

# psychological control in relationships

**psychological control in relationships** is a complex and often subtle form of influence that can profoundly affect the dynamics between partners. It involves manipulating another person's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors to gain dominance or maintain power within a relationship. This type of control can be difficult to detect because it may not always manifest through overt actions but rather through psychological tactics such as guilt-tripping, gaslighting, or isolating a partner from support networks. Understanding psychological control is essential for recognizing unhealthy patterns that can lead to emotional distress and diminish one's sense of autonomy. This article explores the defining characteristics, common tactics, impacts, and potential coping strategies related to psychological control in relationships. The following sections provide an in-depth analysis to help identify and address this critical issue.

- What is Psychological Control in Relationships?
- Common Tactics of Psychological Control
- Signs and Symptoms of Psychological Control
- Effects of Psychological Control on Mental Health
- How to Address and Overcome Psychological Control

## What is Psychological Control in Relationships?

Psychological control in relationships refers to a pattern of behaviors where one partner seeks to dominate or manipulate the other through mental and emotional means rather than physical force. It involves exerting influence over a partner's thoughts, feelings, and decisions, often undermining their independence and self-esteem. Unlike physical control, psychological control operates through covert mechanisms that can erode trust and create an imbalance of power. This form of control is often linked to emotional abuse, as it targets the victim's sense of self and autonomy within the relationship.

## Definition and Characteristics

Psychological control is characterized by tactics that restrict a partner's freedom of thought and behavior. These may include persistent criticism, invalidation of feelings, manipulation of emotions, and the use of fear or guilt to influence decisions. The controlling partner may seek to isolate the

other from friends and family, monitor their activities, and impose rules that limit personal expression. This dynamic fosters dependency and can cause the controlled individual to question their own perceptions and judgment.

## **Differences Between Psychological and Physical Control**

While physical control involves direct bodily harm or physical coercion, psychological control is more subtle and focuses on mental and emotional manipulation. Physical control is often visible and can include violence or intimidation, whereas psychological control may not leave visible marks but can be equally damaging. Both forms of control may coexist, but psychological control is particularly insidious because it can be harder to recognize and address.

## **Common Tactics of Psychological Control**

Partners who employ psychological control use a variety of manipulative tactics designed to dominate and restrict their significant other's autonomy. These tactics often erode the victim's confidence and create a dependency that makes leaving the relationship difficult.

### **Gaslighting**

Gaslighting is a psychological manipulation technique where the controlling partner causes the victim to doubt their own memory, perception, or sanity. By denying facts, twisting reality, or dismissing the victim's feelings, the manipulator gains power and control over the victim's sense of reality.

### **Guilt-Tripping**

Guilt-tripping involves making the partner feel responsible for the controlling partner's emotions or problems. This tactic pressures the victim into compliance by exploiting their empathy and desire to maintain harmony in the relationship.

### **Isolation**

Isolation is a method of psychological control where the controlling partner restricts the victim's contacts with friends, family, or support systems. This tactic increases dependence on the controlling partner and reduces the victim's ability to seek help or alternative perspectives.

## **Monitoring and Surveillance**

Constant monitoring of activities, communications, and whereabouts serves as a way to maintain control and prevent autonomy. This can include checking phones, emails, social media, or demanding detailed accounts of daily actions.

## **Emotional Withholding**

Withholding affection, approval, or communication as a form of punishment manipulates the victim's emotions and reinforces control. This tactic leverages the victim's need for emotional connection to enforce compliance.

## **Signs and Symptoms of Psychological Control**

Detecting psychological control in relationships can be challenging due to its subtle nature. However, there are distinct signs and symptoms that indicate the presence of controlling dynamics.

## **Behavioral Indicators**

Victims of psychological control often show changes in behavior, such as increased anxiety, withdrawal from social activities, or reluctance to express opinions. They may demonstrate excessive compliance or fear of upsetting their partner.

## **Emotional and Psychological Signs**

Feelings of confusion, self-doubt, low self-esteem, and chronic stress are common among individuals experiencing psychological control. Emotional numbness or heightened sensitivity to criticism may also be present.

- Feeling isolated from friends and family
- Constantly apologizing or feeling responsible for conflicts
- Difficulty making decisions independently
- Experiencing frequent mood swings or emotional exhaustion
- Fear of expressing true thoughts or feelings

## **Impact on Communication**

Communication patterns often change under psychological control. Victims may avoid certain topics, provide guarded responses, or experience frequent misunderstandings due to fear of negative consequences.

## **Effects of Psychological Control on Mental Health**

The mental health impact of psychological control in relationships can be severe and long-lasting. The persistent erosion of autonomy and self-worth contributes to a range of psychological disorders and emotional difficulties.

