

WHEN A PEACE OFFICER HAS NO PEACE

Coercive Control = A pattern of behavior by an abuser to dominate, isolate & intimidate an intimate partner.

Three Primary Goals

- Establish Control
- Maintain Control
- Erode Autonomy Over Time

An “invisible cage” that keeps the victim trapped, even when there are no visible bruises.

Achieve power through fear but also through confusion, humiliation and depriving freedom.

Common behaviors

- Emotional Manipulation
- Monitoring & Surveillance
- Regulation of Daily Life
- Threats & Intimidation
- Isolation
- Financial Control
- Using Children (including pseudo-children)
- Degradation & Humiliation

Acts don't have to be physical to be abuse.

Coercive control often precedes physical abuse.

Victims may not identify themselves as abuse if physical abuse hasn't occurred.

They often lack insight their autonomy has been stripped.

Navigating it Sworn

- Weaponizing Career & Reputation
 - Threatening to report the victim to Internal Affairs and/or licensing agencies for misconduct
 - Saying “go ahead and tell someone – I'll tell them you're crazy or unstable. They'll take your gun and badge.”
 - Recording private arguments to use as “evidence” of the victim being unfit for duty
 - Threatening to spread rumors about fraternization, alcohol use, or mental health issues
 - Manipulating or posting photos or texts that could embarrass the victim professionally
 - Doing things to intentionally get her in trouble
- Using Knowledge of Law Enforcement Procedures
 - The abuser knows how investigations, protective orders, and report writing work
 - They use this to intimidate or dissuade the victim from seeking help
 - Coaching the victim on what not to say in a report to avoid mandatory investigations

- Presenting/threatening to present physical acts as “mutual combat”
 - Presenting/threatening to claim the victim was the aggressor
 - Citing policy: “If you admit you’re scared, they’ll make you turn in your firearm”
 - Using cop jargon to minimize – “It’s just verbal” or there’s “no PC” for an arrest
- Control Through Professional Isolation
 - Discouraging or mocking peer support
 - “You’re going to the shrink again?”
 - “I thought you were tougher than that”
 - Creating jealousy around work partners or teammates
 - Monitoring duty schedule, radio traffic, cameras, court calendar
 - Showing up while the victim is on shift just to “check in”
- Manipulating Role-Related Guilt and Duty
 - Abusers exploit the victim’s sense of loyalty, duty, and “protector” mindset
 - “You of all people should understand stress”
 - Guilt-tripping – “You swore to protect others, but you’d destroy your own family?”
 - Convincing the victim that disclosure would “ruin both our careers”
 - “It will make the department look bad”
 - Using rank or seniority as leverage – “You know how chain command works”
- Surveillance and Information Exploitation
 - Using agency resources (databases, CAD, license plate records) to monitor the victim and their friends/family
 - Using GPS/jail cameras
 - Knowing victim’s schedule and using it to manipulate timing to confront or message them
 - Threatening to leak case information or personal data
 - Demanding access to professional devices under the guise of “trust”
 - Directly using the victim’s login
- Emotional and Psychological Undermining
 - Attacks personal confidence and professional identity
 - “You’re supposed to be trained to handle stress. Why are you crying?”
 - “If you can’t handle me, how do you handle suspects?”
 - Mocking the victim’s trauma exposure
 - Implying they’re cold and unlovable because of the job
 - Sabotaging rest before shift
 - Mocking poor performance – “Maybe you’re not cut out for this”
 - Using compassion fatigue or critical-incident
 - “You’re a mess after that call. Everyone knows it.”
- Control Through Shared Law Enforcement Culture
 - Invoking “thin blue line” or “family business” mindset to ensure silence
 - “Cops don’t call the cops”
 - Suggesting reporting will label the victim as a “liability” or “drama”
 - Recruiting mutual coworkers to pressure the victim to “work it out privately”

Documentation is Vital

- Especially if there is a delay to report
- Consider covert documenting
 - Calendar notes
 - Notes in your phone vs a separate notebook/journal
 - Email yourself

Criminal Reporting

- Initial report in jurisdiction (consider using a pseudonym)
- Criminal investigation
- Code violation?
- Arrest-bond
- Criminal Consequences

IA Reporting

- Written complaint
- Administrative investigation
- Policy violation? – Does your agency have a policy that adequately addresses Domestic Violence?
- Suspensions/Reassignment
- Disciplinary actions

Danger Assessment

- Woman who were threatened or assaulted with a gun or other weapon were 20 times more likely than other women to be murdered
- Women whose partners threatened them with murder were 15 times more likely than other women to be killed
- When a gun was in the house, an abused woman was 6 times more likely than other abused women to be killed
- Prior acts of strangulation were present in 43% of homicides
- Strangulation is not just a “red flag” – It’s attempted murder
- The most dangerous time for any victim is in leaving
- When abusers fear loss of control, they change and escalate tactics.
- The ultimate of which is homicide.

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Safety Planning is Vital

- Identity Safe Place
- Signals & Code Words
- Keepa Charged Phone
- Escape Route
- Plan with Children
- Emergency Bag
- Digital Safety
- Legal Protections
- Workplace Safety
- Emotional & Supportive Safety

Other Considerations for Sworn Staff

- Damage to reputation
- Reassignment / restricted duties **may increase volatility
- Potential financial loss
- Facing loss of job

These situations are complex and compounded. Consider professional guidance for coping and healing.

- Employee assistance
- Insurance
- Psychology Today
- Local DV Programs



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