

Coercive Control of Children in Post-Separation Family Violence

A pattern-based framework aligned with Australian family violence law

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How this framework is designed to be used

This framework is designed to assist pattern recognition, professional formulation, safeguarding analysis, and education where children may be affected by coercive control in post-separation family violence. It is intended to help practitioners and decision-makers look beyond isolated incidents and consider repeated relational patterns, behavioural contingencies, developmental impacts, and the conditions shaping a child's expressed position.

Safeguarding and misuse limitation

This framework must not be used to dismiss genuine allegations of abuse, neglect, family violence, sexual abuse, or child safety risk. Where safety concerns are raised, they require proper safeguarding, evidence gathering, and trauma-informed assessment. The framework is concerned with patterned coercive use of children, including situations where fear, loyalty pressure, suggestive questioning, narrative control, or adult grievance material may distort the child's expressed position.

Assessment caution

Individual behaviours or child presentations should not be treated as determinative on their own. The framework should be applied through careful differential assessment, collateral information, chronology, developmental analysis, and consideration of genuine safety concerns, parenting capacity, trauma, neurodevelopment, mental health, grief, attachment disruption, and the child's lived relational history.

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Attachment Conditioning and Love Withdrawal

Coercive behaviours

- warmth, approval, gifts, attention, special status given only when the child echoes the controlling adult’s stance
- sulking, coldness, humiliation, silent treatment, or visible hurt or disappointment after the child has contact with, shows affection toward, or expresses curiosity about the other parent
- the child is trained to anticipate mood shifts and manage the parent’s emotional state

Possible child indicators

- hypervigilance, scanning, people-pleasing, sudden personality shift after phone calls or changeovers
- shame after expressing balanced feelings
- attachment deactivation towards the targeted parent, emotional flattening, “I don’t care” when history suggests they did

01

Band A: Conditioning and fear (items 01–04)

Surveillance, Invasion of Privacy, and Boundary Violations

Coercive behaviours

- tracking, device checks, reading diaries/messages, listening at doors, recording calls
- questioning after contact like a debrief, searching for loyalty breaches
- using third parties to watch, report, or intervene at school and activities

Possible child indicators

- heightened startle response, secrecy, over-control of speech
- panic when asked neutral questions about time with the other parent
- unusually adult caution about phones, evidence, screenshots, recordings

07

Fear Manufacture and Danger Scripting

Coercive behaviours

- repeated suggestions that the other parent is unsafe, unstable, abusive, or disgusting, without evidence that matches the intensity
- catastrophic storytelling (“If you go there, something will happen”), rehearsed what to do scripts that amplify threat
- planting disgust or moral contamination (“He’s creepy”, “She’s dirty”, “They’re not normal”)

Possible child indicators

- disproportionate fear, phobias, nausea, panic, shutdown at the mention of the targeted parent
- rigid, rehearsed language, adult-like allegations with thin sensory detail, or “I just know” rigid conviction
- avoidance of neutral positives, refusal to elaborate, or intense arousal when asked simple, non-leading questions

02

Role Reversal, Parentification, and Emotional Hostage-Taking

Coercive behaviours

- child positioned as confidant, therapist, ally, protector, or the only one I’ve got
- sharing adult allegations, court content, finances, intimate betrayal narratives, mental health crises, or self-harm threats
- child made responsible for the parent’s wellbeing, loneliness, rage, or safety

Possible child indicators

- chronic anxiety, insomnia, somatic complaints, depression, self-blame
- over-maturity, caretaking language, emotional numbing
- intense anger at the targeted parent for causing the controlling adult’s distress

08

Reality Control, Narrative Seeding, and Memory Shaping

Coercive behaviours

- rewriting the child’s memories (“That didn’t happen”, “You were miserable there”, “You cried every time”)
- repeated retellings until the child adopts the account as their own, coached rigid conviction, coached indignation
- explaining the targeted parent’s motives as malicious, then treating the explanation as proven fact

