



These are the sections of the statutory guidance on Domestic Abuse 2021 and the Coercive Controlling Behaviour (Serious Crime Act 2015 as amended) that refer to the interaction between children being used by a perpetrator to control, coerce and abuse their victim. These behaviours highlight parental alienation and alienating behaviours as well as issues such as economic abuse and psychological abuse.

(1) Coercive Control: Statutory Guidance

[Full Guidance](#)

Relevant paragraphs

Para 32:

- Verbal abuse; Constant criticism of the victim's role as a partner, spouse or parent
- Economic abuse (e.g. coerced debt, controlling spending/bank accounts/investments/mortgages/benefit payments);
- Using children to control the victim, e.g. threatening to take the children away, threatening to harm the children;
- Making false allegations to statutory agencies (e.g. Police, Children's Services, Jobcentre, Child Maintenance Services);
- Using child arrangements and child maintenance to control the victim

Para 84: Perpetrator Tactics

84. A perpetrator may manipulate the victim or those around them to make the abuse less visible or undetectable altogether. Perpetrators may also be particularly adept at manipulating professionals, agencies and systems, and may use a range of tactics to maintain contact with, and control over the victim. Perpetrators may also seek to minimise allegations, normalise the behaviour and discredit or undermine the victim's account or credibility.

These may include, but are not limited to, the following:

Threats and intimidation

- Threats of violence or threats to kill;
- Threats to breach court orders;

- Using threats in order to manipulate the victim e.g. by telling the victim that they will not be believed by the police or other agencies, that they will inform social services, and/or that their children will be taken away;

Manipulation

- Making false or vexatious allegations against victims and/or convincing professionals that their controlling tactics are for the victim's own safety and/or for the safety of their children. The police should examine whether this has been a feature in the perpetrator's previous relationships by discussing with the victim or accessing police callouts or relevant criminal records held on the perpetrator;
- Playing different professionals off against one another
- Using children to control or coerce the victim e.g. frustrating child contact and/or child arrangements, telling the children to call the victim derogatory names or to hit the victim, expecting the children to monitor the victim and report back, repeatedly failing to collect the children when they previously agreed to do so to cause the victim problems at work, threatening to abduct the children, weaponising children in family law proceedings.

Sabotage

- Using the courts to continue to abuse the victim, for example by not turning up to court dates, sending unnecessary legal letters and making threats around contact;
- Missing or cancelling appointments.

Para 124: Perpetrator Tactics

Perpetrators of domestic abuse may also target and undermine parents' relationships with their children, using power and control dynamics, for example making vexatious applications to the family court to prolong proceedings and using child arrangements and child maintenance to control the victim. The Ministry of Justice published an expert panel report 'Assessing Risk of Harm to Children and Parents in Private Law Children Cases' which also presented evidence that perpetrators sometimes used family court proceedings as a means of continuing their abuse.^[footnote 74] In the Government's [Implementation Plan](#), a commitment was made to explore how the law could be clarified in respect of orders made under Section 91(14) of the Children Act 1989 ('the 1989 Act') in domestic abuse circumstances

158: Economic Abuse

Deliberately prolonging family and/or civil court proceedings, or conducting proceedings unreasonably with the intention of increasing legal fees

(2) Domestic Abuse Statutory Guidance (Domestic Abuse Act 2021)

[Full Statutory Guidance](#)

Relevant Paragraphs

Coercive Controlling Behaviour

Para 50:

- using children to control the victim, e.g. threatening to take the children away

Economic Abuse

Para 65

- deliberately forcing a victim to go to the family courts so they incur additional legal fees

Perpetrator Tactics

105. Perpetrator behaviours can potentially include:

- disguised compliance, missing or cancelling appointments, non-attendance, playing different professionals off against one another
- making false or vexatious allegations against victims and convincing professionals that their controlling tactics are for the victim's own safety and/or for the safety of their children
- using the courts to continue abuse, for example not turning up to court dates, sending unnecessary and repeated legal letters and making threats around contact
- making counter-allegations against the victim
- exploiting interpretations of religion or faith to maintain control of victims and perpetuate harm
- using children as a form of control – e.g. access visits, seeking to manipulate children's feelings towards ex-partner (the victim)

Produced by the ManKind Initiative 2023

Registered Charity No. 1089547

Contact Mark Brooks for further information: chairman@mankind.org.uk