

Coercive Control of Children & Youth – Framework

Title

Coercive Control of Children & Youth: A Practical Framework

Purpose of This Framework

This framework supports professionals in recognizing and documenting coercive control directed at children and youth—both directly and through the abuse of a caregiving parent.

1. How Coercive Control Affects Children

Children may experience coercive control when an adult:

- Uses fear, threats, or humiliation to control their daily life
- Uses the child as a tool to control the other parent
- Undermines the child’s relationship with a safe caregiver
- Controls access to school, healthcare, friends, and activities
- Sexual abuse is often a form of control

2. Direct Coercive Control of Children

Look for patterns such as:

1. Rules, Punishments & Fear-Based Parenting

- a. Extreme or constantly changing rules
- b. Disproportionate punishments for small “offenses”
- c. Children describing “walking on eggshells” around the adult

2. Isolation from Supports

- a. Blocking contact with the other parent, siblings, or extended family
- b. Preventing participation in school events, sports, or social activities
- c. Monitoring or restricting phone and internet use

3. Psychological Manipulation & Degradation

- a. Name-calling, shaming, or comparing the child to the other parent
- b. Forcing the child to keep secrets or lie to authorities
- c. Blaming the child for the adult’s behavior or emotions

4. Control Over Basic Needs & Services

- a. Withholding food, sleep, clothing, or medical care as punishment
- b. Interfering with therapy, special education, or needed supports
- c. Using medication or diagnoses as tools of control

3. Coercive Control Through Children (Post-Separation and Beyond)

The controlling adult may:

- Use custody, visitation, or exchanges to continue controlling the other parent
- Pressure the child to “spy” or report on the other parent
- Make false reports to schools, CPS, or courts to discredit the safe caregiver
- Threaten to “take the kids away” or move them without consent

4. Child-Centered Questions for Practice

Professionals can ask:

- “Are there rules at home that feel scary or impossible to follow?”
- “What happens when someone in your home breaks a rule?”
- “Are there people you wish you could see or talk to more often?”
- “Do you ever feel like you have to choose sides between adults?”
- “Is there anything you’re afraid to tell me because of what might happen later?”

5. Signs of Harm & Impact

Watch for:

- Anxiety, hypervigilance, or sudden changes in behavior
- Regression (sleep, toileting, separation anxiety)
- School avoidance or sudden drops in performance
- Over-responsibility for adult emotions (“I have to keep Dad calm”)

6. Documentation Tips for Children’s Cases

When documenting:

- Capture **specific examples** of rules, punishments, and threats
- Note how the adult’s behavior limits the child’s freedom, safety, and relationships

- Describe how the child’s relationship with each caregiver is supported or undermined
- Include observations from schools, therapists, and other collateral sources

7. Practice Considerations

- Avoid framing this as “high-conflict parenting”; name patterns of control and fear
- Center the child’s safety, stability, and relationships with safe caregivers
- Consider how race, disability, immigration, and poverty shape risk and system responses

Conclusion

Coercive control of children is a child safety issue, not just a parenting disagreement. This framework is designed to help professionals see the full pattern, document it clearly, and advocate for responses that prioritize children’s long-term safety and well-being.

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Show progress

You’re all set — there’s now a dedicated “**Coercive Control Frameworks**” page with:

- An intro section explaining the two frameworks
- One section for **Intimate Relationships – Framework** with its own download button placeholder
- One section for **Children & Youth – Framework** with its own download button placeholder
- A closing **Request Training or Consultation** call-to-action

Next, once you upload the two PDF files, tell me their names and I’ll connect each download button to the correct PDF.