



## Abuse behaviours checklist

This checklist is intended to assist you in talking with survivors about the kinds of abuse to which they have been subjected. Many tactics overlap with one another and may fit in more than one category.

### Coercive control

Coercive control is a term that appears in both the federal *Divorce Act* and some provincial family laws within the definition of family violence. Generally, it is a pattern of behaviour that, over time, causes the victim to fear for her physical safety or that of another family member, has a negative impact on her mental or emotional health or well-being or has a substantial adverse effect on her daily life. Most often, the abusive behaviours that form a pattern of coercive control include tactics from many of the categories we have listed below.

### Anger and intimidation

- Changes mood suddenly
- Gets angry when things don't go their way
- Gives the woman the silent treatment
- Engages in loud and aggressive behaviour, such as shouting, yelling, pounding fists on table or into walls, throwing, kicking or breaking objects out of anger, slamming doors, stomping out of the house
- Says that they have "nothing to lose"
- Drives in a frightening way
- Plays with weapons to intimidate/frighten
- Makes a scene in public by losing their temper or embarrassing the woman
- Is charming with others and aggressive with the woman

## Psychological and emotional abuse

- Blames the woman for their problems or denies that they are abusive
- Blames the woman for the abuse
- Tells the woman she's overreacting, being dramatic (about the abusive behaviours)
- Lies and makes the woman question her memories, e.g., "I never said that" (gaslighting)
- Denies the woman affection or personal care
- Puts down the woman's physical appearance, education or social class
- Insults the woman in front of children/others
- Criticizes the woman's care of children/home
- Calls the woman names or swears at her
- Calls the woman crazy/irrational or threatens to have her institutionalized
- Treats the woman as though she is stupid
- Attacks the woman's self-esteem in other ways
- Ridicules the woman's family or friends
- Makes repeated threats: to leave the relationship, to commit suicide, to have an affair, to damage the woman's belongings, to take the children away, to come after the woman if she leaves, to kill or hurt her, the children or other family members or a family pet or animal or to have someone else kill them
- Forces the woman to do degrading or dehumanizing things (e.g., eating cigarette butts or pet food or licking the floor)
- Isolates and alienates the woman from others, including family and friends
- Restricts the woman's access to transportation or leaves her without transportation
- Controls and monitors the woman's time, activities, dress, hairstyle, makeup, etc.
- Accuses the woman of having an affair
- Confines the woman to the family home or kicks her out of the family home
- Stops the woman from getting health care
- Actively turns the children against the woman or threatens to do so
- Does not respect the woman's privacy and goes through her personal things
- Restricts the woman's access to means of communication (e.g., phone, internet, assistive technology)
- Interferes with the woman's online activities: accesses her online accounts, impersonates her online, uses technology to monitor her social-media accounts and offline activities

## Physical abuse

- Throws or kicks things at the woman
- Pushes, grabs, slaps or shoves the woman
- Pulls the woman's hair/twists her arm
- Pins the woman to the wall, floor or bed
- Chokes her
- Kicks, hits or punches her
- Burns, stabs or shoots her or threatens to use a weapon to hurt her
- Tries to run the woman down with a car or throw her out of a moving car
- Poisons her
- Deprives the woman of sleep
- Uses violence against the woman in front of children
- Physically abuses the children
- Hurts or kills animals

## Sexual and reproductive abuse

- Accuses the woman of being "promiscuous"
- Makes the woman feel ashamed or humiliated about her sexual desires
- Denies the woman affection
- Makes the woman feel guilty if she doesn't want to have sex
- Coerces the woman to have sex or to engage in unwanted sex acts, including pornography
- Shares or threatens to share intimate images or videos without the woman's consent (non-consensual intimate imagery (NCII), sometimes called "revenge porn")
- Uses weapons or other threatening/harmful objects during sex
- Rapes/sexually assaults the woman
- Uses sex and intimacy to control the woman
- Forces sex as a condition to keep children safe/allow the woman to see them/return them/before paying child support
- Exposes children to pornography
- Sexually abuses, exploits or grooms the children

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- Forces the woman into sex work and takes the money (sex trafficking)
- Lies about and/or infects the woman with HIV or other sexually transmitted infections
- Sabotages condoms or birth control and/or removes condoms without consent
- Prevents or coerces the woman into not using birth control or condoms
- Forces the woman to become pregnant
- Forces the woman to terminate or prevents her from terminating a pregnancy
- Forces the woman to be surgically sterilized
- Causes physical harm while the woman is pregnant
- Blames the woman for a miscarriage or health issues with fetus or baby

## Economic abuse

- Undermines the woman's attempts to get and maintain education, training or paid work
- Prohibits or forces the woman to work or controls where she works
- Chooses not to work, while forcing the woman to work
- Forces her to pay a disproportionate share of household expenses
- Spends or mismanages the family income, including the woman's earned income and/or savings
- Forces her to turn over all her earnings
- Makes major financial decisions without the woman's input
- Controls the woman's spending and forces her to account for her purchases
- Makes her ask for basic necessities/money or gives her an "allowance"
- Does not share financial information with the woman
- Puts their name on property purchases and/or removes the woman's name
- Builds up credit-card debt without the woman's knowledge
- Destroys the woman's credit rating
- Incurs bills in the woman's name without her knowledge or consent
- Forces the woman to turn over benefit payments or entitlements
- Threatens to make false allegations about fraud to OW or ODSP
- Forces the woman to be part of illegal/criminal acts (social assistance fraud, drug operations, etc.)
- Insists on paying for everything themselves, then uses this against her