Possible child indicators

- black-and-white thinking, global denigration, historical revision (“I never loved them”)
- borrowed phrases and legal jargon used incorrectly but confidently
- contradictions across time, or facts that match the controlling adult’s grievances rather than the child’s lived experience

03

Inducements, Bribery, and Comparative Parenting Traps

Coercive behaviours

- special privileges, money, freedom, gifts, fun parent leverage, contrasted with “they’re strict/boring”
- engineered moments where the child must choose the reward or face loss
- shaming the targeted parent as inadequate, stingy, or inferior

Possible child indicators

- transactional relating, contempt for boundaries, entitlement framed as justice
- increased defiance specifically directed at the targeted parent
- sudden re-labelling of normal parenting as abuse when limits are set

09

Loyalty Binds and Forced Choosing

Coercive behaviours

- “If you love me, you won’t go”, “After everything I’ve done”, “I’m the only one who’s been there”
- creating a moral hierarchy where choosing the targeted parent equals betrayal, cruelty, or stupidity
- secret-keeping demands, tests (“Tell me what they said”), and traps (“You didn’t defend me”)

Possible child indicators

- guilt, fawning, appeasement, fear of getting in trouble for warmth, tears after enjoying time with the targeted parent
- refusal framed as moral righteousness, contempt as virtue
- compulsive reporting, interrogating the targeted parent, policing their tone, searching for proof

04

Professional System Manipulation and Credibility Warfare

Coercive behaviours

- recruiting teachers, coaches, doctors, therapists, and child protection through selective disclosure and strategic vulnerability
- exaggerating risk, omitting context, reverse-victim narratives, persistent complaint-making
- creating a paper trail that looks like concern but functions as control

Possible child indicators

- the child’s distress appears highly contingent on particular prompts, audiences, professional settings, or adult narratives
- the child’s account to professionals closely mirrors adult framing, grievance language, or case theory, particularly where the child has had repeated exposure to that material
- fear of consequences if they don’t maintain the story with outsiders

10

Isolation and Relationship Sabotage

Coercive behaviours

- obstructing contact through cancellations, reduced time, last-minute changes, or presenting refusal as the child’s independent choice
- blocking or undermining relationships with extended family, siblings, grandparents, cultural or community connections linked to the targeted parent
- withdrawing approval, affection, or safety when relational closeness occurs

Possible child indicators

- shrinking social world, loss of protective relationships, and narrowing identity
- sudden hostility or indifference towards previously loved relatives with vague or adult-derived explanations
- insistence that isolation is my choice alongside visible anxiety or agitation

05

Band B: Isolation and gatekeeping (items 05–08)

Legal and Administrative Abuse via the Child

Coercive behaviours

- weaponising court orders, changeovers, school enrolments, medical consent, passports, and complaints to control access and identity
- using police call-outs, welfare checks, contrived incidents, or accusations around contact points
- rehearsed accounts, fear of getting it wrong
- escalating rigidity and hostility after each legal event

Possible child indicators

- procedural trauma, dread of handovers, shutdown near official processes
- rehearsed accounts, fear of getting it wrong
- escalating rigidity and hostility after each legal event

11

Information Gatekeeping and Communication Takeover

Coercive behaviours

- intercepting messages, speaking for the child, monitoring or restricting communication, and controlling the conditions of contact
- withholding school, medical, extracurricular, or developmental information
- positioning professionals, legal representatives, or process as justification for communication control

Possible child indicators

- inability to communicate freely, checking for permission, or abrupt call termination
- scripted communication or avoidance of spontaneous expression
- fear of leaving a digital trace, deleting messages, or asking what is allowed to be shared

06

Identity Shaping and Us vs Them Group Psychology

Coercive behaviours

- merging identities (“We are the good ones”), creating an enemy image of the targeted parent and their family
- moralising contempt, mockery, dehumanising labels, disgust cues
- recruiting siblings into hierarchies (golden child, enforcer child, scapegoat child)

Possible child indicators

- loss of complexity, loss of empathy, contempt that feels performative and brittle
- sudden value shift that matches the controlling adult’s worldview
- sibling policing, reporting, bullying, or coordinated rejection

12

Band C: Systems and legal abuse (items 09–12)

Possible child indicators - These presentations are hypothesis-generating indicators. They require careful assessment of timing, repetition, relational pattern, developmental stage, and alternative explanations.

