

**Submission  
No 68**

## **COERCIVE CONTROL IN DOMESTIC RELATIONSHIPS**

**Organisation:** Insight Exchange (Domestic Violence Service Management)

**Date Received:** 29 January 2021

### About Insight Exchange

Insight Exchange centres on the expertise of people with lived experience of domestic and family violence and gives voice to these experiences. Insight Exchange is designed to inform and strengthen social, service and systemic responses to domestic and family violence.

Insight Exchange has been established, developed and is governed by Domestic Violence Service Management (DVSM) a registered charity (ABN 26 165 400 635.). Insight Exchange has been sustained through the generous humble donations of individuals and a silent donor for the benefit of many. Launched in November 2017, Insight Exchange was designed by Domestic Violence Service Management (DVSM), in collaboration with Dr Linda Coates and Dr Allan Wade from Centre for Response-Based Practice Canada.

The portfolio of our work can be explored through [www.insightexchange.net](http://www.insightexchange.net) Our work and reach is nationally focused and accessed heavily by NSW through relationships and collaborations we have built within the NSW responses system. We have a national reach through our work with corporates and nationally placed organisations both commercial and commonwealth funded. Significantly, the participation of individuals with lived experience of domestic and family violence involves voices from each Australian state and territory.

### Our response to the NSW Government discussion paper on coercive control

Of the 15 questions asked in the NSW Government discussion paper on coercive control, our submission provides a response to question 15. Our response is in two parts.

**Part 1:** We recommend 9 elements (A-I on Page 02 – 04) be considered when refining the definition of domestic and family violence.

**Part 2:** We recommend the value of a utilising a shared foundational **Guide for understanding and responding to coercive control, abuse and violence**. We have developed the first edition of a guide of this kind and included the guide in this submission. The guide is live on [www.insightexchange.net](http://www.insightexchange.net) accessible to any reader and available at no cost. The guide is best accessed digitally as it contains short animations and hyperlinks to content and practical free resources.

- Page 05 (PDF) includes the **rationale for developing the guide** which explains the importance and value of bringing together (i) the **well established Insight Exchange work**, (ii) the timing of community and sector conversations ignited through the **NSW joint select committee inquiry into coercive control** and (iii) the important enduring priorities of the **NSW Coroners Court Domestic Violence Death Review 2017-2019 Report** which recommended increased guidance and resources to support safety planning.
- Page 06 – 27 (PDF pages) includes (in full) the **Guide for understanding and responding to coercive control, abuse and violence**. The guide is designed for any reader who may want to understand more about and improve their responses to coercive control, abuse and violence. The guide contains ideas, insights and practices that are not limited to one sector or professional discipline alone. It contains principles that are integral to all responses from anywhere in the response continuum. The guide may provide support and extension to good work already in place, or it may be a useful place to begin.

We invite the NSW government and broader response system (formal and informal, general through to specialist) to explore and take up (in part or in full) the free guide we have developed and shared in this submission. We invite any and all responders to apply and evolve this guide into their context. Centring on how the content is valued, experienced and improved by people with lived experiences of domestic and family violence. People with lived experience of coercive control, abuse and violence have been instrumental in shaping key content in this guide. Their voices of insight and experience remain essential to guiding how ecosystem responses can be evolved and refined.



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our work and services operate and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We extend this respect to all First Nations peoples across the country and the world. We acknowledge that the sovereignty of this land was never ceded. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

## Response to Question 15:

What non-legislative activities are needed to improve the identification of and response to coercive and controlling behaviours both within the criminal justice system and more broadly?

### Response | Part 1 of 2

We recommend the definition of domestic and family violence needs to

- A. Be a national definition
  - B. Take a stance on coercive control being a form of violence
  - C. Illuminate gravity of loss and harm to the victim, and costs to society
  - D. Be inclusive of immediate and enduring impact
  - E. Be matched with meaningful consequences, where criminalisation does not apply
  - F. Encompass the use of systems abuse
  - G. Account for new and changing behaviours used by perpetrators
  - H. Widen out from recency measures such as 'the last 12 months'
  - I. Be inclusive of broader indicators than 'fear' as a psychological construct
- These points are explained on the following pages.

#### A. A national definition is needed

It is unhelpful to people who are experiencing violence that national, state and territory definitions of domestic and family violence vary, and that coercive control is not recognised as a common feature of domestic violence. We need a single, consistent definition of domestic and family violence, used across all state and territories and embedded in all Australian criminal codes.

Without this commitment perpetrators of violence benefit from the inconsistent and unclear definitions. They are able to excuse and extend abuse through the unclear and/or uncertain rights of people living in Australia. Perpetrators of control, abuse and violence can weaponize the ambiguity into threats of false consequence and mutualise their abuse behind 'definition gaps' of eligibility and responses. The dissonance between rights, definition and criminal codes enables concealing of and responsibility for behaviours and allows perpetrators of violence to evade consequences.

Without this commitment, victims of violence have to traverse varied definitions, inconsistent consequences and safety supports. Responders to perpetrators and/or victims of violence have to traverse, learn, and work around varied definitions, consequences and safety supports. . This necessary but preventable effort has a resulting resource consequence on national and state expenditure into prevention and earlier responses to domestic and family violence.

#### B. The definition needs to take a stance on coercive control being a form of violence

Irrespective of the NSW decision on whether to criminalise coercive control, the stance '***The use of coercive control is a form of abuse and violence***' is an important clarification and validation for people who are experiencing coercive control in making meaning of their experiences. This stance holds utility and value in informing and guiding responders about what constitutes domestic and family violence. By taking this stance we have grounds for either criminalisation or other forms of consequence. This way, the decision on criminalisation does not determine whether coercive control constitutes a form of violence or not.

#### C. The definition needs to illuminate gravity of loss and harm to the victim, and costs to society

There are substantial benefits to using the quote from Evan Stark (featured in the discussion paper) "*The person using violence uses 'entrapment that renders the victim hostage-like in the harms they inflict on their **dignity, liberty, autonomy and personhood** as well as to their physical and psychological integrity.'* (Evan Stark *Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life* (Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 15.)"

*The benefits to using this description* are that it illuminates and values dignity (often discounted or invisibilised - yet central to safety and wellbeing) as well as liberty, autonomy and personhood (whole of person). Collectively, these **place value on human rights and quality of life over a lifetime**. This definition positions the impacts and costs of violence outside of the scope of 'incidents' and 'injury' to whole of person and lifetime. This is better weighting to the true violation and enduring economic, social, health, emotional, interpersonal, intergenerational costs of violence (in all forms).

## D. The definition needs to be inclusive of immediate and enduring impact

We recommend developing broad based communication (for and with the public and for responders across the ecosystem) about the **meaning and central importance of dignity, liberty, autonomy and personhood** so that coercive control can be discerned in a more informed way. This communication could enhance responses to move beyond assessment of what behaviours the perpetrator has used (type, pattern, frequency and intensity) against the victim. Responders could be supported to **understand and place importance on what the control, abuse and violence has cost the victim (now and over their life time, and to generations)**. This step might support more informed measures of assessment (criminal and more broadly) being set against how perpetration of violence has human costs not merely measures of what violence has or hasn't been perpetrated.

For example, the use of intense levels (or forms) of sexualised violence may result in a acquired brain injury, premature birth or foetal injury (or the risk of these impacts). We need to be considering, 'how has the perpetration of sexualised violence cost the *dignity, liberty, autonomy and personhood* of the adult victim of crime and the unborn child?'. These impacts (and risks) need to factor into how we understand the gravity of the violence perpetrated against the adult victim and the unborn child.

## E. Where criminalisation does not apply other forms of consequence needs to exist

Perpetrators of domestic and family violence optimise and weaponise the gaps between the definition and consequences for using violence.

One example is the gaps in consequence in relation to financial abuse. Irrespective of the NSW decision on whether to criminalise coercive control, we recommend building in an inclusion of **Financial abuse** in existing response mechanism. Financial abuse is a significant form of coercive control and yet ADVO's in NSW are not currently used to protect money or assets. An ADVO could be used to protect money in joint accounts or prevent the unethical use of credit facilities.

## F. The definition needs to encompass the use of 'systems abuse'

Perpetrators of domestic and family violence frequently use services and systems to harm and control victims.

Perpetrators often use services and systems as part of their violence before, during and long after a relationship has ended. Any service or system could be targeted by perpetrators in an effort to extend the use of their abuse and control. 'Systems abuse' by the perpetrator against the victim is a form of domestic and family violence. System abuse needs to be included in the definition.

## G. The definition needs to account for new and changing behaviours used by perpetrators

Perpetrators of domestic and family violence create new behaviours of control, abuse and violence with changing situations and contexts. The definition needs to allow for new behaviours.