- "Love bombing" her with over-the-top presents or fancy dinners or trips (often, the abuser can't really afford these/the woman doesn't want them in the first place), then using this to manipulate her or expecting her to pay them back for the "gift"

### **Stalking/harassment**

- Calls, texts, messages and/or emails the woman constantly
- Monitors the woman's online browsing, social-media and phone use
- Uses the woman's technology (e.g., cell phone and browser history, social-media posts, GPS, spyware) to monitor, stalk, harass and collect evidence about her
- Uses technology linked to the children to stalk her (e.g., devices and toys he can use for monitoring service accounts for devices)
- Shows up where the woman is (e.g., at home, school, work, grocery store, a movie, in a restaurant)
- Harasses the woman at work
- Sends the woman unwanted packages, flowers, cards, gifts or letters
- Tracks the woman using public records, online searches or paid investigators
- Uses the children, woman's friends, family, co-workers or neighbours to find out about her
- Goes through her garbage to find information
- Has third parties monitor/harass the woman

### **Male privilege/patriarchy**

- Demands obedience and submissiveness from the woman
- Expresses misogynistic views (e.g., lower value placed on girl children, putting down women and their ability to be leaders, praising violence against women)
- Calls woman degrading names
- Puts himself and his needs on a pedestal
- Makes the woman do most of the household tasks
- Makes major decisions without the woman's input
- Tells the woman that she can't cope without him
- Coerces her into marriage through threats and force/refuses to marry her
- Socializes and enforces strict gender roles with the children

- Teaches son harmful masculinities (e.g., it is okay to boss his mother around)

### **Cross-border abuse**

- Threatens to report the woman to immigration authorities or to cancel her sponsorship/have her deported
- Lies about the woman's legal status
- Tells her false information about immigration laws/process
- Makes false allegations to immigration officials
- Makes threats about penalties in country of origin (such as losing children) or threatens to harm the woman's family
- Prevents the woman from attending language classes
- Acts as the woman's language interpreter when attending appointments to control/change information she provides and receives
- Interferes with the woman's ability to learn about her legal rights and services in Canada or elsewhere
- Controls access to passport or immigration papers and/or prevents the woman and/or children from travelling
- Threatens to impose a travel ban unless the woman gives the abuser what he wants
- Threatens/tries to remove children to another jurisdiction

### **Cultural, ethnic and racial abuse**

- Threatens to isolate the woman or denies her access to her cultural, religious or linguistic community
- Undermines the woman because of her ethnicity or cultural practices
- Uses racial slurs
- Denies that he is being racist
- Stops the woman from engaging in ceremonial practices
- Punishes or ridicules the woman's spiritual beliefs
- Prevents the woman from practising her spiritual beliefs and/or from teaching the children her spiritual beliefs
- Denies the woman access to culturally appropriate resources/support groups
- Turns the woman's community against her

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- Uses a belief system to control the woman's actions or to degrade/punish her
- Refuses to permit a religious divorce
- Harms the woman through violence such as female genital mutilation, claiming it is an accepted cultural practice
- Forces the woman to practise certain beliefs and engage in rituals
- Forces the woman to wear or prevents her from wearing religious clothing or symbols
- Forces the woman to join and/or stay in a cult

## Disability abuse

- Neglects medical and personal care (fails to provide the necessities of life)
- Refuses to give the woman necessary medication or gives too much medication
- Controls or sabotages her equipment in order to limit her independence: refuses to plug in her mobility device, takes away or breaks her communication device (TTY, tablet, hearing aids, etc.)
- Takes away her guide dog or threatens to hurt it
- Places objects out of reach
- Confines the woman, creates physical obstacles to impede her mobility
- Creates an unsafe or unhealthy environment for the woman
- Exploits her intellectual or mental health disability
- Tells the woman that her chronic illness is "made up" or "in her head"
- Criticizes her speech or American Sign Language (ASL) skills
- Calls her names, taunts or belittles her because of the disability
- Discloses her disability without consent
- Makes the woman feel guilty about her disability and that she needs to be cared for
- Body-shames her
- Takes advantage of the woman's disability in order to be sexually violent with her
- Takes or controls the woman's disability income
- Ridicules her about her disability, especially in front of the children or others
- Threatens that they will get primary parenting time because of the woman's disability
- Tells others the woman is lying or was on medication or having an episode when she tries to disclose the abuse
- Blames bruises and cuts from the abuse on the disability (e.g., "She fell down")

- Exploits societal ableism against the woman, particularly when dealing with systems such as family court, RCMP/POLICE, child protection, health care

