of the booklet.

Isolation

- > Prevents contact with loved ones by erasing new communications on her phone, forbidding her to see or talk to them
- > Prevents her from leaving the house, confiscating car keys and shoes
- > Prevents her from going to school or work

Physical violence

- > Pushes her, hits her
- > Strangles her
- > Spits on her

Blaming

- > Tells her he can't stay sober while living with a crazy woman like her
- > Says that if she leaves him, he'll kill himself and it will be her fault
- > Tells her that he wouldn't get angry if she could keep the kids quiet and under control

Abuse using technology

- > Logs into her account, reads her posts, impersonates her and interacts for her on social media
- > Confiscates her phone, removes her SIM card
- > Tracks her with geolocation apps

Humiliation

- > Acts in ways that embarrass or humiliate her in public
- > Compares her physically to other people


Harassment


- > Stalks her, follows her or has her followed by friends
- > Lurks or shows up at her home or place of work to make sure she is there
- > Repeatedly sends her text messages, sometimes under the guise of child-related communications


Do you recognize yourself in one or more of these situations?


Are you worried? Do not hesitate to talk about it and seek assistance.

Women's shelters are there for you, they can support you and your children. A specialized support worker on the other end of the line is ready to help.


Immediate, timely and confidential telephone support based on your needs


Shelter, if you need it


Specialized services for you and your children, so they can also get help to deal with the situation


External support services for women not living in shelter: listening and assisting you in your efforts to regain power: search for housing, setting up safety scenarios requests for social assistance, medical and administrative procedures, immigration applications, etc.

Know that you do not have to leave your partner to benefit from the shelter's services
maisons-femmes.qc.ca/besoin-daide/

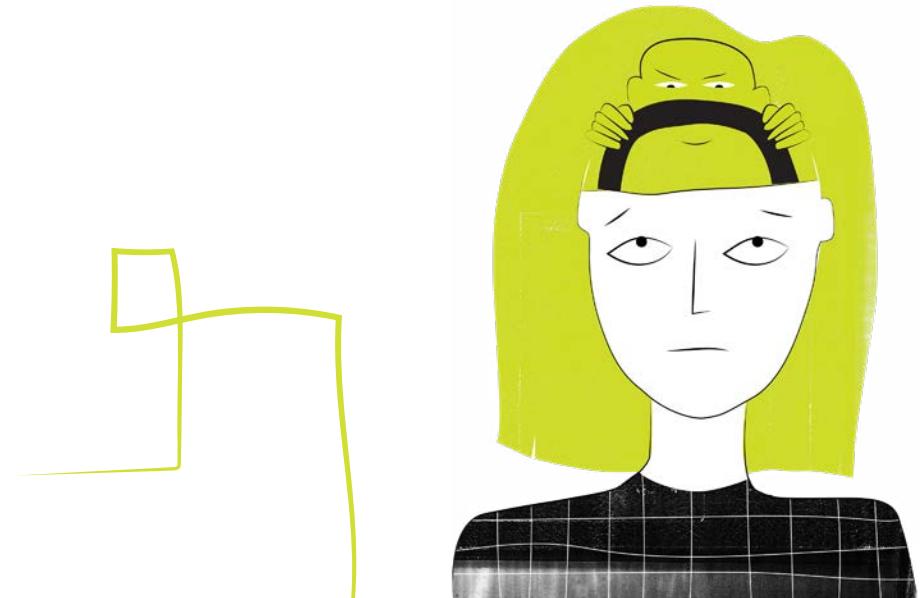
SOS violence conjugale
<https://sosviolenceconjugale.ca>



24/7 phone line
1 800 363-9010



text message (before 10 p.m.)
438 601-1211

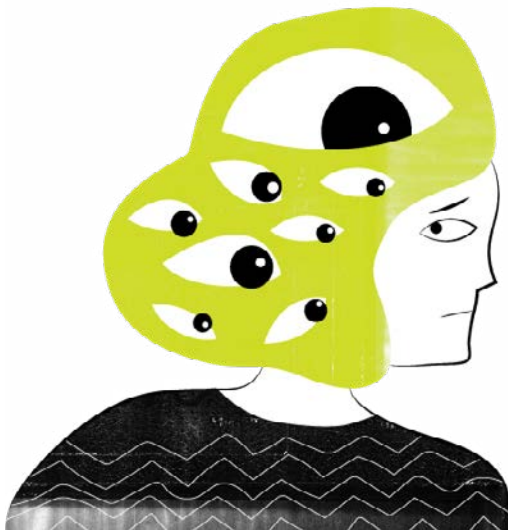


Keep a record of your experiences

Keeping a record of your experiences and your (ex) partner's strategies for controlling you, can be very helpful even if it is not physical violence or criminal acts.

This information can be passed on to a support worker, police officer or lawyer, and be used in future child custody proceedings or if you decide to file a complaint.

- Some manifestations of coercive control are recognized as offences under the Criminal Code: criminal harassment, threats and harassing communications².
- As of March 1, 2021, coercive control must be taken into account in a divorce proceeding to ensure your child's physical and emotional safety³.



It is important to keep this information in a safe place at home or with a trusted person.

What?

Any types of violence or abuse that you or your child(ren) have experienced:

- Isolation
- Humiliation
- Gaslighting
- Abuse using technology
- Physical violence
- Threats
- Monitoring
- Control
- Harassment
- Sexual violence
- Blaming

How?

- Documents
- Photos
- Emails
- Text messages
- Screen capture
- Notebook
- Audio recording
- This booklet

Information?

- Description of behaviours
- How often
- More frequent recently?
- Date, time, place
- Presence of witnesses, their contact information
- Were police called?

For examples, see pages 10 and 11 of this booklet.

Useful resources if you decide to take legal action

Rebâtir

4 hours of legal consultation, free of charge,
in all areas of the law:

1 833 732-2847 | 1 833-REBÂTIR

DPCP info line Domestic and sexual violence

A free and confidential service for information about the court process, the general handling of a police complaint, authorization of a prosecution, and measures to facilitate your testimony in court if you decide to file a complaint.

Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

1 877 547-3727 | 1 877 547-DPCP

References:

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¹ These examples are taken from various sources on the Internet and from different tools, the main ones being:

- Guide from the Carrefour familial des personnes handicapées "Femmes handicap violence conjugale" (HVC) [http://www.cfph.org/_guide-hvc-2021/guide-hvc.pdf]
- Chart produced by the West Island Women's Shelter "Coercive Control Screening Questionnaire and Evaluation Grid" [<https://wiws.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Outils-Complementaires-English-v4.pdf>]
- PEVC evaluation tool (Protection des enfants en contexte de violence conjugale) [<https://pevc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Outil-evaluation.pdf>].

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² For a more complete list of offences that can be charged:

<https://sosviolenceconjugale.ca/en/tools/sos-infos/14-criminal-offenses-in-contexts-of-intimate-partner-violence>

³ Coercive control was incorporated as a key aspect of "domestic violence" in the Divorce Act:




<https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/cfl-mdf/dace-clde/div64.html>





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