

## Definition:

**Domestic violence: a *pattern of coercive control* perpetrated by one person against another in an intimate relationship.**

Understanding this definition of domestic violence and being able to describe a perpetrator's pattern of coercive control is absolutely essential for assessing the on-going risk to the children, the safety of the survivor<sup>1</sup> and treatment planning.

While domestic violence usually comes to the attention of child protection through behavior that can get the perpetrator arrested like physical assault, threats of bodily harm, kidnapping, stalking, sexual assault, ***many behaviors in the pattern of control cannot be criminally prosecuted.***

These include behaviors like name calling, threatening to use the courts to take away children, outing someone to their relatives, telling lies, throwing out birth control pills, controlling finances, cheating, keeping weapons in the home, hiding passports or other important documents and controlling access to phone and car.

Men and women in heterosexual and same sex relationships can be either perpetrators or survivors. Regardless of sex, assessing the pattern of coercive control remains the same: Who's using physical violence, threats and intimidation to create fear in the other members of the family?<sup>2</sup> Who's exerting coercive control through finances, manipulation, and sabotage of work or family relationships? Is one partner more vulnerable to coercive control due to his or her cultural status and institutional disadvantages?

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<sup>1</sup> Using the term "survivor" instead of "victim" can help focus on the efforts of a parent to protect themselves and their children in the face of the threats and challenges of the batterer and life circumstances, e.g. housing issues, etc.

<sup>2</sup> For example, while men and women can both be perpetrators or survivors of domestic violence the level of coercive control experienced may vary. Women are 2 to 3 times more likely to report an intimate partner pushed grabbed or shoved them and 7 to 14 times more likely to report an intimate partner beat them up, choked them, or tied them down ([Tjaden and Thoennes 2000a](#) cited at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/ipvfacts.htm>).