We recommend an inclusion '**The person using violence (in any form) may use some or all of the behaviours listed, or develop new behaviours to achieve entrapment and inflict harm.**' *Given that perpetrators of violence use behaviours can change slowly, subtly, rapidly and significantly, this description allows for a changing scope as context and society changes.* For example; including this clause would account for how Covid 19 virus and measures have been used to threaten or harm a victim.

## H. Widen out from recency measures such as 'the last 12 months'

A 'recency' rule or measure in the assessment of domestic and family violence for example, '*has this domestic and family violence occurred in the last 12 months?*' can erase evidence of violence, minimise a victims experiences, dilute the assessment of future risk, safety and be weaponised by the perpetrator.

Recency measures might be the driver for resource and response management but who is this costing?

- What meaning are we ascribing to the perpetrators use of violence and the victims' lived experiences?
- What evidence is erased due to timelines and what factors are removed from the risk assessment?
- If the legal system, including courts and family court are lengthy in process time, the recency measures about assessing domestic and family violence can lead to the past use of domestic and family violence being erased out of the analysis and ruling.

## I. Be inclusive of broader indicators than ‘fear’ as a psychological construct

When we draw from the work of Centre for Response-Based Practice Canada, we can conclude that by understanding the victims’ resistance to violence, we better identify the deliberateness and intensity of the violence used against the victim.

We can only understand the deliberateness and intensity of violence in context. This involves understanding and acknowledging the victim’s resistance and responses to violence. Whether that resistance be active or inactive, overt or covert, we need to understand and respond with an awareness that resistance and responses to violence are ever present and part of the fact pattern. Understanding context reveals more about the deliberate choices of behaviour, and the level of intensity and persistence used by the perpetrator of violence to anticipate, suppress and overpower the victim.

Typically, victims of violence are observed and/or assessed by responders for the level of fear they have about the immediate and sometimes longer-term actions of the perpetrator. This is only one indicator of the significance of the control, abuse and violence and may be an inadequate representation of the significance of abuse and impact. We need to explore more inclusively other elements of resistance, responses, effects and impacts of the violence beyond ‘fear’ as a psychological construct. We need to be exploring what lengths and efforts people are having to go to mitigate the violence, create or rebuild safety, protect children, pets, property, belongings, loved ones, opportunities, resources and more. We are also needing to explore what people are going without to survive, or to conceal their suffering so that dignity, safety, useful strategies are preserved. We recommend including this scope in the definition which will enable a more comprehensive assessment and response.

There has been intensive debate about whether or not ‘victims’ of domestic and family violence are as violent, controlling and abusive as ‘perpetrators’ (Wangmann, Laing & Stubbs, 2020). Longitudinal studies of the perpetration of violence reveal consistent patterns of a perpetrators use of unilateral violence, control and abuse against one or more victims. While some victims may resist some acts of violence with force, the repeated patterns of violent, coercive and controlling perpetration and context must be taken into account. Therefore, single incident accounts of violent perpetration should not be taken out of this context analysis (Wangmann, Laing & Stubbs, 2020).

### Excerpt from the NSW definition

‘Domestic and family violence includes any behaviour, in an intimate or family relationship, which is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling, causing a person to live in fear. It is usually manifested as part of a pattern of controlling or coercive behaviour.’

### Recommended adjustment to this part of the NSW definition

‘Domestic and family violence includes any behaviour, in an intimate or family relationship, which is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling, causing a person to live in fear, to be made to do things against their will. This may involve having to significantly modify their behaviour in an attempt to mitigate threats to their safety or wellbeing or the safety and wellbeing of people they care about. It is usually manifested as part of a pattern of controlling or coercive behaviour.’

## Response | Part 2 of 2

**We recommend the value of a utilising a shared foundational *Guide for understanding and responding to coercive control, abuse and violence*.**

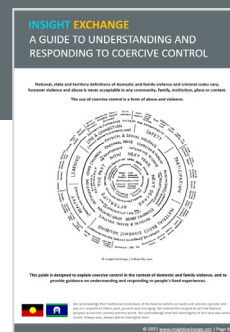


Page 05 (PDF page) outlines the [rationale](#) for developing and sharing the ‘Guide to understanding and responding to coercive control, abuse and violence’.



Page 06 – 27 (PDF pages) includes (in full) the [Guide for understanding and responding to coercive control, abuse and violence](#)

# RATIONALE FOR GUIDE



This page outlines the rationale for developing and sharing the Guide to understanding and responding to coercive control, abuse and violence.

State and Territory definitions of and responses to domestic and family violence vary, and perpetrators of violence continue to use coercive control, abuse and violence against victims. Understanding coercive control is important for community and for responders across all parts of the ecosystem across Australia.

This guide serves to reveal perpetrator responsibilities for the use of coercive control, abuse and violence, and to provide guidance in understanding and responding to people's lived experiences.

**Download | [Guide to understanding and responding to coercive control, abuse and violence](#)**

## CONTEXT

This first edition of the guide has been developed at a time when:

**1. [Insight Exchange](#) ideas and lived experience insights consistently feature coercive control as a key form of domestic and family violence**

**2. Insight Exchange has developed and published collaborative [key resources](#) focused on understanding and building on safety for people experiencing domestic and family violence.**

**3. NSW Government is exploring [state responses to coercive control](#).** A joint select committee was established on 21 October 2020 to inquire into and report on coercive control in domestic relationships.

**4. NSW Coroners Court [Domestic Violence Death Review 2017-2019 Report](#) has recommended increased guidance and resources to support safety planning. (see below\*)**

These elements of our work (items 1 & 2 above) have enabled us to collate this guide from pre-existing resources and published insights that are well established. We see the community conversations about coercive control (item 3 above) as a critical time to also be talking about, and supporting, improved responses to people experiencing domestic and family violence (item 4 above). This Guide is designed to contribute to supportive and informative conversations about coercive control.

Whilst the guide is timed to support active work and discussion taking place in NSW, the content is designed for national engagement and the utility of the guide is not determined by or limited to NSW.

**We invite you to read and take forward this work, and to evolve it into your community and context so that together we can make meaningful progress in understanding and responding to domestic and family violence.**

\*Recommendation 8 of the NSW Domestic Violence Death Review 2017-2019 Report draws attention to our work in this way: *“That the NSW Government develop increased guidance and resources to support safety planning, which may include consideration of standard resources or tools for use by responders and practitioners who work with victims of domestic and family violence. In developing standard resources or tools the NSW Government may consider the work of DVSM Sightlines (now Insight Exchange) and literature around safety planning and responding to risk. Roll out of standard resources or tools should be accompanied by comprehensive training and education.”*

Insight Exchange supports this recommendation. To play our part, Insight Exchange resources are made available at no cost through the Insight Exchange website [www.insightexchange.net](http://www.insightexchange.net) and we continue to evolve this body of work with and for the benefit of many.



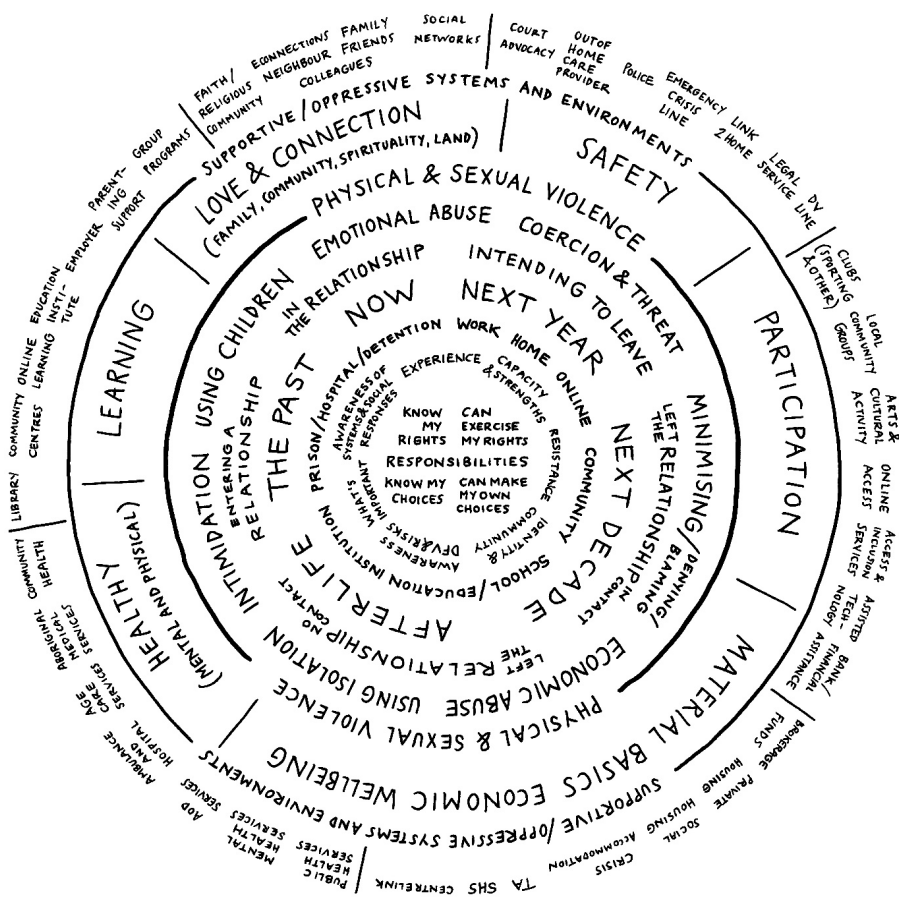
We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our work and services operate and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We extend this respect to all First Nations peoples across the country and the world. We acknowledge that the sovereignty of this land was never ceded. Always was, always will be Aboriginal land.