### **Anxiety and Depression**

Continuous psychological manipulation often leads to chronic anxiety and depression. The victim may feel trapped, helpless, or hopeless, which exacerbates feelings of sadness and fear.

### **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

In some cases, prolonged exposure to psychological control can result in PTSD symptoms, including flashbacks, hypervigilance, and emotional numbness. The psychological trauma stems from sustained emotional abuse and powerlessness.

### **Low Self-Esteem and Identity Loss**

Psychological control undermines an individual's confidence and can lead to a fragmented sense of self. Victims often struggle with self-identity and may lose touch with their values and desires as a result of manipulation.

### **Physical Health Consequences**

Although psychological control is non-physical, its stress-related effects can manifest physically. Common outcomes include headaches, gastrointestinal issues, sleep disturbances, and weakened immune function.

## **How to Address and Overcome Psychological Control**

Recognizing and addressing psychological control is crucial for restoring

autonomy and well-being. Interventions may involve personal strategies, professional help, and support networks.

## **Recognizing the Problem**

The first step in overcoming psychological control is identifying and acknowledging its presence. Awareness empowers the individual to seek change and break free from harmful patterns.

## **Setting Boundaries**

Establishing clear and firm boundaries is essential to limit the controlling partner's influence. This includes asserting personal needs, refusing manipulative demands, and communicating limits effectively.

## **Seeking Professional Support**

Therapy or counseling can provide victims with tools to rebuild self-esteem, develop healthy coping strategies, and navigate the complexities of leaving or redefining the relationship. Mental health professionals can also assist in addressing trauma related to psychological abuse.

## **Building a Support System**

Reconnecting with trusted friends, family, or support groups reduces isolation and reinforces emotional resilience. Social support plays a critical role in recovery and empowerment.

1. Identify controlling behaviors and acknowledge their impact.
2. Communicate boundaries clearly and consistently.
3. Engage with mental health professionals for guidance.
4. Seek support from friends, family, or community groups.
5. Consider safety planning if the relationship escalates to abuse.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

## **What is psychological control in relationships?**

Psychological control in relationships refers to behaviors where one partner attempts to dominate or manipulate the other's thoughts, feelings, and actions to maintain power and control over them.

## **How can psychological control affect mental health?**

Psychological control can lead to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and feelings of helplessness, as the controlled partner may feel trapped and emotionally manipulated.

## **What are common signs of psychological control in a relationship?**

Common signs include manipulation, excessive monitoring, guilt-tripping, withholding affection to punish, isolating the partner from friends and family, and controlling decision-making.

## **How is psychological control different from physical abuse?**

While physical abuse involves bodily harm, psychological control is more about emotional and mental manipulation that undermines the partner's autonomy and self-worth without necessarily involving physical violence.

## **Can psychological control be unintentional?**

Yes, sometimes individuals may exert psychological control unknowingly due to insecurities, past traumas, or unhealthy relationship patterns, but it still negatively impacts the partner's well-being.

## **How can someone protect themselves from psychological control?**

Setting clear boundaries, seeking support from trusted friends or professionals, improving self-awareness, and fostering open communication can help protect against psychological control.

## **Is it possible to recover from psychological control in a relationship?**

Yes, with appropriate support such as therapy, rebuilding self-esteem, and establishing healthy relationship dynamics, individuals can recover from the effects of psychological control.

# When should someone consider ending a relationship due to psychological control?

If psychological control persists despite efforts to address it, causes significant emotional distress, or escalates to other forms of abuse, it may be necessary to consider ending the relationship for one's safety and well-being.

## Additional Resources

### 1. *"The Gift of Fear" by Gavin de Becker*

This book explores the importance of trusting one's intuition to recognize and avoid dangerous situations, including manipulative and controlling relationships. De Becker provides insights into how fear can be a valuable signal that protects individuals from psychological control and abuse. It is an essential read for understanding the early warning signs of controlling behavior.

### 2. *"In Sheep's Clothing: Understanding and Dealing with Manipulative People" by George K. Simon*

George K. Simon delves into the tactics used by covert aggressors who manipulate and control others through subtle psychological means. The book offers practical strategies for identifying manipulation and protecting oneself from emotional abuse. It's particularly useful for anyone dealing with controlling personalities in personal or professional relationships.

### 3. *"Why Does He Do That?: Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men" by Lundy Bancroft*

Lundy Bancroft provides an in-depth look at the mindset of abusive and controlling men, based on years of work with perpetrators of domestic violence. The book sheds light on the patterns of psychological control and offers guidance for victims to understand and break free from these toxic dynamics. It is a powerful resource for understanding power and control in intimate relationships.

