

# LOVE CREEP

Understanding Coercive Control



Te Mahere Ako | Lesson Guide

LoveBetter



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This resource is designed for use in classrooms across Aotearoa with students aged 16 to 18. It includes teacher background notes, curriculum links, and two structured lesson plans focused on exploring and understanding coercive control. The first session starts by creating a safe, inclusive, and supportive space for honest kōrero.

### **It's never too late to open up the conversation**

Teachers, whānau, and communities all have a role to play in helping rangatahi build healthy, respectful relationships.

This resource is intended as part of a broader, scaffolded approach to relationships and sexuality education. It's most effective when students have already engaged with foundational topics such as consent, healthy relationships, digital safety, and emotional wellbeing. Building on this prior learning, the lessons aim to deepen understanding of coercive control—a complex but essential area of learning for senior secondary students.

Educators are encouraged to use this resource alongside other trusted materials, such as those provided by [\*Sexual Wellbeing Aotearoa\*](#) and programmes delivered by [\*Nest Consulting\*](#).

### **Why Healthy Relationship Education Matters**

Healthy relationships are built on skills, behaviours, and values that support wellbeing and connection. When these skills are taught early and often, rangatahi are better equipped to recognise the difference between respectful relationships and those that may cause harm.

Quality relationship and sexuality education, grounded in best practice and kaupapa Māori, supports the development of safe, supportive, and mana-enhancing connections. Research shows that when this education is done well, it can:

- Reduce the risk of harm, including sexual violence
- Increase the likelihood that first sexual experiences are consensual
- Improve sexual health and increase the use of protection
- Strengthen digital safety and online literacy
- Enhance mental health and emotional wellbeing
- Empower young people to seek help, speak out, and support others

*Sourced from Sex Education Forum*

While coercive control is a form of abuse, it's important to explore it within the broader context of healthy and unhealthy relationships. Without this framing, rangatahi may struggle to distinguish between behaviours that are toxic or concerning and those that are abusive. Unhealthy behaviours may cause hurt, but they do not always escalate to harm or control. Recognising these differences is essential for early intervention and support.

By having regular kōrero about values, feelings, and respectful behaviour—at school, at home, and in the community—we help shape young people's expectations for how they deserve to be treated and how they should treat others.

## Understanding Coercive Control

Coercive control is a pattern of harmful behaviour seen in relationships that is ongoing, repetitive, and cumulative. It can happen slowly and subtly and can be difficult to identify and respond to. People using and experiencing this behaviour can be of any age, gender, and sexuality.

Traditionally, violence and abuse has been understood as a continuum of harm (usually, non-physical behaviour is viewed as less traumatic in contrast to extremely harmful physical violence). Coercive behaviour is a framework of abuse designed to erode a person's autonomy. It is used to micromanage a partner's daily life in order to isolate, dominate and control the other person, keeping them stuck in the relationship. Many people who are victims of coercive control have never been victims of physical violence. Coercive control is often non-physical, it's not always visible and it can go unnoticed or unchallenged. The behaviour almost always gets worse over time.

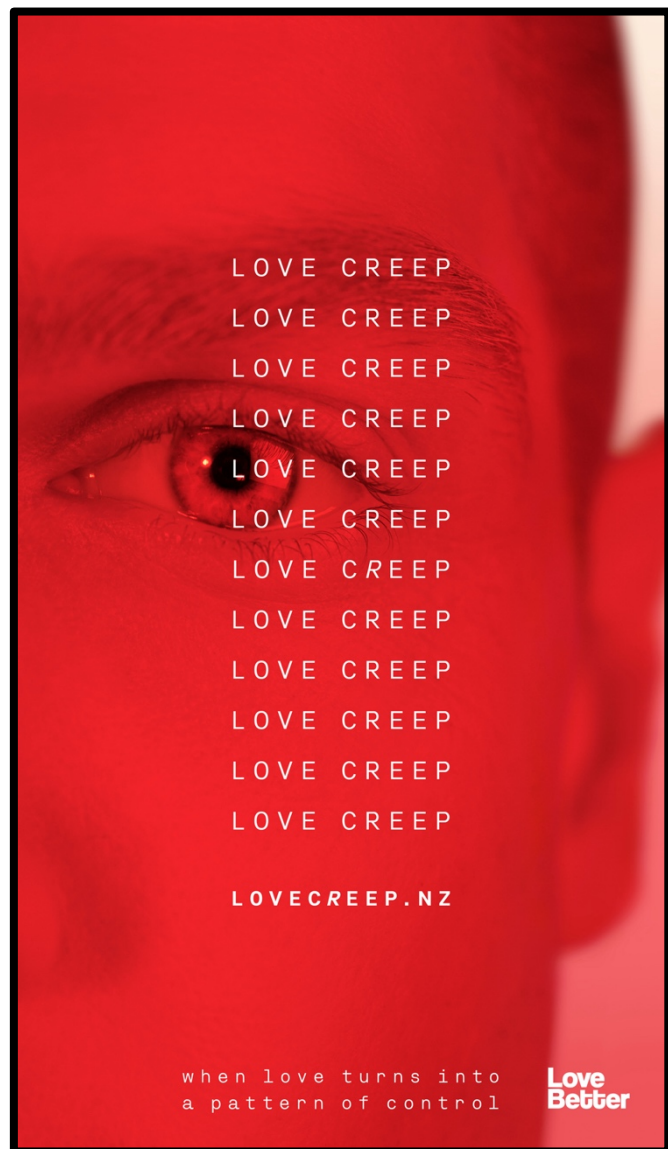
It can be defined by patterns of controlling behaviour that are subtle, repetitive, and cumulative. These behaviours are often disguised as love or care in the beginning—but once the pattern is in place, it can be incredibly hard to break free. Emotional and non-physical abuse can deeply harm someone's confidence, safety, and mana.