# INSIGHT EXCHANGE

## A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO COERCIVE CONTROL, ABUSE AND VIOLENCE

National, state and territory definitions of domestic and family violence and criminal codes vary, however violence and abuse is never acceptable in any community, family, institution, place or context.

The use of coercive control is a form of abuse and violence.



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This guide serves to reveal perpetrator responsibilities for the use of coercive control, abuse and violence, and to provide guidance in understanding and responding to people’s lived experiences.



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If you or your children, or the person you are supporting are in immediate danger, please contact the Police on Triple Zero (000)

## BACKGROUND

[Click here](#) to read more about rationale for developing this first edition of the guide.



## CONTENT

Read the guide from front to back or click on the section you wish to read more about.

**FOUNDATIONS** – Read about key ideas that underpin the contents of this guide. [Page 3 – 4.](#)

**CONTENT** - Explore sections 1 to 6 for detailed content and resources as outlined below.

<b>1. Understanding control, abuse and violence as a choice</b> <a href="#">Page 5 - 7</a>	<b>2. Understanding lived experiences</b> <a href="#">Page 8 - 10</a>	<b>3. Reflecting on experiences</b> <a href="#">Page 11 - 13</a>	<b>4. In focus examples and insights</b> <a href="#">Page 14 – 16</a>
I am I can	Follow My Lead	My Safety Kit	Economic Abuse and Sexualised Violence
<b>5. Read more about our collective responsibilities</b> <a href="#">Page 17 - 18</a>		<b>6. Read more about domestic and family violence</b> <a href="#">Page 19 - 21</a>	
Reflections and Responsibilities		Definition and behaviours	

## SUPPORTS

Please note this guide is a resource not a service response.  
A range of supports and resources are listed in the resources that are included in this guide.

## USE AND COPYRIGHT

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**Coercively controlling, abusive and violent behaviours are understood in context as actions perpetrated to humiliate, isolate, suppress, overpower and harm the victim of violence. The choice of behaviours used by the perpetrator can change slowly, subtly, rapidly and significantly.**

**To understand violence we need to understand resistance to violence.**

The perpetration of violence and abuse, including coercive control, is a choice made by an individual (or groups) and against the will and wellbeing of another person (or group or people). Coercive control, abuse and violence always occurs within social, political and economic contexts. Coercive control, abuse and violence can be perpetrated directly (in person) or indirectly (for example digitally, or through creation of harmful and humiliating circumstances or through others). The behaviours that may represent domestic and family violence are included on [page 19 – 20](#) of this guide.

Perpetrators anticipate, suppress and overpower resistance. Whenever people are subjected to coercive control, abuse and violence, they resist in (overt and/or covert ways\*). Resistance to violence is:

- any action (mental, emotional, spiritual, physical) that opposes the violence, attempts to limit its affects, and attempts to uphold dignity and/or build on safety for self or others. Being safe is no simple or single decision, or task, and a victims' efforts to uphold dignity and create safety may not always be aligned.
- important in creating safety and upholding dignity. Just because the victim of violence couldn't stop the violence, it doesn't mean they let it happen. A victims' resistance may not prevent the perpetrator from choosing to use coercive control abuse and violence. A victim of violence is not responsible for causing the perpetrators use of violence (in any form) or for making the violence stop.

### **\*Honouring covert and overt acts of resistance and responses to violence**

People resist coercive control, abuse and violence in creative, resourceful, careful, clever, cautious ways to uphold their dignity and stay safe. And to protect the people they love (Excerpt '[My Dignity](#)').

Covert acts of resistance are strategically used by victims of violence to uphold their dignity and safety for themselves and others. Covert resistance is often used by victims when more overt forms of resistance, such as 'fighting-back' or 'leaving the situation' are not safe or possible. Covert resistance strategies are often less visible to perpetrator's and are often under-acknowledged by social responders. This is because covert strategies and responses can be extremely subtle and may look like appeasing, complying with and hiding from the perpetrator. Covert resistance may also involve being physically present but mentally going to another place in the privacy of one's mind. Victim's who use covert resistance may also face social judgments from others that they have not 'resisted' because they have not 'fought back' or stopped the violence. That is why it is critically important to listen for and acknowledge victims' strategic acts of covert resistance (Coates & Wade, 2007).

Victims who use overt resistance (which may involve the use of physical force) can be misrepresented as being the perpetrator or as being just as violent as the perpetrator. The misrepresentation of victims use of overt resistance occurs when the victims responses are taken out of the situational, historical, social and relational contexts in which the violence has taken place. Single incident accounts of the victims' use of physical force should not be confused with the perpetrators' consistent and repeated patterns of unilateral violence, control and abuse against one or more victims (Wangmann, Laing & Stubbs, 2020). The misrepresentation of the victim of violence as the perpetrator of violence results in consequences for victims (e.g. social ostracisation, incarceration and removal of children) which can further compound their experiences of adversity and injustice.

Honouring victims' use of covert and overt resistance strategies is critically important in clarifying the perpetrators responsibility for violence and in challenging the perpetrators' and social responders' attempts to make victims responsible for the perpetrator's use of violence and control (Coates & Wade, 2007).

**By understanding the victims' resistance to violence, we better identify the deliberateness and intensity of the violence used against the victim.**

We can only understand the deliberateness and intensity of violence in context. This involves understanding and acknowledging the victim's resistance and responses to violence. Whether that resistance be active or inactive, overt or covert, we need to understand and respond with an awareness that resistance and responses to violence are ever present and part of the fact pattern.

People who perpetrate violence and abuse often try to excuse and conceal their behaviour and obscure their responsibility for their actions. For instance, by portraying their unilateral (one person's actions over and against another) violent actions as mutual (shared actions). They may do this through concealing the ways they attempt to control and overpower the victim's resistance and responses to the violence. They may blame the victim for their behaviour. They may use misleading or false representations of their intentions (Excerpt '[The Fact Pattern](#)').

The perpetration of violence and control always occurs in a broader context. Colonialism, racism, sexism, ableism, ageism, homophobia, transphobia, religious prejudice enables perpetrators of domestic and family violence to intensify their use of violence against victims. In this context, political and social action taken to prevent and end domestic and family violence is frequently met with opposition through "denial, disavowal, inaction, appeasement, appropriation, co-option, repression and backlash" (VicHealth, 2018). These forms of backlash serve to maintain the power and control of perpetrators and diminish the capacity for victims to be heard and reduce the likelihood of receiving just and dignifying social responses.

**Understanding context reveals more about the deliberate choices of behaviour, and the level of intensity and persistence used by the perpetrator of violence to anticipate, suppress and overpower the victim.**

**This guide serves to reveal perpetrator responsibilities for the use of coercive control, abuse and violence, and to provide guidance in understanding and responding to people's lived experiences.**

#### References:

Coates, L. & Wade, A. (2007), 'Language and Violence: Analysis of Four Discursive Operations', *Journal of Family Violence*, 22:511-522.

Wangmann, J., Laing, L. & Stubbs, J. (2020). 'Exploring gender differences in domestic violence reported to the NSW Police Force'. *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, 32(3), 255–276.

VicHealth, 2018, p.4, '(En)countering resistance: Strategies to respond to resistance to gender equality initiatives', Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.

## CONTENT

1. Understanding control, abuse and violence as a choice
2. Understanding lived experiences of domestic and family violence
3. Reflecting on lived experiences of domestic and family violence
4. In focus examples and insights economic abuse & sexualised violence
5. Our collective responsibilities
6. What is domestic and family violence

# 1. UNDERSTANDING CONTROL, ABUSE AND VIOLENCE AS A CHOICE

With rare exceptions, the use of control, abuse and violence is a choice. Understanding this is important in eliminating excuses for using violence (in any form) and in remembering that non-violence is possible.