### 4. *"Psychopath Free: Recovering from Emotionally Abusive Relationships With Narcissists, Sociopaths, and Other Toxic People" by Jackson MacKenzie*

This book focuses on the aftermath of controlling relationships with toxic individuals, particularly those with narcissistic or sociopathic traits. MacKenzie outlines the psychological impact of such abuse and provides steps toward healing and reclaiming one's life. It is a hopeful guide for survivors seeking freedom from psychological control.

### 5. *"The Covert Passive Aggressive Narcissist: Recognizing the Traits and Finding Healing After Hidden Emotional and Psychological Abuse" by Debbie Mirza*

Debbie Mirza examines the subtle and often hidden forms of psychological control exerted by covert narcissists. The book helps readers identify passive-aggressive behaviors that undermine self-esteem and autonomy in

relationships. It offers practical advice on how to heal and regain control after emotional abuse.

6. *"Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life"* by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend

This influential book teaches readers how to establish and maintain healthy boundaries to prevent psychological control and manipulation in relationships. Cloud and Townsend provide tools to assert oneself and protect personal integrity without guilt. It's an empowering resource for gaining control over one's emotional and relational life.

7. *"Stop Caretaking the Borderline or Narcissist: How to End the Drama and Get On with Life"* by Margalis Fjelstad

This book addresses the challenges of being in relationships with borderline or narcissistic individuals who often use psychological control to dominate others. Fjelstad offers strategies for breaking free from caretaking roles that enable manipulation. It's a practical guide for reclaiming independence and emotional well-being.

8. *"Emotional Blackmail: When the People in Your Life Use Fear, Obligation, and Guilt to Manipulate You"* by Susan Forward

Susan Forward explores the dynamics of emotional blackmail, a common form of psychological control in personal relationships. The book explains how fear, obligation, and guilt are used as tools to manipulate and control others. Forward provides effective techniques for recognizing and resisting emotional blackmail to regain personal power.

9. *"Women Who Love Too Much"* by Robin Norwood

This classic book addresses the psychological patterns that lead some women to become overly involved with controlling or emotionally unavailable partners. Norwood explores the underlying issues that drive such relationships and offers guidance for breaking free from destructive attachment cycles. It is an insightful resource for understanding and overcoming harmful relational control.

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the things they can say. A controlling partner, through fear and intimidation, will seek to ensure their victim is subdued, to the point of accepting any and all abuse that's fired their way. By manipulation, gaslighting, lies, and hurtful insults, the abuser will make their victim a willing puppet on a string, ready to be utilized how the controlling spouse sees fit. Coercive control is seldom talked about in comparison to other forms of abuse, yet it's so commonplace in relationships. Plenty of victims of this type of behavior may not even be aware that's it's full-blown abuse. Many more see controlling behavior as their partner's way of showing they 'care'. In order to shed light on this topic, and reach out to those who need help in understanding and overcoming a controlling partner, I have created this book as their starting point. I was shackled to a malignant narcissist for many years of my life, being controlled and manipulated, day-in, day-out. As a proud survivor of abuse, I feel obligated to help others in their journey towards getting their power back and recovering from the cruel effects of an abusive relationship. This book will cover the following: - what coercive control is - the devastating effects of a controlling relationship - financial coercion - breaking the spell of abuse - coercive control after separating I use my own experiences, as well as those of the survivors I've connected with via Escape the Narcissist, to help piece together the things you need to know about this type of abusive relationship.

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**psychological control in relationships: Students at Risk of School Failure** José Jesús Gázquez, José Carlos Núñez, 2018-10-18 The main objective of this Research Topic is to determine the conditions that place students at risk of school failure, identifying student and context variables. In spite of the fact that there is currently little doubt about how one learns and how to teach, in some countries of the “developed world,” there is still there is a high rate of school failure. Although the term “school failure” is a very complex construct, insofar as its causes, consequences, and development, from the field of educational psychology, the construct “student engagement” has recently gained special interest in an attempt to deal with the serious problem of school failure. School engagement builds on the anatomy of the students’ involvement in school and describes their feelings, behaviors, and thoughts about their school experiences. So, engagement is an important component of students’ school experience, with a close relationship to achievement and school failure. Children who self-set academic goals, attend school regularly and on time, behave well in class, complete their homework, and study at home are likely to interact adequately with the school social and physical environments and perform well in school. In contrast, children who miss school are more likely to display disruptive behaviors in class, miss homework frequently, exhibit violent behaviors on the playground, fail subjects, be retained and, if the behaviors persist, quit school. Moreover, engagement should also be considered as an important school outcome, eliciting more or less supportive reactions from educators. For example, children who display school-engaged behaviors are likely to receive motivational and instructional support from their teachers. The opposite may also be true. But what makes student engage more or less? The relevant literature indicates that personal variables (e.g., sensory, motor, neurodevelopmental, cognitive, motivational, emotional, behavior problems, learning difficulties, addictions), social and/or cultural variables (e.g., negative family conditions, child abuse, cultural deprivation, ethnic conditions, immigration), or school variables (e.g., coexistence at school, bullying, cyberbullying) may concurrently hinder engagement, preventing the student from acquiring the learnings in the same conditions as the rest of the classmates.