Coercive Control of Children in Post-Separation Family Violence (continued)

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Sexualised Insinuation and Contamination Narratives (where present) Coercive behaviours • introducing sexualised suspicion, insinuations, or creepy framing without substantiated evidence • exposing the child to adult sexual themes, suggestive questioning, or inappropriate disclosures • collapsing boundaries through enmeshment framed as closeness or protection Child signals • disgust or fear paired with vague, adult-like, or incoherent language • sexualised anxiety, shame, avoidance, or hypervigilance • extreme rigid conviction without the capacity to describe concrete events 13	Time Distortion and Developmental Sabotage Coercive behaviours • chronic lateness, rushed handovers, sleep disruption before contact, forgetting equipment, homework, medication, uniforms • scheduling that consistently undermines the child’s capacity to settle, rest, or enjoy time with the targeted parent • framing exhaustion or dysregulation as proof the other parent is harmful Child signals • irritability, emotional lability, shutdown, behavioural escalation that appears context-linked rather than relationally driven • negative associations with the targeted parent that track fatigue rather than experience • academic decline or somatic complaints clustered around transition days 14	Emotional Baiting and Reactive Framing Coercive behaviours • provoking distress in the child immediately before or after contact, then pointing to the reaction as evidence • setting up no-win scenarios (“You can go, but I’ll be alone or unsafe”) • deliberately triggering the targeted parent through the child, then using the reaction to justify further restriction Child signals • confusion about cause and effect (I felt bad, so it must be them) • hyper-responsibility for adult emotions • escalating fear after witnessing adult dysregulation that is later misattributed 15	Narrative Contamination via Concerned Questions Coercive behaviours • repeated pseudo-neutral questioning (“Did anything weird happen?”, “You can tell me if you’re scared”) that primes the child to search for harm • persistent checking, follow-up questioning, or disappointment until the child produces something negative • teaching the child that safety, approval, or protection depends on disclosure of wrongdoing rather than accuracy Child signals • increasing suspicion of neutral or benign events • searching memory for wrongdoing that fits the adult prompt • anxiety, agitation, or distress when nothing bad can be reported 16	Identity Foreclosure and Future-Self Hijacking Coercive behaviours • telling the child who they will become if they maintain contact (“You’ll end up like them”, “You’ll turn out the same”) • framing future success, morality, safety, or worth as contingent on rejecting the targeted parent • collapsing the child’s emerging identity, values, and self-concept into the coercive parent’s worldview and narrative Child signals • premature rigid conviction about identity, values, beliefs, or life direction • fear of becoming tainted, damaged, or morally compromised through connection • rejection framed as self-preservation, survival, or moral necessity rather than preference 17	Grief Obstruction and Loss Invalidation Coercive behaviours • refusing to acknowledge or tolerate the child’s grief for the targeted parent, extended family, or lost time • reframing grief as manipulation, weakness, betrayal, or evidence of indoctrination • preventing mourning rituals, memory-keeping, photographs, stories, anniversaries, or symbolic connection Child signals • frozen grief, emotional numbing, irritability, or displaced rage • shame, guilt, or secrecy about missing the targeted parent or other family members • somatic symptoms clustered around anniversaries, milestones, or reminders 18