'I am. I can.' is a small resource (see pages 6 -7) created to invite reflection about the use of violence (in any form) being a 'choice'.

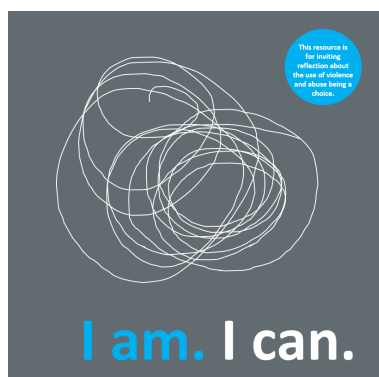
We invite responders to read this resource and reflect on their beliefs and responses to the positions and statements presented in this resource.

In exploring these statements we can each consider if and where we excuse violence and abuse, and how we can be more informed in how we respond as individuals, services and systems.

## Why is it important to be talking about control, abuse and violence as a choice?

If we deny violence (in any form) as a choice:

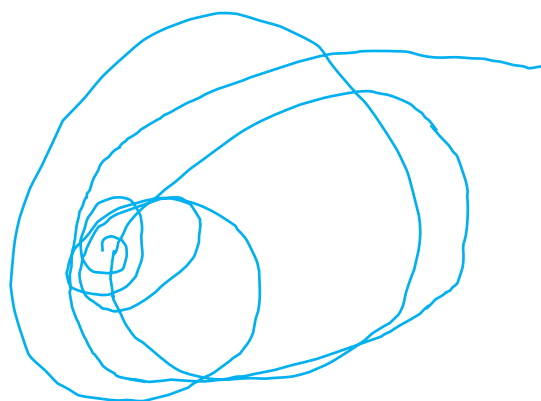
- we diminish the responsibility to choose non-violence
- we diminish a person's capacity to control their behaviours
- we diminish the evidence of non-violence (i.e. non-violence prior to the domestic relationship or non-violence to others who are not in the domestic relationship).



**We need to identify and acknowledge a person's existing competency and that non-violence has been and is possible.**

**Despite factors, drivers or stressors of biology, psychology, society, culture, childhood, context and Covid-19 a person can choose non-violence.**

**A person can choose non-violence in all relationships.**





I am competent, and capable.

Yet, I (might) choose to use

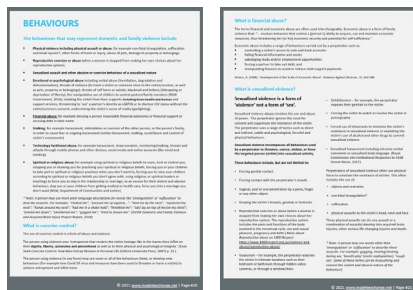
- behaviours that are **controlling**
- behaviours that are **abusive**
- behaviours that are **violent**

I (might) choose to use these behaviours in hidden or overt ways that are seen or unseen by others.

I (might) describe myself as ‘a bit difficult to be around’ and deny that my behaviours are ‘controlling’, ‘abusive’ or ‘violent’.

I (might) see myself as someone who does not want to use control, abuse and violence, and as having good intentions. I (might not) plan to, and (may) even regret my choices.

Regardless of how closely I relate to the terms ‘controlling’, ‘abusive’ or ‘violent’ as descriptions of my behaviour, the tactics I use might include some or all of the behaviours list on [page 20-21](#), but are not limited to these.



I (might) use these behaviours to threaten, coerce, violate, entrap or force the targeted person (victim) in ways that inflict on their **dignity, liberty, autonomy and personhood.**

When I choose to behave in ways that are controlling, abusive and violent, this is...

Not because of my **biology** (though my physical health and wellbeing really matter)

Not because of my **psychology** (though my mental health and wellbeing really matter)

Not because of my **society** (though my social interactions, connections, influences and community really matter)

Not because of my **culture** (though my cultural identity, experiences, connections, values, norms, traditions really matter)

Not because of my **faith, religion or spirituality** (though my beliefs, practices, theology, and traditions really matter)

Not because of my **childhood** (though my early experiences, interactions and relationships really matter)

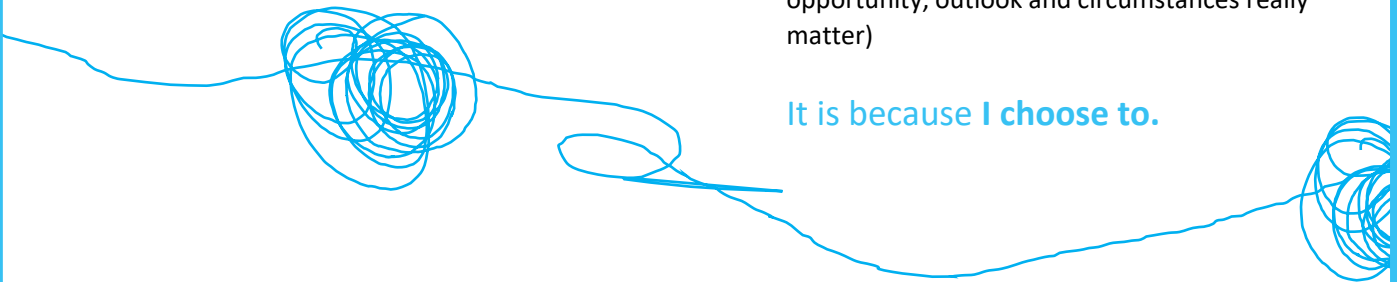
Not because of **who the victim is** (though my relationship can be strained, under pressure, involve differences and conflict)

Not because of **substances or alcohol** (though substances and alcohol may impact my mood, judgement and stability)

Not because of my **context** (though my context is crucial and always matters)

Not because of **COVID-19** (though my liberties, income, connection, opportunity, outlook and circumstances really matter)

**It is because I choose to.**



**I am not violent and abusive all the time.**

**I am in control** of my behaviour **all the time.**

I choose **who** I use violence and abuse against.

I choose **where** I use violence and abuse

I choose **when** I use violence and abuse.

I choose the **type, intensity** and **frequency** of abuse and violence.

I choose **every** time **all** the time.

**I choose how I behave in planned ways and 'in the moment'.**

I choose **who I don't** use violence and abuse against.

I choose **where I don't** use violence and abuse.

I choose **when I don't** use violence and abuse.

I choose **my excuses for my behaviour.**

I make **excuses for my behaviour because I know it is wrong.**

Because I am competent, and capable...

**I can** choose to stop my use of violence and abuse.

My reasons for behaving in violent and abusive ways are no excuse for choosing to use violence and abuse.

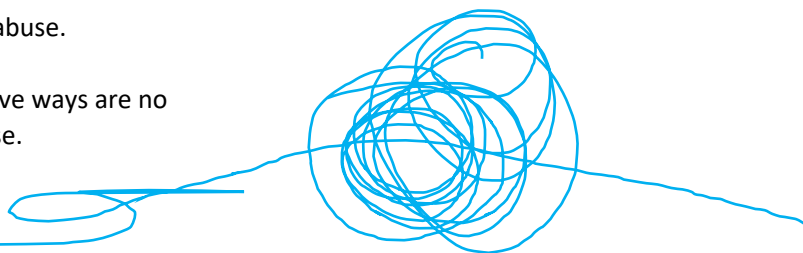
**Don't create excuses for my controlling, abusive and violent behaviour.**

Excuses provided to me by society, services and systems deny

- my **competency,**
- my **capability,**
- and my **responsibility.**

They deny the deliberateness of my actions and the control I have, and **this allows me to extend my use of abuse and violence**

**I can choose to seek support to choose different behaviours.**



© 2021 *I am I can* was authored by the Insight Exchange Team informed by the ideas and work of Centre for Response-Based Practice.

### Men's Referral Service (No to Violence)

The **Men's Referral Service** (MRS) is operated by No to Violence (NTV) and takes calls from men and women who are looking for help to improve their wellbeing and safety, who want to improve the wellbeing and safety of their children, or who are looking for help for their partner or another male family member.

**1300 766 491** | <https://ntv.org.au/>

### Are you using domestic and family violence?

**Mensline Australia** is a national and online counselling service offering support for Australian men anywhere, anytime.

<https://mensline.org.au/family-violence/using-violence/are-you-using-domestic-or-family-violence/>

### Do you hurt the people you care about?

**Say It Out Loud** encourages LGBTQ+ communities to have healthy relationships, get help for unhealthy relationships and support their friends.