**psychological control in relationships: The Development of Relational Aggression** Sarah M. Coyne, Jamie M. Ostrov, 2018 Research over the last few decades has revealed that individuals use a variety of mechanisms to hurt one another, many of which are not physical in nature. In this volume, editors Sarah M. Coyne and Jamie M. Ostrov turn their focus on relational aggression, behavior that is intended to cause harm to another individual's relationships or social standing in the group (e.g., gossiping, social exclusion, and spreading malicious rumors). Unlike physical aggression, the scars of relational aggression are more difficult to detect. However, victims (and their aggressors) may experience strong and long-lasting consequences, including reduced self-esteem, loneliness, depression, anxiety, and more. Over the past 25 years, there has been a growing body of literature on relational aggression and other non-physical forms of aggression that have focused predominantly on gender differences, development, and risk and protective factors. In this volume, the focus turns to the development of relational aggression during childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood. Here, Coyne, Ostrov, and their contributing authors examine a number of risk factors and socializing agents or models (e.g., parenting, peers, media, the classroom) that lead to the development of relational aggression over time. An understanding of how these behaviors develop will inform readers of important intervention strategies to curb the use of relational aggression in schools, peer groups, and in family relationships. The Development of Relational Aggression provides scholars, researchers, practitioners, students, and parents with an extensive resource that will help move the field forward in our understanding of the development of relational aggression for the future.

**psychological control in relationships: Handbook of Parenting** Marc H. Bornstein, 2019-03-08 This highly anticipated third edition of the Handbook of Parenting brings together an array of field-leading experts who have worked in different ways toward understanding the many diverse aspects of parenting. Contributors to the Handbook look to the most recent research and thinking to shed light on topics every parent, professional, and policymaker wonders about. Parenting is a perennially hot topic. After all, everyone who has ever lived has been parented, and the vast majority of people become parents themselves. No wonder bookstores house shelves of how-to parenting books and magazine racks in pharmacies and airports overflow with periodicals that feature parenting advice. However, almost none of these is evidence-based. The Handbook of Parenting is. Period. Each chapter has been written to be read and absorbed in a single sitting, and includes historical considerations of the topic, a discussion of central issues and theory, a review of classical and modern research, and forecasts of future directions of theory and research. Together, the five volumes in the Handbook cover Children and Parenting, the Biology and Ecology of Parenting, Being and Becoming a Parent, Social Conditions and Applied Parenting, and the Practice of Parenting. Volume 1, Children and Parenting, considers parenthood as a functional status in the life cycle: Parents protect, nurture, and teach their progeny, even if human development is more dynamic than can be determined by parental caregiving alone. Volume 1 of the Handbook of Parenting begins with chapters concerned with how children influence parenting. Notable are their more obvious characteristics, like child age or developmental stage; but subtler ones, like child gender, physical state, temperament, mental ability, and other individual-differences factors, are also instrumental. The chapters in Part I, on Parenting across the Lifespan, discuss the unique rewards and special demands of parenting children of different ages and stages – infants, toddlers, youngsters in middle childhood, and adolescents—as well as the modern notion of parent-child relationships in emerging adulthood, adulthood, and old age. The chapters in Part II, on Parenting Children of Varying Status, discuss common issues associated with parenting children of different genders and temperaments as well as unique situations of parenting adopted and foster children and children with a variety of special needs, such as those with extreme talent, born preterm, who are socially withdrawn or aggressive, or who fall on the autistic spectrum, manifest intellectual disabilities, or suffer a chronic health condition.