This resource is written to explore coercive control from the perspective of a person harming someone and a person being harmed. It's designed to build understanding, spark kōrero, and help rangatahi recognise signs of control in their own lives or their friends'.

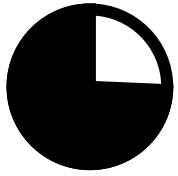
This kaupapa is about recognising the patterns. Trusting your gut when something doesn't feel right. Learning what control looks, sounds, and feels like—and knowing you're not overreacting. The earlier we name it, the earlier we can change it.

**Find more information, stories, and tools:**

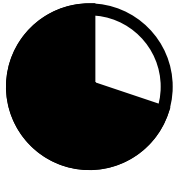
**Check out [Love Creep](#) or the [Love Better Campaign](#)**



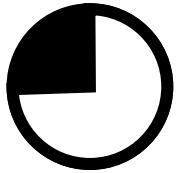




Young people in Aotearoa are three times more likely to experience or use coercive control than the general population **NZ Crime & Safety Survey**



68% of respondents aged 16 – 24 had experienced some form of coercive control **Love Better Campaign Research**



One in four young people in New Zealand reported being in a relationship where they felt afraid of their partner **NZ Family Violence Clearinghouse**

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## The Importance of Understanding Coercive Control

One in three NZ women will be the victims of family and/or sexual violence in her lifetime. Coercive control sits at the heart of this violence, and it often goes unreported.

Research conducted by Love Better identified that young people could identify broad unhealthy aspects of relationships; however, they can struggle to identify coercive control and abusive behaviours beyond physical violence in their own relationships. Young people are often exposed to ideas about relationships through social media, peers, whānau, and even pornography, which can blur the line between what's loving and what's controlling. Unlike physical violence, coercive control can be subtle and confusing—sometimes even mistaken for love or care.

It is common for harmful relationships to be confusing because they may also include behaviour that can make a person feel good and loved. By learning and talking about relationships, both romantic and friendly, young people can learn to identify and untangle the harmful and healthy behaviour. Education can be life-changing—for those being harmed, it may open the door to support or leaving safely. For those causing harm, it can be a turning point toward change.

Together, through kōrero, curiosity, and care, we can help grow a generation of young people who expect and demand relationships that are safe, respectful and nurturing.





**Strand A: Personal Health and Physical Development**

Year Level	Focus	Curriculum Objectives
Year 11 Level 6	Self-awareness, managing personal change, and safety in relationships	A1: Describe factors influencing personal identity and well-being  A3: Demonstrate understanding of how decision-making and risk-taking affect well-being
Year 12 Level 7	Reflecting on values, assessing risk, and developing resilience	A1: Evaluate personal, social, and societal influences on well-being  A3: Investigate strategies for promoting safety in relationships and reducing harm
Year 13 Level 8	Critical thinking about personal development and social influences	A1: Critically analyse the way relationships, beliefs, and practices influence well-being  A3: Critique societal influences that affect risk-taking and safety

**Strand C: Relationships with Other People**

Year Level	Focus	Curriculum Objectives
Year 11 Level 6	Developing relationship skills, understanding consent, and respecting others	C1: Demonstrate strategies for maintaining and enhancing relationships  C2: Describe rights and responsibilities in relationships; show respect for diversity  C3: Use assertive communication and conflict resolution strategies
Year 12 Level 7	Examining power, gender, and communication in relationships	C1: Evaluate interpersonal skills and how they influence relationships  C2: Investigate issues of equity, social justice, and inclusivity in relationships  C3: Apply strategies for managing complex interpersonal situations
Year 13 Level 8	Critically analysing societal norms, media, and the impact on relationships	C1: Critically examine communication and power in intimate relationships  C2: Analyse the impact of societal and cultural factors on respect and inclusion  C3: Evaluate strategies for navigating challenges in adult relationships

## Creating an Emotionally Safe Learning Space

*Adapted from NSPCC Learning UK*

These lesson plans are designed to raise awareness about coercive control and support the development of safe, caring relationships. The content may prompt personal reflection or emotional responses in both students and teachers.