<https://sayitoutloud.org.au/abusive-relationships/are-you-hurting-someone>

**1800 Respect** is a national sexual assault and domestic violence counselling service. **1800 Respect 'Using Violence'** page signposts to Men's Referral Service and Men's Line (both listed above) | <https://www.1800respect.org.au/using-violence>

# 2. UNDERSTANDING LIVED EXPERIENCES OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

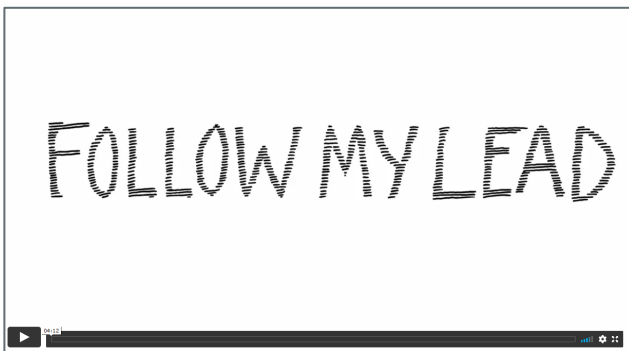
Everyone's response to domestic and family violence matters.  
All the time. Every time.

**“Actual and possible social responses are a constant concern for victims and offenders in cases of interpersonal violence, including children.”**

So, why is understanding social responses important when it comes to domestic and family violence?

“Research and practice experience show that the quality of responses by social network and institutional actors is strongly correlated with the level of victim distress in the short and long term and the likelihood of victim disclosure in future.

Once a person receives a negative social response, they become much less likely to disclose again in the future.” (Excerpt– [Interviewing for social responses](#)) Negative social responses might include concealing the violence, minimising perpetrator responsibility or mutualising responsibility, denying or diminishing the victims resistance and responses to the violence, and blaming the victim.



[View the Follow My Lead Animation \(4min\)](#)

*Follow My Lead* seeks to reveal a snapshot (in first person voice) the complexity of lived experience of violence and how violence is used to undermine, oppress and control a persons liberties, safety and wellbeing across many aspects of their life.

Do you want to embed the **Follow My Lead animation** in your website or presentation?  
[Copy the embed code from here.](#)



Your response can be of immense help.

How you respond to me when I share with you, and in the time that follows, matters significantly to me.

[Excerpt from  
Follow My  
Lead.

I might tell you parts of my experience to test out how safe I am with you and to explore how you react or retreat.

I'll be looking to see;

- what you think of what I have shared
- that you believe me
- what you think of me and if/how that changes now that you know more about me
- whether you give more weight to what the person abusing me says than what I say
- whether the person abusing me will be able to influence your thinking and make you think differently about me
- and what this means next.

**Domestic and Family Violence is an injustice and is an offence to my dignity, compromising my safety and undermining my wellbeing... and the dignity and wellbeing of the people I care for and who care for me.**

**I am a unique person with unique experiences.**

I have rights and responsibilities. I respond to events and exercise choice.  
But violence and coercive control limit my options.

**I have my own sense of what is important right now and in the long term.**

I identify with and belong to many communities and networks.

These are the contexts in which I understand and respond to Domestic and Family Violence.

I respond to, and resist, the violence, discrimination and oppression in my own way despite danger and unpredictability.

I am always aware of the actual and possible responses of others, from professionals to my friends and family members.

These responses inform how, or if, I reach out to others.

**Where I am** (at home, in school, online, on my mobile, at work, in the community) changes the risks I face and the responses I can expect to receive.  
I anticipate and respond to threats and risks wherever I go, with whoever I meet and whatever I do.

**The risks I face change over time and can change rapidly.**

The abuse I have experienced in the past might be similar or different to the current or future threats I face.

The importance I place on the past, the present, the future, and possibly the afterlife, can influence how I see things and make decisions.

Something that makes me safer in the short term might make me less safe in the future.

These facts may be seen or unseen by others, however they are personal and make sense to me.

**The status of my relationship matters.**

My relationship status with the person abusing me creates different levels of risk, threat and consequences for my dignity and wellbeing.

I might be entering a new relationship, in a relationship with no intention to leave, or planning to leave when I can. I might have escaped but am threatened and forced back into contact with the person abusing me because of the children (or pets, or some other reason).

I might have no contact with the person abusing me but know I will (or may) be unsafe if found.

The person abusing me may change the nature of their behaviour rapidly, without warning, significantly changing the realities I face.

I might be in relationships with more than one person who is committing violence against me.

It is my choice whether I am in a relationship and whether I choose to leave it.

**Just as every person is unique, the violence I experience is unique.**

I may be threatened, intimidated or coerced into doing things against my will.

The person committing the abuse may isolate me from those I love and manipulate others against me, and undermine my relationships including my parenting.

They may commit physical, verbal, emotional or sexualised abuse, and they may threaten or abuse my children, friends or family, pets, property, and things that are important to me as a means to control me.

They may steal, control or undermine my finances, or my ability to work or be financially independent.

They may try to use my beliefs and spirituality to control and isolate me.

I am experienced in anticipating the patterns and tactics that the person abusing me uses against me and the people I care about. I can see how they adjust their tactics to suppress my resistance and responses to their abuse.

The actions of the person who has abused me may be similar to others but are also completely unique and specific to me and those whom I love.

**The violence I experience undermines my wellbeing across many areas of my life.**

**My responses** – the person using violence violates my rights, restricts my choices, and limits my capacity to act and put into force my own decisions.

**My safety** – my safety is compromised.

**Love and connection** - my family relationships, friends and connections with community, spiritual connection and connections to land may be under threat.

**My learning and growth** – because I am forced to deal constantly with abuse, and possibly with negative responses from others, I experience fatigue and isolation. Sometimes I cannot help but ignore or avoid activities that could help me learn and develop as a person because of competing priorities related to violence.

**My health** – my body and mind suffer from the violence and coercion. I can become physically unwell, fearful, desperate, lonely, sad, and angry.

Although my despair is one form of resistance to the violence, I may be seen as ‘clinically depressed’ or as having another disorder. My feelings are ethical emotional responses to violence.

**My material basics and economic wellbeing** – the person abusing me tries to suppress my resistance by limiting my access to material and economic basics, such as food, housing, clothing, money and my financial assets. If they can undermine my material and economic wellbeing, they will be more able to use violence.

**My participation** – my opportunity to participate, have a voice and be involved as a citizen and in the community may be limited.

The violence I experience is an affront to my dignity.

**I may experience supportive, unsupportive or oppressive systems and environments.**

My race, gender, sexuality, class, immigration status, ability, age etc. influences the circumstances of my life and the discrimination and oppression I may experience.

When I face multiple forms of discrimination, the person abusing me is empowered to use greater levels of violence and I am isolated from formal and informal support systems.

I may receive both positive and negative social responses from others.

The quality of the social responses I have received influences ‘if’ and ‘how’ I engage with social networks and services.

The decisions I make and if/how I take steps is influenced by my context, situation and the coercive control I am experiencing.

Despite this complexity, and even when under immense pressure, I also consider how my decisions to act or not act, may impact the experiences of people and communities I care about.  
K Crenshaw (1991) mapping the margins: intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color.

**I resist and respond to the violence, discrimination and oppression I experience.**

I do this in visible and invisible ways that might not seem obvious or directly related to what is going on, but this resistance and response to violence is important to me, and is part of upholding my dignity.

**The person abusing me knows that I do not like the violence and anticipates that I will resist. Consequently, I must hide my resistance, sometimes completely, and find a safe place in the privacy of my mind.**



Read and/or download [Follow My Lead](#)

Follow My Lead is an awareness raising resource that speaks from the voice of people with lived experience of Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) who need the professionals and their social networks to be more prepared to respond effectively; more prepared to respond in ways that uphold dignity and build on safety.

**Service Supports** | A range of service supports are listed in Follow My Lead


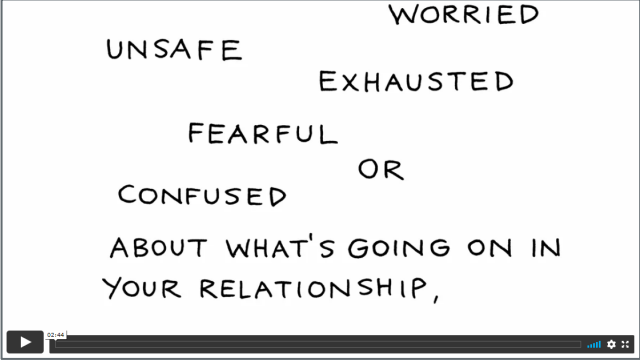



# 3. REFLECTING ON LIVED EXPERIENCES OF DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE

We know that for a person experiencing domestic and family violence, being safe is no simple, single decision or task.