Band D: Identity and development (items 13–16)					
Coercive Repair Theatre Coercive behaviours • demanding the child participate in forced reconciliation, therapy tasks, or repair activities on the coercive parent’s terms • insisting on apologies, letters, explanations, or statements that conform to the coercive narrative • presenting staged cooperation or surface compliance as proof the issue is resolved Child signals • performative remorse, hostility, or compliance that collapses outside observation • emotional exhaustion, shutdown, withdrawal, or increased appeasement • worsening internal distress following interventions framed as successful 19	Comparative Victimhood and Moral Inversion Coercive behaviours • positioning the controlling adult as the primary or sole victim of the child’s relationship with the other parent • reframing boundary-setting, limits, or normal parenting by the targeted parent as cruelty or abuse • training the child to defend, justify, or advocate for the controlling adult Child signals • moralised contempt, righteousness, and disproportionate rigid conviction • inability to tolerate nuance, mixed feelings, or competing perspectives • defensive aggression when the dominant narrative is questioned 20	Strategic Compliance and Surface Reasonableness Coercive behaviours • temporary cooperation during investigation, court scrutiny, or professional oversight • selective compliance that meets the letter of requirements while undermining their intent • invoking the child’s choice • language to mask continued pressure and control Child signals • brief improvements that reliably collapse once scrutiny reduces • fear of blame, withdrawal of approval, or retaliation if alignment weakens • sudden narrative shifts that closely track adult pressure 21	Sibling Alignment Engineering Coercive behaviours • assigning roles within sibling groups (spokesperson, enforcer, informant, compliant child) • rewarding rejection or hostility in one child and using it to pressure others • pitting siblings against each other to secure safety, approval, or resources Child signals • sibling surveillance, reporting, bullying, or coordinated narratives • anxiety about getting out of line or breaking rank • fractured sibling bonds that persist beyond the immediate context 22	Shame Induction and Character Assassination by Proxy Coercive behaviours • attacking the targeted parent’s character, morality, sexuality, or sanity in front of the child • implying the child shares those defects through association, biology, or loyalty • using ridicule, disgust, or moral superiority rather than overt hostility Child signals • identity shame, self-disgust, or repudiation of half of the self • contempt that functions to manage fear of contamination • dissociation, splitting, or rigid identity positioning 23	Exit Blocking and Autonomy Suppression Coercive behaviours • discouraging independent thought, therapy, reflection, or private communication unless controlled • undermining the child’s confidence in their own perceptions, memories, and interpretations • framing autonomy, differentiation, or questioning as danger, betrayal, or harm Child signals • paralysis around decision-making or independent judgement • excessive reliance on the coercive parent’s interpretation of events • fear of thinking, speaking, or reflecting freely 24
Band F: Family system engineering (items 21–24)					