### **Sexual orientation/gender identity abuse**

- Exploits internalized anxieties about the woman's sexual orientation/gender identity to control her
- Uses looks, actions, gestures to reinforce homophobic, biphobic or transphobic control
- Controls/defines each partner's role or duties in the relationship
- Denies the woman access to medical treatment or hormones or coerces her to pursue medical treatment
- Tells the woman she's not a "real" woman
- Uses offensive pronouns for the woman or children
- Says women cannot abuse women so it is just "fighting" and not abuse
- Says no one will believe her because of her sexual orientation/gender identity
- Uses privilege or ability to "pass" to discredit the woman, put her in danger, cut off her access to resources or use the system against her
- Threatens to "out" the woman (reveal her sexual orientation/gender identity) to family, ex-partner, friends, neighbours, authorities, community and/or employers
- Threatens the woman's new partner
- Makes homophobic/biphobic/transphobic comments to the children
- Threatens to take the children away from the woman because of her sexual orientation/gender identity
- Reports the woman to child protection authorities for being unfit because of her sexual orientation/gender identity
- Exploits societal homophobia/biphobia/transphobia against the woman, particularly when dealing with systems such as family court, RCMP/POLICE, child protection, health care
- Refuses to support a child's sexual orientation or gender identity
- Claims the woman is "making" the child identify as gay, bisexual or transgender

## Post-separation abuse

- Increases threats and intimidation
- Blocks access to money after separation
- Drains joint bank accounts or assets
- Interferes with the woman's ability to find/maintain employment or enter an employment program
- Withholds child/spousal support, medical insurance, financial contribution to children's extra expenses (e.g., sports, day care, school uniform/graduation costs)
- Interferes with the woman's ability to find affordable housing
- Uses the children as an excuse to repeatedly contact the woman, to show up where she and the children are or to justify breaking no-contact orders
- Coerces or tricks the children to monitor the woman (e.g., reporting on her activities, installing spyware on her or the children's devices)
- Tells children lies about their mother and says that she is the reason for the family breakup
- Calls the woman names, degrades her and her family in front of the children
- Doesn't take responsibility for children (e.g., does not show up for parenting time)
- Neglects or ignores children's needs, schedules and fears during time with them
- Contradicts the woman's rules for the children
- Withholds information about children from the woman
- Doesn't allow children to call their mother when they are with the abuser
- Tells the children that a new partner is their new mother
- Uses corporal punishment with children
- Makes false accusations of bad parenting
- Threatens to report or reports the woman to child protection
- Threatens to kidnap the children
- Refuses to permit the woman to travel with the children
- Refuses to sign for the children's passports or provide them to the woman
- Interferes with the woman's ability to get the children into child care
- Exploits "father's rights" to gain sympathy/undermine the woman
- Degrades the woman to family members or community
- Stalks or monitors the woman physically and/or electronically

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- Escalates technology abuse tactics (e.g., spyware, monitoring her accounts, GPS tracking)
- Uses “smart home” technology to control the temperature, lighting and other utilities and appliances in the woman’s home
- Uses social media to talk about the family law case or to slander the woman’s name
- Locks the woman out of the family home
- Destroys her/children’s belongings
- Escalates abusive behaviour when the woman has a new partner
- Threatens harm/death to the woman, the children, her new partner, other people, pets, farm animals

## Legal abuse

- Has the woman charged or countercharged by the RCMP/POLICE, complaining that she assaulted them, then uses the criminal charges against her in family court
- Pressures her to change bail conditions or drop criminal charges and/or offers to “make a deal” with the woman: The abuser won’t fight for the children if she doesn’t testify in criminal court
- Lies in court appearances and documents; in particular, denies the abuse
- Makes allegations of parental alienation if she raises their abusive behaviour in court
- Appears charming and conciliatory to the judge or other legal personnel, raising questions about the credibility of the woman’s story
- Acts as their own lawyer so that they can have contact with her (e.g., serving documents, cross-examination, negotiations)
- Makes it difficult for the woman to find a lawyer by “consulting” with all the family law lawyers in the community
- Uses delay tactics that wear her down, increase her lawyer’s time and/or require her to miss work for court appearances (e.g., misses mandatory court-related sessions, refuses to find a lawyer or repeatedly changes lawyers, delays providing financial information, refuses to sell the family home or respond to legal offers, makes endless motions over minor or inappropriate issues, reneges after making an agreement)
- Runs up the woman’s legal bill or eats up the hours on her legal aid certificate by using up her lawyer’s time with unnecessary correspondence, phone calls, etc.
- Withholds information (such as financial disclosure) and/or insists on unreasonable disclosure from the woman
- Pressures the woman to accept mediation and joint-parenting arrangements

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- Coerces the woman to trade away some legal rights (e.g., the right to property or financial support) in exchange for other rights (e.g., parenting time)
- Uses intimidation and threats
- Makes malicious reports slandering the woman to the court and other officials
- Attempts to interfere in the professional relationship the woman has with her lawyer
- Makes malicious reports about her lawyer, judges and other court personnel connected to her case
- Harasses the woman at court, in the days leading up to court appearances and/or when they are coming and going from court
- Brings family/friends to court to create an intimidating atmosphere
- Refuses to follow court orders
- Appeals decisions even when there is no possibility of success