## View the My Safety Kit Short Animations

My Safety Kit is a reflection resource designed to support people who are, or may be, experiencing domestic and family violence

<p>View the <b>My Safety Kit</b> animation</p> <p>An introduction <a href="#">for responders</a> (2.5mins)</p>	 <p>The diagram consists of three overlapping, hand-drawn circular segments arranged in a larger circle. The top segment is labeled 'ASSESSING AND MANAGING RISK', the right segment is 'RESISTING THE VIOLENCE AND ABUSE', and the bottom segment is 'BUILDING ON THEIR SAFETY'. The segments are drawn with multiple overlapping lines, giving them a textured, sketchy appearance.</p>
<p>View the <b>My Safety Kit</b> animation</p> <p>An introduction <a href="#">for people reflecting on their relationships</a> (2.4mins)</p>	 <p>The text is arranged in a list-like format, centered on the page. The words are: UNSAFE, WORRIED, EXHAUSTED, FEARFUL, OR, CONFUSED, and ABOUT WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP. The words are in a simple, hand-drawn font.</p>
<p>View the <b>My Safety Kit</b> animation</p> <p>An introduction to the <a href="#">decision-making tool</a> (3.5 mins)</p>	 <p>The diagram shows a yellow path that starts from the bottom left and leads towards the right. On the left side of the path is a sign on a stand that says 'HOPES AND WORRIES'. On the right side of the path is another sign on a stand that says 'FULLER PICTURE'. The path is drawn with a thick yellow line.</p>

Do you want to **embed the My Safety Kit animations** in your website or presentation? Copy the embed code by opening the animation and toggling through the 'share' button options.

## Are you responding to someone experiencing domestic and family violence?

Are you wondering how best to **support** them?

How to **explore** their concerns? How to better **understand** their challenges and capacities?

Whether you are responding formally as a professional, or informally as a friend, family member, neighbour or colleague...

**My Safety Kit** is something you can offer or work through with the person, **following their lead**.




[Excerpts from My Safety Kit]

### **A healthy relationship includes equality.**


The features of a healthy relationship apply to all types of relationships, including friendship, family, work relationships and intimate partners.

**My Safety Kit** is designed to support me to reflect on these questions:

- What did I hope for and what is going on in this relationship?
- What kinds of things am I having to do to stay safe and well?
- How constricted has my life become?
- Why is this happening? Is it me?
- What decisions are important to me about my safety, liberty and wellbeing?
- What is available to me and who can support me?
- What is domestic and family violence?



**What kinds of things am I having to do to stay safe and well?**



**How constricted has my life become?**

**What did I hope for and what is going on in this relationship?**

**Honesty is possible where there is safety.**

**I am wondering about some things...**

Are my rights and boundaries respected?

Are we sharing the work in the relationship?

Are we both included in making decisions?

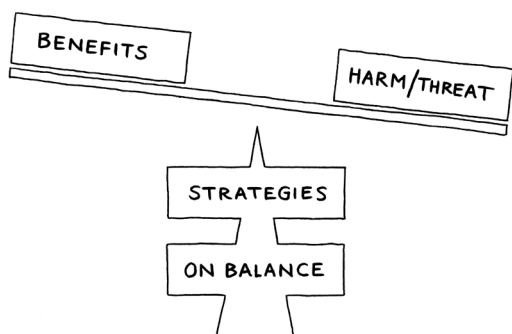
Am I able to safely express my thoughts and feelings?

Is there safety for everyone – enough to allow comfort and some discomfort?

Can I safely talk about what I am and am not comfortable with?

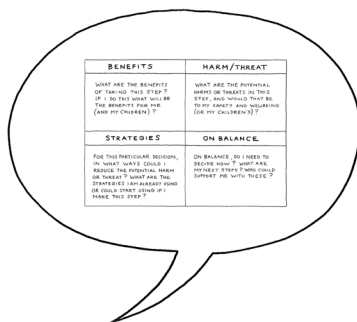
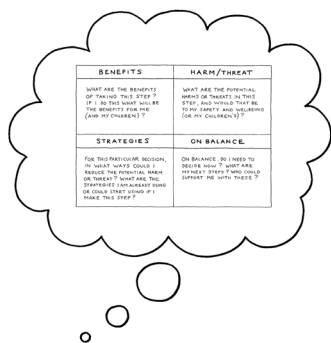
**There is no place in a healthy relationship for controlling, abusive and violent behaviour.**

I know that being safe is no simple, or single decision or task. And I am thinking about my next steps.



BENEFITS	HARM/THREAT
WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF TAKING THIS STEP? IF I DO THIS WHAT WILL BE THE BENEFITS FOR ME (AND MY CHILDREN)?	WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL HARMS OR THREATS IN THIS STEP, AND WOULD THAT BE TO MY SAFETY AND WELLBEING (OR MY CHILDREN'S)?
STRATEGIES	ON BALANCE
FOR THIS PARTICULAR DECISION, IN WHAT WAYS COULD I REDUCE THE POTENTIAL HARM OR THREAT? WHAT ARE THE STRATEGIES I AM ALREADY USING OR COULD START USING IF I MAKE THIS STEP?	ON BALANCE, DO I NEED TO DECIDE NOW? WHAT ARE MY NEXT STEPS? WHO COULD SUPPORT ME WITH THESE?

I might have a decision to make, or I might want to keep thinking about my experiences and what my best options are.



I might not be safe enough to write things down but I can use this decision tool in the privacy of my mind.

I might want to talk this decision through with a friend or someone I feel safe to share with.

I might get started in thinking about this decision and carry it around in my mind for a while to see how its sits with me and if I have extra ideas.

**Responses from others are significant and play a part in my safety.**

If or when I do reach out to someone (a person or a service), I don't have to make any decisions, or all my decisions at once. And no-one should be expecting me to.



[Excerpts from My Safety Kit resource and animation]  
Illustrations by Guy Downes



**My Safety Kit** is a reflection resource that speaks in the voice of the reader who may be reflecting on their own relationships and (possible) experiences of domestic and family violence.

The resource may also have benefits for people who are supporting friends and family who are (or might be) experiencing domestic and family violence; and for people who are working as a service responder to people experiencing domestic and family violence.

**Service Supports** | A range of service supports are listed in My Safety Kit

# 4. IN FOCUS EXAMPLES AND INSIGHTS

## ECONOMIC ABUSE & SEXUALISED VIOLENCE

Coercively controlling behaviours may include economic abuse.

The terms economic abuse and financial abuse are often used interchangeably. Economic abuse represents a broader set of behaviours and is a form of family violence that:

*“... involves behaviors that control a [person’s] ability to acquire, use and maintain economic resources, thus threatening her [or his] economic security and potential for self-sufficiency.”*

Economic abuse includes a range of behaviours carried out by a perpetrator such as:

- controlling a victim’s access to cash and bank accounts
- hiding financial information and assets
- sabotaging study and/or employment opportunities
- forcing a partner to take out debt, and
- manipulating finances to avoid or reduce child support payments.

Adams, A. (2008). 'Development of the Scale of Economic Abuse'. *Violence Against Women*, 14, 563-588.

### Support for financial abuse

If you are experiencing economic abuse from a current or former partner, or you are still dealing with the consequences of abuse, there are organisations that can support you. The Centre for Women's Economic Safety (CWES) provides [a directory](#) with links to organisations that may be useful.



He controlled all the money. I just went to work. I was earning money but had no access to it. Not that I needed too much, but he wouldn't allow me to go shopping for myself, because I'd have to justify everything. If I wanted to buy the kids something, he would go with me, and it was just those little things that you think I didn't have that freedom. If I needed a new dress... the only time he would ever allow me to buy something was usually when I was going somewhere with him, because he would want me to look like a trophy wife.

**Sophie**

© Insight Exchange | Arts Lab | Voices of Insight Collection | Artist Louise Whelan

Read Voices of Insight | [Sophie](#) 'I didn't know what financial abuse was.'

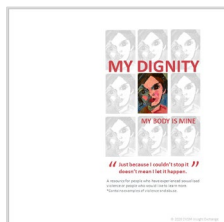
Explore more lived experience insights:

[Voices of Insight](#) – are de-identified narratives of people’s lived experience of domestic and family violence and other adversities. Also includes lived experience insights involving financial abuse.

[Voices of Experience](#) – are written insights and reflections from people with lived experience of domestic and family violence and other adversities.

# Coercively controlling behaviours may include sexualised violence.

We know that wherever it is difficult to tell someone about domestic and family violence, it may be even more difficult to tell someone about sexualised violence.



[My Dignity - My body is mine](#) - is a resource for anyone who may be or has experienced sexualised violence and for anyone who may be responding.

The intent of My Dignity is to provide information, support reflection, share lived experience insight from others, and signpost to contacts and supports.

Whenever people are subjected to violence, they resist. It can be in a range of ways and the examples in this resource not conclusive.