Key Processes Underpinning Coercive Control of Children

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Narrative seeding

The repeated introduction of emotionally weighted interpretations that override a child’s direct perception and establish the controlling adult as the authoritative interpreter of reality.

01

Memory shaping

The progressive reorganisation of a child’s autobiographical memory through moralised retellings, such that lived experience is replaced by inherited narrative.

02

Affective tagging

The pairing of a person, relationship, or memory with fear, disgust, or anxiety so emotional responses are triggered automatically, without conscious appraisal.

03

Epistemic dependency

Erosion of autonomous reasoning whereby the child relies on the controlling adult to interpret events, assign moral meaning, and determine truth.

04

Epistemic closure

Defensive filtering of new information through imposed belief systems, where contradiction is experienced as threat rather than data.

05

Fear conditioning

Associative learning in which contact, curiosity, or warmth toward the targeted parent becomes paired with distress or danger cues.

06

Psychological Mechanisms (items 01 – 10)

Operant conditioning (coercive context)

Behavioural shaping through reward and withdrawal, where compliance restores safety and non-compliance produces relational threat.

07

Attachment inversion

Reversal of perceived safety within attachment hierarchies, where the controlling parent becomes the secure base and the targeted parent is recoded as unsafe.

08

Authority inversion

Transfer of interpretive authority away from the child’s own experience toward the controlling adult as the final arbiter of meaning, safety, and morality.

09

Affective amplification

Deliberate magnification of emotional tone (fear, disgust, moral alarm) to override reflective processing and accelerate conditioning.

10

attachment deactivation

Learned inhibition of attachment behaviours toward a formerly secure parent due to conditioned associations between closeness and threat.

11

Conditioned avoidance

Involuntary suppression of approach or curiosity toward the targeted parent, maintained by anxiety relief rather than rejection.

12

Adaptive Responses in Children (items 11 – 17)

Term introduced by Amanda Sillars (2025)

Survival-based rejection

Defensive rejection of a parent or family member assessed as safe or sufficiently safe, arising from fear, dependency, and disrupted attachment under coercive control, and experienced by the child as necessary for self-protection and relational safety.

13

Displacement of affect (emotion)

Redirection of fear, anger, or guilt away from the controlling adult toward the targeted parent in order to preserve attachment safety and reduce perceived threat within the controlling relationship.

14

Psychological splitting

Context-specific division of the targeted parent or family members into ‘all bad’ categories to manage anxiety and preserve narrative coherence, with broader generalisation occurring only under prolonged coercive reinforcement.

15

Learned helplessness

Conditioned passivity and withdrawal resulting from chronic erosion of perceived agency within coercive relational systems.

16

Compliance-based identity masking

Presentation of a compliant, aligned self while suppressing disallowed emotional or relational aspects in order to maintain safety, approval, or stability within a coercive relational environment.

17

Identity diffusion

Fragmentation of self-concept caused by chronic conflict between imposed loyalty demands and authentic emotional experience, resulting in instability of values, belonging, and self-definition.

18

Developmental and Relational Outcomes (18–25)

Moral rigidity

Defensive moral absolutism that replaces reflective reasoning with rehearsed rigid conviction in order to stabilise identity and reduce internal conflict under coercive pressure.

19

Moral contamination

Internalised guilt or shame associated with positive feelings toward the targeted parent, experienced as disloyalty or moral failure that must be suppressed.

20

Pseudo-maturity

Surface sophistication or rigid conviction masking anxiety, role confusion, and arrested emotional development, often maintained to secure approval or safety.

21

Compliance-based alignment

Observable behavioural and cognitive synchrony with the controlling adult maintained through fear, guilt, and dependency rather than genuine relational preference.

22

Relational autonomy erosion

Progressive loss of the child’s capacity to form, evaluate, and maintain relationships independently of coercive influence over time.

23

Erosion of self-attunement

Progressive reduction in the child’s ability to notice, trust, and respond to their internal emotional and cognitive states due to prolonged coercive influence.

24

Overstepping Adult–Child Boundaries

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Core Boundary–Violating Behaviours

