



The Center for the
**STUDY & PREVENTION OF
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

Coercive Control: Supporting Survivors in Crafting Legible Narratives

2:00-2:05- Welcome

2:05-2:30- Foundational concepts (links between coercive control and lethal violence)

2:30-3:25- Strategies for working with survivors to fill out PFAs and testify in court

3:25-3:30- Conclusion

Presented by: Dr. Angela Hattery and Maria Paula Mendoza, MA

Coercive Control

Some abusers are able to **exert complete control** over a survivor's every action without ever using physical violence or only using subtle threats of violence. However, **abusive behaviors will combine and escalate over time.**



Examples of Coercive Control

- Taking control over every aspect of a survivor's life by tracking phones, cars, and social media presence and dictating where they can go, who they can see, and what they can do
- Isolating survivors by preventing them from leaving the house or seeing friends and family
- Using the threat of physical, sexual, and/or financial abuse to control survivors' behavior
- Denying the survivor with basic necessities such as food and medical services
- Harming or threatening to harm children or pets

Legal Abuse

The legal system can be a vehicle for coercive control through frivolous court filings or false allegations of child abuse



Lethality Assessment Protocol (LAP)

- Instances of coercive control are a strong predictor for subsequent violence, including homicide
 - Research suggests that coercive control is a better predictor of future violence than previous experiences of violence
- Some instances of coercive control are screened for in the Lethality Assessment Protocol

Distinguishing Innocuous Behaviors vs. Coercive Control

- Consider the survivor's perspective and why an action may feel threatening to them
- Understand the history of the relationship - domestic violence is not just a one-off event
- Coercive control is intentional
 - The goal is control and these tactics are being intentionally used to enforce that control through fear

Identifying Patterns

- Coercive control is about patterns, but identifying these patterns can be difficult
- Effects are cumulative
- What are strategies you have utilized to unpack survivors' experiences and identify patterns of coercive control?

Challenges in the Courtroom

- Tension between a PFA hearing's focus on individual incidents and the cumulative realities of coercive control
- Difficulty in identifying new instances of abuse during hearing (if not mentioned in the petition)
- Coercive control often is rooted in prior experiences that may have occurred many years ago
- There may be a lack of traditional evidence

Practice Scenarios

- The following slides depict examples of stories that may arise when talking with survivors
 - How is coercive control present?

Scenario #1

During previous fights, the respondent has methodically cleaned his gun in front of the petitioner and has threatened to kill her with it. In the instance detailed in the PFA petition, the respondent starts to clean his gun, though the petitioner quickly leaves without explicit threats.

The respondent claims that he cleans his gun to calm down in tense situations and that he has never physically abused the petitioner.

Scenario #2

For the first several years of the abusive relationship, the respondent would physically assault the petitioner if he arrived home even a few minutes late. In order to avoid beatings, the petitioner set alarms on his phone to prevent being late.

Recently, the respondent prohibited him from visiting his mother in the hospital. Even though she has not assaulted him in over two years, he decided this was the last straw and wants to file for a PFA.

Scenario #3

The respondent and petitioner are Mexican and came to the United States together 3 years ago. Since then, the respondent has become physically and financially abusive. The petitioner has never reported the violence.

After breaking up, the respondent sent her videos of a witch performing spells intending to hex her six year old daughter. The petitioner is terrified for her daughter's safety and decided to apply for a PFA to protect them both.

Scenario #4



Scenario #5



Scenario #6



Other Examples?

Are there any examples of coercive control you have encountered in your work that you would like to share?

Strategies for Crafting Legible Narratives

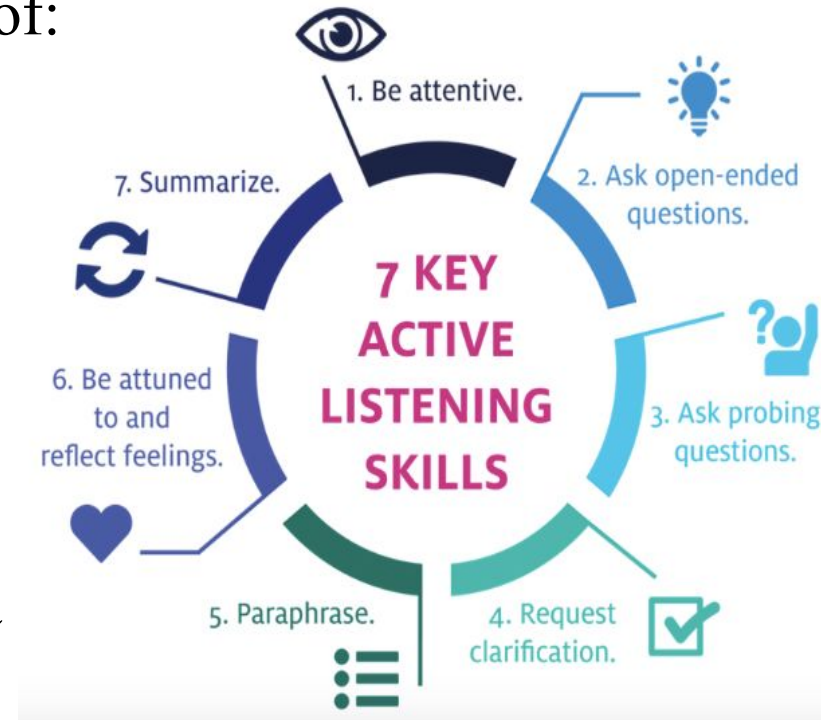
- Begin early (at intake, before filing for PFA/custody)
- Be as thorough as possible when asking questions
 - How does this instance relate to prior experiences?
 - What happened the last time?
 - How did this make you feel?
 - Why did this frighten you?
 - When and why did you start to feel this way?

Trauma Informed Active Listening

Trauma informed listening consists of:

- (1) Active listening
- (2) Listening with empathy
- (3) Listening while withholding judgement

How does an action impact the survivor? How do they interpret a given interaction?



Documentation Strategies

- Encourage survivors' to make a record of instances of coercive control, including details such as:
 - Date/time
 - What happened, what was specifically said or done
 - What their partner wanted
 - What the survivor did in response
 - Any resulting consequences
 - Any witnesses present
 - Evidence they can present (texts, audios, photos, journal entries)

Safety Considerations

- Documentation is important though survivors' safety always comes first
- Consider advising the following options
 - Write in code (e.g. as a grocery list)
 - Have a trusted family member or friend keep track of incidents
 - Store somewhere the abusive partner cannot access
- Be mindful of technology!

Potential Statements

- I changed my behavior because I was afraid of how my partner would react
- I felt that I needed permission to make everyday decisions
- I felt that I had to constantly monitor my partner's mood or reactions
- I felt afraid of what would happen if I did not comply with my partner's demands
- I felt that I could not safely say "no"
- I felt that my partner made me doubt my ability to make decisions on my own

Practice Scenarios

- Now, returning back to our practice scenarios
 - How would you help survivors recall and identify these instances?
 - What strategies would you advise the survivor use to document these instances?

Key Takeaways

- What is coercive control and how can we identify it?
- What are the challenges associated with demonstrating coercive control in legal settings?
- What strategies can survivors use to document instances of coercive control?

Understanding these concepts can make your advocacy more effective!

Contact Us

- Co-directors' email:
 - Dr. Angela Hattery:
hattery@udel.edu
 - Dr. Jennifer Naccarelli:
jnacc@udel.edu
- Website:
<https://www.udel.edu/wgs/gbv>
- Facebook and Instagram:
[@UDcenterforGBV](#)