**psychological control in relationships: The International Journal of Indian Psychology, Volume 4, Issue 2, No. 88** IJIP.In, 2017-02-27

**psychological control in relationships: Internet Use and Psychological Well-Being Among Children and Adolescents** Yangu Pan, Zhaojun Teng, Daniel Tan Lei Shek, Chun Chen, 2024-01-22 Internet use (e.g., smartphone use, social media use) is ubiquitous in our daily lives and plays an increasingly important role in human well-being. Today's adolescents and their parents spend significant amounts of time on technological devices, such as smartphones, especially during COVID-19. In this year, new research shows that nearly half of American teenagers say they use the Internet "almost constantly", 95% of American teens have smartphones, and about 54% of teens said it would be "somewhat hard" to give up social media. Hence, further research on the relationship between Internet use and psychological well-being among children and adolescents is worth pursuing. At the same time, a new interest in this area of research is "parental technoference" which was defined as regular interruptions to real-time face-to-face communications, interactions, or time spent together among family members because of parental use of technology. Technoference has become a common phenomenon in many families with children, and evidence has been identified that extended parental time on technological devices (e.g., smartphones) could have negative effects on parent-child relationships and children's wellbeing. For example, parental phubbing is regarded as a typical parental technoference, and this term is used widely in some countries around the world, which has been demonstrated to be detrimental to their children's developmental outcomes and cause various psychological health problems.

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understanding of parent-child boundaries and the mechanisms for their dissolution. The breakdown of appropriate generational boundaries between parent and child can threaten the child's psychological development. *Implications of Parent-Child Boundary Dissolution for Developmental Psychopathology: Who Is the Parent and Who Is the Child?* explores this covert and oftentimes ignored form of emotional abuse, discussing in detail the various ways it can manifest. This revealing text comprehensively examines how the burden of meeting the emotional needs of the parent interferes with the child's healthy development. The boundary dissolution patterns of role reversal, enmeshment, psychological control, and triangulation are closely examined with an eye toward providing appropriate strategies for dealing with the problem. *Implications of Parent-Child Boundary Dissolution for Developmental Psychopathology* is separated into four sections to focus extensively on every aspect of the problem. The first section discusses definitions, concepts, and methodological concerns of the phenomena, including a consideration of the child's developmental responses to boundary dissolution. The second section explores the empirical research concerning boundary dissolution within the family system, and includes intriguing information on the actual mechanism that passes the pattern of role reversal on to the following generation. The next section closely examines boundary violations within high-risk families, with a focus on those undergoing divorce. The final section concentrates on cultural contexts of boundary dissolution and includes a look at the perception of familial responsibility and its effects on Bosnian youths. This one-of-a-kind resource is extensively referenced, and provides a solid foundation to inspire a new generation of theory, research, and clinical work. *Implications of Parent-Child Boundary Dissolution for Developmental Psychopathology* examines: a multidimensional model of boundary dissolution—with supporting research a comprehensive review of published literature in the areas of attachment theory, developmental capacities of the infant, child-rearing practices, and parental beliefs the theoretical background supporting the construct of boundary dissolution the boundary disturbance patterns of enmeshment and control the relationships between interparental conflict, parental responses to children's emotions, and representations of role reversal and vulnerability in children's family drawings the 'spill over' effect of marital conflict role reversal in high-risk families children's rejection of one parent over another in custody disputes post-war adjustment of Bosnian adolescents psychological control in individualist and collectivist groups representations of parents and children in twentieth century American novels *Implications of Parent-Child Boundary Dissolution for Developmental Psychopathology* is crucial reading for researchers and clinicians who deal with families and psychopathology and is of particular interest to graduate students in clinical child psychology, child and family studies, social work, and developmental psychology.

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**psychological control in relationships: Education And Awareness Of Sustainability - Proceedings Of The 3rd Eurasian Conference On Educational Innovation 2020 (Ecei 2020)** Charles Tijus, Teen-hang Meen, Chun-yen Chang, 2020-11-17 This volume represents the proceedings of the 3rd Eurasian Conference on Educational Innovation 2020 (ECEI 2020). This conference is organized by the International Institute of Knowledge Innovation and Invention (IIKII), and was held on February 5-7, 2020 in Hanoi, Vietnam. ECEI 2020 provides a unified communication platform for researchers in a range of topics in education innovation and other related fields. This proceedings volume enables interdisciplinary collaboration of science and engineering technologists. It is a fine

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**psychological control in relationships: Psychological Courage** Daniel Putman, 2004-04-15  
While the virtues of physical courage and moral courage have a long history in ethics, the courage to face personal psychological problems has never been fully integrated into the discipline. Psychological Courage explores the ethical dimension and multiple facets of the virtue of psychological courage, as dubbed by author Daniel Putman. In this book, Putman outlines three forms of courage: physical, moral, and psychological. He defines psychological courage as the courage to face addictions, phobias, and obsessions, and to avoid self deception and admit mistakes. This book analyzes what psychological courage is and upholds it as a central virtue for human happiness.

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