Sometimes the acts of resistance by a victim of violence are hidden or only in the privacy of the victim's mind because that is the only safe response at the time.

The victim of violence knows the context they are in and they are also mindful of consequences of further danger, violence and abuse that may occur in response to how they resist and respond.

## Examples of victims' resistance to violence and abuse

“

Every time he visits to see the kids, he sexually assaults me. I can't stop the violence, but now I am **refusing to take my bra off in each and every assault.**



Night after night I cried after 'sex'. During 'sex' there was a painting of us both displayed in our bedroom. I would look at the painting at the time and, **looking at my eyes in the painting and mentally reminding myself I have eyes and I can see you abusing me.**

I have been **self-harming so that the perpetrator would reduce the degree of sexualised violence** as he didn't like the look of my self harm marks.



My partner has repeatedly raped me, so I resist by **refusing to take care of my personal hygiene to make myself as unclean as possible to protect myself.**

[Excerpts from My Dignity – My body is mine]

”



On the following page you can read an account of sexualised violence which highlights the importance of resistance and responses to violence as part of the fact pattern.

The account is an excerpt (Account 03, page 8) from [The Fact Pattern](#) resource, a summary of the work of Dr Linda Coates and Dr Allan Wade from the Masterclass on Language and Violence hosted in the [Language Lab](#) on [www.insightexchange.net](http://www.insightexchange.net)

## An account

Mrs. Smith reminded him to take out the garbage. He **began yelling at her. She went quiet and started to walk out of the room. He called her denigrating names. She told him not to talk to her that way.** Mr. Smith lost control. **He grabbed her. She pulled back. He tightened his grip and yanked her toward him. She twisted to try to get away. He grabbed her around the waist and forced her off the ground. She kicked her legs and threw her weight backwards. He dragged her into the bedroom and threw her onto the bed.**

As soon as she landed, she rolled over and moved to the head of the bed to try to get off the bed. **He grabbed her by the hair and arm and wrenched her over. She grabbed the edge of the bed. He jerked her down the bed toward him. He pinned her on the bed with the weight of his body. She tried to breathe. He grabbed her face. She tried to turn away. He forced his tongue into her mouth. She concentrated on not gagging because she knew he would hurt her worse. He yanked her skirt up. She went quiet. He raped her. She went elsewhere in her mind.**

This account clearly shows that the victim resisted the violence including the sexualised violence, and the perpetrator of violence anticipated, suppressed and overpowered the victim's resistance to violence.

### Analysis of this account

- His deliberateness is evident in how he overpowers her resistance
- Resistance to violence is present in the account

Note the false representation of Mr. Smith's violence - "Lost control" - as if no intent. This representation conceals the violence and/or obscures the responsibility through the false representation of intention.

## Representation

**"The problem of violence is inextricably linked to the problem of representation."**

Centre for Response-Based Practice

We draw from the Centre for Response-Based Practice work in understanding that victims of violence use language in ways to manage their safety. Perpetrators of violence use language to conceal their responsibility and behaviour.

Language matters all the time. For responders, the words we select are an ethical choice and take a position about violence. Our choice of language can be used in restrictive or liberating ways to:

- conceal or reveal violence
- obscure or reveal offender responsibility
- conceal or reveal responses and resistance; and
- blame or contest the blaming of, victims

The words we select (may) benefit the perpetrator of violence, or further harm the victim of violence.

Explore the [Language Lab](#) on Insight Exchange



# 5. OUR COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

## Social and cultural context

Coercive control abuse and violence can be perpetrated at an interpersonal and structural level. Our collective responsibilities to end violence and support people who have resisted and been impacted by violence, include taking into account how the services and systems we work in can be used by the perpetrator of violence to conceal or extend their use of control, abuse and violence.

## Perpetrators of violence may use systems abuse

**Knowingly or not, people working in services and systems can be used by perpetrators of violence and abuse to extend their control and impact on the victim.**

Perpetrators of domestic and family violence frequently use services and systems to harm and control victims.

Perpetrators often use services and systems as part of their violence before, during and long after a relationship has ended.

Any service or system could be targeted by perpetrators in an effort to extend the use of their abuse and control. Perpetrators may try to do any one or of the following examples (which are not exhaustive);

- Ask social responders to disclose the location or details of a victim.
- Ask social responders to disclose the location or details of a victim.
- Use services and systems to intimidate, harass, maintain control over and to gain access to victims.
- Persuade social responders that the victim cannot be trusted or believed.

- Persuade social responders that the perpetrator is the victim and misrepresent the victim as the perpetrator.
- Use services such as Centrelink, Banks, Courts, Child Support to constrain victims' financial resources and wellbeing.
- Intentionally block or undermine victims' capacity to engage support services, maintain community connections and maintain employment and education.

## How can services and systems anticipate, mitigate and prevent the use of systems abuse?

- **Understand what domestic and family violence is.** This understanding will help to retain a clear distinction between victim and perpetrator, for instance, understanding violence and abuse as unilateral, not mutual.
- **Understand the use of violence and abuse is a choice.** This understanding will help to mitigate service/system acceptance of a perpetrators excuse making about causes for their behaviour, or false representations of intention.
- **Always listen to and believe victims.**
- **Engage with victims' insights and experiences to understand how your service/system has been used to perpetrate further violence (including threats to use legal, policy and process gaps).**
- **Develop workplace protocols that anticipate perpetrators possible use of services and systems at a policy, process and practice level.**

## People working in services and systems may perpetrate control, abuse and structural or institutional violence

Our collective responsibilities to end violence and support people who have resisted and been impacted by violence, include taking into account our own behaviours. Taking ownership and responsibility for our values, ethics, principals and practices as responding members of community, and as workers and leaders in organisations, services and systems.

“Even with the best intentions any of us can design and/or respond in ways that further a persons experiences of... ableism, racism, colonialism, religious prejudice, ageism, heteronormativity/homophobia, cis-sexism/transphobia, patriarchal sexism, and using other forms power or privilege to our own benefit.”  
(Excerpt - Insight Exchange Insight-informed Toolkit)

Our interpersonal and structural responses must be practiced in ways that do not use (or extend the use of) coercive control for our own gain or to maintain the status quo.

Our responsibilities to and with First Nations people and communities are essential and of enduring importance. The [Securing Our Rights, Securing Our Future Report 2020](#) (adjacent) is one document representing many voices, and asks all of us to stand together and work together to change the status quo.

There are many places and ways in which we need to listen in order to inform meaningful change. Change that is borne out of equality, inclusiveness and respect, not coercive control and power. Interpersonally, socially and structurally.

### First Nations Voices

*Wiyi Yani U Thangani*—meaning ‘Women’s Voices’ Bunub language — [Securing Our Rights, Securing Our Future Report 2020](#).

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner June Oscar said that every chapter of *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* outlines the imposition of Western systems, the structures of colonisation that women and girls have described as trapping them into intergenerational poverty and power.

“These structures that are detached, are unresponsive. They deepen cycles of crisis and punitive interventions and silence our women even when their pain is deafening,” she said.

**“First Nations women never stop fighting even when exhausted, driven by their uncompromising pursuit for a society capable of realising basic rights and ideals of equality, inclusiveness and respect.**

“Let 2020 be the turning point, where it is recognised that all Australians hold these ideals in common, and when we stand together our fight is shared and can take us toward the future, we all want and deserve. But, to be equals on this journey, we must overcome inequalities and institutional discrimination by guaranteeing our women and girls self-determination. That is the call of our women’s voices, of *Wiyi Yani U Thangani*.”

<https://womensagenda.com.au/latest/let-2020-be-a-turning-point-june-oscar-ao-releases-landmark-report-on-first-nations-women-and-girls/>

## Futures Lab

Imagine if decisions about responses to domestic and family violence were insight-informed. Informed by the insights of people who have or are experiencing domestic and family violence. **Futures could be different.**

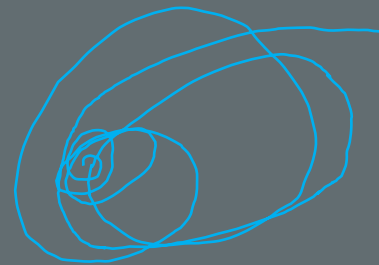
We can all stand against violence and abuse from wherever we are in society. Every community. Every sector & system.

We can choose to **listen to insights** of lived experience of domestic and family violence. We can ask ‘**Who Benefits?**’ from the status quo? We can ask ‘**Who Decides?**’ to keep things the same? We can **decide differently.**

Contact the Insight Exchange team to find out more about the Futures Lab [contact@insightexchange.net](mailto:contact@insightexchange.net)



# 6. WHAT IS DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE?



Domestic and family violence includes any behaviour, in an intimate or family relationship, which is violent, threatening, coercive or controlling, causing a person to live in fear and to be made to do things against their will. This may involve having to significantly modify their behaviour in an attempt to mitigate threats to their safety or wellbeing or the safety and wellbeing of people they care about. Domestic and family violence can happen to anyone and can take many forms. It is often part of a pattern of controlling or coercive behaviour.

