



# Reaffirming Individual Dignity: Exposing Coercive Control

**CAUTION:** If you suspect that your loved one or a parishioner is a victim of abuse, proceed cautiously and remember that your own safety (and that of your own family) is also at risk.

Note that abuse counselors customarily have security measures in place before they attempt to help a victim. Others ordinarily have no such protection. Your own reputation, psychological well-being, and physical safety could be targeted when you help someone who is a victim.

Listen to podcasts that allow victims to tell their dating & domestic violence stories to become aware of the risks that could be involved in controlling relationships. Reach out to Cleveland's Family Justice Center, or other domestic abuse organizations, for guidance when you help a victim. One of the least risky ways that an outsider can help prevent coercive control and abuse is to encourage every person (no matter their marital status) to maintain historically important relationships meaningfully and independently.

For help, contact the **Cuyahoga County Family Justice Center** at 216-443-7345 or the National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-7233. Read USCCB's "[When I call for Help](#)" for more information on the Church's response to domestic violence.

## Segment #3

### ***What is the "Control" of Coercive Control?***

Coercive control is a term used to streamline observations of diverse spousal abuse tactics by comprehending that CONTROL and ISOLATION are the preliminary *goals* of *all* forms of abuse (emotional, spiritual, psychological, sexual, financial, and physical abuse). In this segment, the "control" aspect will be investigated.

The CONTROL in a coercively controlled marriage is a pattern of extensively controlling minute, detailed aspects of a target spouse's everyday life to such a degree that the target begins to lose their sense of self. Minute aspects of life are controlled, inspected, and discussed to an exhaustive degree. Day-to-day decisions - such as how to dust one's house, how to clean dishes, the frequency or order of vacuuming, creating vacuum lines/lawnmower lines, rules about how to shower, which soap to use and how, when to use the toilet, how much to sleep, minute details of what to eat and how to prepare it, extensive/minute details of childcare, etc. - are controlled exhaustively through much of the day, every day, in a coercively controlling relationship.

Influence over small daily activities seems unimportant, at first – and is, in fact, a part of compromise in most relationships. However, if an overarching, meticulous pattern of one-sided control becomes evident, something more is happening. Mundane activities involve small acts of spontaneous human creativity, dignity, and free will. If a pattern of abusive coercive control dominates, then these activities devolve into robotic capitulation to the controlling spouse's will. The problem with the activity is not the activity itself (nor how the activity is done), but that it is an incessant pattern of control in daily life that is being forced upon the target spouse in an abusive manner and with a frequency and invasiveness that takes away the target spouse's liberty, dignity, energy, and autonomy.

The target is coerced to go along with the control due to a system of rewards and punishments. The target hopes life will be better if they placate. Initially, minimal placating does abate bad days -- however, in abusive relationships a pattern emerges where the controller imposes more and more rules, and the target loses more and more freedom.

Controlling tactics commonly escalate to include control over the flow of outside information (such as which news sites the target can or cannot get information

from) and control over communication with others (such as which relatives and old friends the target is persuaded to or deterred from speaking with). The controlling spouse likely will organize, expend, or supervise the target's independent alone time. The controlling spouse may also invade all of the target's private time with God, demanding when and how the target spouse must pray, even during private prayer.

**Technology-facilitated abuse** is common in current times. This includes using any technology (including Mass videos streamed online) to stalk, harass, monitor, bully, intimidate or control. It also includes a controlling spouse freely accessing the target's private email, text, phone, social media accounts and/or their private online search history in order to stalk, intimidate and control the target's communication with the outside world. A controlling spouse may impersonate their target in online conversations. In severe situations, a controlling spouse may install video cameras about the house/car or may even induce the target to think that a monitoring device has been implanted inside their body, thus causing the target to behave in a robotic and uncharacteristically controlled way, even in private.

As noted, video streaming of Masses can be exploited in technology-facilitated abuse. A controlling spouse is able to monitor from afar where a target goes to Mass, how they and/or the children act at that Mass, and with whom they sit and converse. To help prevent videoed Mass from being misused in this way, focus the camera only upon the priest/altar. Do not record the congregation (even during reception of Communion). Preferably, several non-videoed Mass options would be made available throughout the diocese each weekend. Scheduling and publicizing several options for weekend Masses which are entirely free of videography is a helpful way to assist both current victims and also survivors who are trying to rebuild their private spiritual lives away from the abusive person. Another way to be cognizant of technology-facilitated abuse is to be aware that offering a victim a phone line to use can be a lifeline to those victims whose own cell phones are closely monitored by their abuser.