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Emotional parentification The child is relied upon to regulate, comfort, reassure, or emotionally stabilise the adult, including managing the adult’s distress, anger, fear, or loneliness. The child’s own emotional needs are deprioritised, and the relationship shifts from caregiving to caretaking.	Adult disclosure and venting The adult shares grievances, allegations, legal conflict, financial stress, or emotionally charged details with the child, positioning them as a confidant. This exposes the child to adult burdens they cannot process or resolve and undermines the child’s sense of safety and role clarity.	Loyalty solicitation The child is pressured, implicitly or explicitly, to agree with, defend, side with, or advocate for the adult’s perspective, or to reject, criticise, monitor, or distance themselves from another parent or family member. Loyalty becomes a condition of emotional safety.	Use of the child for surveillance or intelligence gathering The child is encouraged, prompted, or expected to observe, report on, or relay information about another parent or family member’s behaviour, communications, routines, or emotional state, positioning the child as a covert observer rather than a protected dependent.	Interrogation and narrative extraction The child is repeatedly questioned, cross-examined, or pressed for details about interactions, conversations, or experiences with another parent or family member, creating pressure to provide answers that align with the adult’s expectations.	← These practices commonly result in children altering, omitting, exaggerating, or fabricating details, not out of deceit, but as an adaptive strategy to reduce pressure, avoid consequences, or preserve attachment safety.
Role confusion The child is treated as an equal, advisor, advocate, protector, or partner substitute, blurring the boundary between adult responsibility and child dependency. The child is positioned as emotionally or morally responsible for adult outcomes.	Authority inversion The child is encouraged or permitted to judge, evaluate, discipline, or determine the safety, credibility, or moral standing of another adult or caregiver, undermining appropriate adult authority structures and distorting relational hierarchies.	Boundary erosion through over-involvement The adult intrudes excessively into the child’s thoughts, communications, feelings, or relationships, framing this as closeness, transparency, or protection. This restricts the child’s autonomy and conditions the child to accept monitoring as care.	Use of the child as messenger or intermediary Adult communication, conflict, negotiation, or information-passing is routed through the child, placing them in the middle of dynamics they cannot control, resolve, or safely carry, and exposing them to adult tension and responsibility.	Exposure to adult conflict and litigation The child is involved in, informed about, or exposed to legal processes, allegations, evidence-gathering, or adult disputes, creating fear, confusion, or a perceived obligation to take responsibility for outcomes.	Conditional emotional availability Warmth, approval, attention, or stability is offered or withdrawn depending on the child’s emotional alignment, agreement, or compliance. The child learns that safety and connection are contingent rather than reliable.

Triangulation The child is positioned as the emotional bridge, buffer, or leverage point between adults, carrying information, regulating tension, or absorbing hostility that should be managed directly between adults.	Decision–burdening The child is asked to make choices or express preferences about adult matters such as contact, residence, safety assessments, or legal positions, exceeding their developmental capacity and generating anxiety, guilt, or fear of consequences.	Normalisation of adult dependence The adult frames reliance on the child as mutual closeness, maturity, or specialness, obscuring the imbalance of power and responsibility and making the boundary violation harder for the child to recognise or resist.
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Adult–child boundary violations occur when an adult places a child in roles, conversations, decisions, or emotional positions that exceed the child’s developmental capacity or compromise their psychological safety. In post-separation contexts, boundary violations are often framed as closeness, honesty, protection, or reliance, but function to burden the child, distort attachment, and undermine autonomy.

These behaviours are not benign. They are associated with elevated risk of trauma, anxiety, identity disturbance, and impaired relational development.

Common justifications used by adults
(These do not make the behaviour safe)

- “I’m just being honest with them”
- “They’re very mature for their age”
- “They want to know”
- “I don’t have anyone else to talk to”
- “They need to understand what the other parent is like”
- “I’m protecting them”

Developmental maturity does not equal emotional capacity for adult burdens.

How boundary violations show up in children

- Hypervigilance about adult emotions
- Excessive responsibility or guilt
- People-pleasing and compliance
- Anxiety linked to pleasing or protecting the adult
- Black-and-white thinking about adults
- Suppression of needs, sadness, or anger
- Fear of upsetting the adult
- Premature maturity masking distress
- Conflicted loyalty and shame
- Withdrawal or hostility toward the targeted parent or family members

These responses reflect adaptive survival strategies under relational pressure, rather than wilful behaviour.

Why this is legally and professionally significant

- Boundary violations can undermine psychological safety, attachment, autonomy, and development
- They can condition compliance, secrecy, emotional caretaking, and fear of consequence
- They can distort a child’s views or account where questioning, rehearsal, pressure, reward, withdrawal, or adult disclosure shape what the child feels able to say
- Repeated or severe violations may raise safeguarding concerns, even without physical harm

In legal and child protection settings, repeated boundary violations warrant concern when paired with fear, loyalty pressure, adultification, suggestive questioning, narrative control, or interference with safe relationships.