An intimate relationship refers to people who are (or have been) in an intimate partnership whether or not the relationship involves or has involved a sexual relationship, i.e. married or engaged to be married, separated, divorced, de facto partners (whether of the same or different sex), couples promised to each other under cultural or religious tradition, or who are dating.

A family relationship has a broader definition and includes people who are related to one another through blood, marriage or de facto partnerships, adoption and fostering relationships, sibling and extended family relationships. It includes the full range of kinship ties in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (see adjacent – Family Violence), extended family relationships, and family of choice within lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer (LGBTIQ) communities.

People living in the same house, people living in the same residential care facility and people reliant on care may also be considered to be experiencing domestic and family violence when one or both people in the relationship try to create an imbalance of power to establish coercive control and commit violence.

Women and children are overwhelmingly the victims of domestic and family violence and those who use violence are overwhelmingly male. Domestic and family violence can be perpetrated by a partner, family member, carer, house mate, boyfriend or girlfriend. Women also commit domestic and family violence against men, as do same-sex partners (Domestic Violence NSW, 2018). Domestic and family violence is also committed by and committed against people who identify in non-gender binary terms.

The term **'Family Violence'** is preferred in an Indigenous context. It is used to describe the range of violence that takes place in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities including the physical, emotional, sexual, social, spiritual, cultural, psychological and economic abuses that may be perpetrated within a family. The term also recognises the broader impacts of violence; on extended families, kinship networks and community relationships. It has also been used in the past decade to include acts of self-harm and suicide, and has become widely adopted as part of the shift towards addressing intra-familial violence in all its forms. (Gordon, 2002).



**Violence and abuse costs us all.**

**Lives are lost.**

**Homicide. Femicide. Filicide. Suicide.**

**Indignity, injury, suffering, grief, and loss extends within families, across communities and throughout our country.**

**Poverty endures.**

**Children's hopes and futures are sabotaged.**

**National, state and territory definitions of domestic and family violence and criminal codes vary, however violence and abuse is never acceptable in any community, family, institution, place or context.**

# BEHAVIOURS

## The behaviours that may represent domestic and family violence include

- **Physical violence including physical assault or abuse;** for example non-fatal strangulation, suffocation and head injuries\*, other forms of harm or injury, abuse of pets, damage to property or belongings.
- **Reproductive coercion or abuse** (when a woman is stopped from making her own choices about her reproductive system).
- **Sexualised assault and other abusive or coercive behaviour of a sexualised nature.**
- **Emotional or psychological abuse** including verbal abuse (humiliation, degradation and dehumanisation), threats of violence (to harm a victim or someone close to the victim/survivor, as well as pets, property or belongings), threats of self harm or suicide, blackmail and bribery (kidnapping or deprivation of liberty), the manipulative use of children to control partner/family members (NSW Government, 2014), isolating the victim from their supports and support services, threatening to 'out' a partner's identity as LGBTIQ or to disclose HIV status without the victim/survivors consent, undermining the victim's sense of reality (gaslighting).
- **Financial abuse;** for example denying a person reasonable financial autonomy or financial support or accruing debt in their name.
- **Stalking;** for example harassment, intimidation or coercion of the other person, or the person's family, in order to cause fear or ongoing harassment (online-harassment, stalking, surveillance and control of victim's movements).
- **Technology facilitated abuse;** for example harassment, impersonation, monitoring/stalking, threats and attacks through mobile phones and other devices, social media and online accounts (like email and banking).
- **Spiritual or religious abuse;** for example using spiritual or religious beliefs to scare, hurt or control you, stopping you or shaming you for practising your spiritual or religious beliefs, forcing you or your children to take part in spiritual or religious practices when you don't want to, forcing you to raise your children according to spiritual or religious beliefs you don't agree with, using religious or spiritual leaders or teachings to force you to stay in the relationship or marriage, as an excuse for their violent and abusive behaviour, stop you or your children from getting medical or health care, force you into a marriage you don't want (NSW, Department of Communities and Justice).

\* Note: A person may use more plain language descriptions for words like 'strangulation' or 'suffocation' to describe assaults. For example: "choked me"; "pressed me up against..."; "held me by the neck"; "squeezed my neck"; "hands around my neck"; "had me in a choke hold"; "throttled me"; "sat/ lay on top of me/on my chest"; "pinned me down"; "smothered me"; "gagged me"; "tried to drown me". (DVSM Domestic and Family Violence and Acquired Brain Injury Project Report, 2018)

## What is coercive control?

The use of coercive control is a form of abuse and violence.

The person using violence uses 'entrapment that renders the victim hostage-like in the harms they inflict on their **dignity, liberty, autonomy and personhood** as well as to their physical and psychological integrity.' (Evan Stark Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life (Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 15.)

The person using violence (in any form) may use some or all of the behaviours listed, or develop new behaviours (for example how Covid 19 virus and measures have been used to threaten or harm a victim) to achieve entrapment and inflict harm.

## What is financial abuse?

The terms financial and economic abuse are often used interchangeably. Economic abuse is a form of family violence that: "... involves behaviors that control a [person's] ability to acquire, use and maintain economic resources, thus threatening her [or his] economic security and potential for self-sufficiency."

Economic abuse includes a range of behaviours carried out by a perpetrator such as:

- controlling a victim's access to cash and bank accounts
- hiding financial information and assets
- sabotaging study and/or employment opportunities
- forcing a partner to take out debt, and
- manipulating finances to avoid or reduce child support payments.

Adams, A. (2008). 'Development of the Scale of Economic Abuse'. *Violence Against Women*, 14, 563-588.

## What is sexualised violence?

### Sexualised violence is a form of 'violence' not a form of 'sex'.

Sexualised violence always involves the use and abuse of power. The perpetrator ignores the need for consent and suppresses the resistance of the victim. The perpetrator uses a range of tactics such as direct and indirect, subtle and psychological, forceful and physical behaviours.

**Sexualised violence encompasses all behaviours used by a perpetrator to threaten, coerce, violate, or force the targeted person (victim) into sexualised activity.**

**These behaviours include, but are not limited to:**

- Forcing genital contact.
- Forcing contact with the perpetrator's mouth.
- Vaginal, anal or oral penetration by a penis, finger or any other object.
- Groping the victim's breasts, genitals or buttocks.
- Reproductive coercion or abuse (when a woman is stopped from making her own choices about her reproductive system. The reproductive system includes the parts and functions of the body involved in the menstrual cycle, sex and sexual pleasure, pregnancy and birth.) *More about Reproductive abuse on 1800 Respect*  
<https://www.1800respect.org.au/violence-and-abuse/reproductive-abuse/>
- Voyeurism – for example, the perpetrator watches the victim in intimate locations such as their bedroom or bathroom through hidden video-cameras, or through a window/door.

- Exhibitionism – for example, the perpetrator exposes their genitals to the victim.
- Forcing the victim to watch or involve the victim in pornography.
- Forced use of intoxicants to minimise the victim's resistance to sexualised violence or exploiting the victim's use of alcohol and other drugs to commit sexualised violence.
- Sexualised harassment including intrusive verbal comments or sexualised body language. (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017).

Perpetrators of sexualised violence often use physical force to constrain the resistance of victims. This often includes the use of:

- objects and restraints
- non-fatal strangulation\*
- suffocation
- physical assaults to the victim's head, neck and face

These physical assaults can (in one assault or a combination of assaults) develop into acquired brain injuries, other serious life-changing injuries and death.

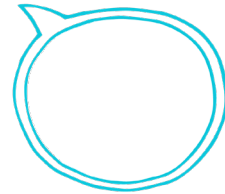
*\* Note: A person may use words other than 'strangulation' or 'suffocation' to describe these assaults. For example: gagging, choking/choking during sex, 'breath-play' (erotic asphyxiation), 'rough sex'. Some of these terms can be mutualising and conceal the violent and abusive nature of the behaviour).*



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### [Guide to understanding and responding to coercive control, abuse and violence](#)

We welcome [feedback](#) to improve future editions.



**Insight Exchange** centres on the expertise of people with lived experience of domestic and family violence and gives voice to these experiences.

**Insight Exchange** is designed to inform and strengthen social, service and systemic responses to domestic and family violence.

Insight Exchange has been established, developed and is governed by Domestic Violence Service Management (DVSM) a registered charity (ABN 26 165 400 635.).

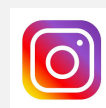
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