What healthy adult–child boundaries look like

- Adults manage their own emotions and seek adult support
- Children are not asked to take sides or carry adult information
- The child’s relationship with each parent is respected
- Adults communicate directly with other adults
- The child is allowed to be a child, emotionally, cognitively, and relationally

Healthy boundaries protect the child’s role, autonomy, and developmental safety.

Bottom line

- Children are not:
- therapists
 - confidants
 - allies
 - messengers
 - protectors
 - decision-makers in adult conflict

When adult–child boundaries are crossed, the harm is not mitigated by intent, love, or explanation. The issue is impact, role confusion, and developmental burden.



Legal Alignment Note: Coercive Control and Family Violence in Australia

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In Australia, the law recognises patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour as a form of family violence and domestic abuse. Under federal family law, the Family Law Act 1975 defines family violence to include “violent, threatening or other behaviour by a person that coerces or controls a member of the person’s family, or causes the family member to be fearful”, and this definition encompasses non-physical behaviours that restrict autonomy and relationships. **AustLII**

Australian family law also recognises that family violence can occur before, during and after separation, and that it can affect a person’s ability to parent, participate in legal processes, and make decisions free from fear. The Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (FCFCOA) emphasises both the immediate and longer-term impacts of family violence on all affected family members, including children. **FCFCOA**

It is also relevant to note that Tasmania was the first Australian jurisdiction to legislate against non-physical forms of family violence through the Family Violence Act 2004 (Tas). While the Act was framed primarily around intimate partner relationships and did not explicitly address coercive control of children, it recognised patterns of emotional abuse, intimidation, and controlling behaviour as unlawful. This early legislative recognition laid important groundwork for later coercive control reforms across Australia and supports a pattern-based understanding of family violence beyond physical harm. **Tasmanian Government**

Australian law expressly recognises that children can experience family violence directly or indirectly. Under federal family law, a child is considered to be affected by family violence where they are exposed to coercive or controlling behaviour, including where such behaviour is directed toward another family member and impacts the child’s psychological safety or wellbeing. This includes situations in which a child is manipulated, pressured, caused to fear, or used as a conduit through which coercive control is enacted. The law does not require a child to be the primary target of violence in order for harm to be recognised.

At the state and territory level, there has been ongoing legislative reform to specifically criminalise coercive control in certain jurisdictions. For example:

- New South Wales has, since 1 July 2024, made coercive control a criminal offence where an adult engages in a course of abusive behaviour intended to coerce or control a current or former intimate partner. This offence captures repeated patterns of non-physical and physical abuse that aim to control or dominate another person. **NSW Government**
- Queensland has, since 26 May 2025, implemented a standalone criminal offence of coercive control. This law makes it illegal for an adult to use patterns of abusive behaviour towards a current or former intimate partner, family member, or informal carer with the intention to coerce or control them. **Queensland Government**
- South Australia has passed legislation criminalising coercive control, making it an offence to engage in controlling behaviours in intimate relationships, reflecting a broader trend in recognising coercive conduct as serious harm. **South Australian Government**

Legal reform in other states and territories is ongoing. The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) government is progressing law reform to criminalise coercive control in family and domestic contexts. **ACT Government**

There is also national policy recognition of coercive control through the National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence. These principles provide a shared framework to understand the common features and impacts of coercive control across Australia and to enhance coordinated responses to it. **Attorney-General’s Department**

This framework of coercive control involving children is intended to sit alongside, not replace, existing legal definitions and statutory structures. It focuses on patterns and impacts that align with recognised legal concepts of coercive and controlling behaviour, particularly in the context of family violence and family law, and is designed to assist practitioners and decision-makers to recognise how such patterns may manifest when children are involved, including when the child is used as a conduit for control.

This note does not constitute legal advice and should be interpreted in the context of specific statutory definitions and professional legal guidance.

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