Some participants may have experienced harmful behaviours—either as someone who has been harmed or has harmed others. For some, these lessons may bring that realisation for the first time. It's important to introduce content with care, foster a positive and inclusive learning environment, and ensure all students know where to access support if needed.

Teachers are encouraged to approach these conversations without framing them through judgement, fear, shame, blame, or the assumption that all relationships involve harm. If you have experienced relationship harm yourself, we recommend seeking support before delivering this material.



## Establishing Ground Rules

Setting shared guidelines helps create a respectful space for everyone. Students are more likely to engage meaningfully when they understand what's expected. Develop ground rules together with your class so there's shared understanding and ownership. Include the following:

- We can choose to "pass" if we don't want to answer or join in.
- We listen to each other without judgement.
- We won't share personal stories about ourselves, our whānau, or our friends.
- We can ask questions — but not personal ones of each other or the teacher.

## Vulnerable Students

Some students may have lived experience of harm or may find the content difficult to engage with. Where possible:

- Give a heads-up to ākonga and whānau before teaching this topic.
- Work with pastoral staff for guidance.
- Offer a quiet space or "exit card" option for students who might need a break.
- Keep reminding students where they can go for support — both in school and beyond.

## The Why

Taking time to explain why a topic matters helps build trust and gives young people a sense of ownership over their learning. When ākonga understand the purpose behind a lesson — especially one about relationships, safety, or behaviour — they're more likely to engage meaningfully.

Framing the why also supports autonomy. It shifts learning away from "being told what to think" and instead encourages critical thinking, reflection, and personal connection. It shows that we trust young people to explore big ideas and apply them to their own lives. [Read more here.](#)

The lesson plan provides space for you to unpack the purpose. Sharing a few key statistics or real-world context can help make the learning feel relevant — but avoid overloading students with too much data, as this can feel overwhelming or disengaging.

### **Inclusive Language**

Inclusive language helps every student feel seen, respected, and safe to engage in learning. It acknowledges the diversity of students' identities, families, experiences, and relationships.

- Avoid gendered assumptions — Use terms like partner, person you care about, or someone in your life instead of boyfriend/girlfriend.
- Reflect family diversity — Say whānau or caregivers rather than mum and dad.
- Acknowledge all identities — Use language that includes all genders, sexualities and cultures.
- Model respect — Use people's correct names and pronouns and encourage students to do the same.

You don't need to get everything perfect — just stay open to learning and correcting gently. Modelling inclusive language supports student wellbeing as well as sets the tone for a classroom where everyone belongs and can feel safe to learn.

### **Distancing the Learning**

The lessons use fictional characters & stories. These create safe distance and allow students to reflect on behaviours and patterns — rather than personal experiences. It also reduces the likelihood of triggering students who have been personally affected by the issues and discourages them from making public disclosures in front of their peers.

If a student shares a name with one of the fictional characters in the lesson, it's recommended to change the name to help protect that student's emotional safety and prevent others from making personal links.

### **Handling Questions**

Encourage curiosity and questions, but be prepared for challenging topics. Try these strategies:

- Use a question box before/during/after lessons — students can stay anonymous.
- If you're unsure how to answer in the moment, it's okay to say you'll follow up later.
- Always thank students for their questions, even if they surprise you.
- If a question raises concern, consult your safeguarding lead or a trusted colleague.

### **Protective Interrupting**

Sometimes students may begin to disclose something personal in front of others. Gently pause and redirect them to a private kōrero later. For example:

- "That sounds important — let's talk one-on-one after the lesson."
- "Can I pause you there? I want to give you my full attention later."

Make sure to follow up, and respond in line with your school's child protection process.

### **Winding Down**

After exploring heavy or emotionally charged topics, it's important to intentionally bring the energy back up before students leave the space. A positive ending helps students reset, feel grounded, and carry a sense of hope or empowerment with them.

You might:

- Reflect on strengths and what helps us feel safe
- Acknowledge the heaviness, then shift focus to something uplifting
- Share a calming activity, a moment of gratitude, or even a fun, light question

This gentle "cool down" protects emotional safety and ensures ākonga leave the session feeling steady, supported, and not weighed down.



## Reflect, Prepare, Support

Teaching sensitive topics can sometimes stir up personal emotions. It's important to recognise when something feels difficult and take steps to care for your own wellbeing.

Notice your triggers: If a topic brings up strong feelings, acknowledge this without judgement. You're human too. Seek support from a trusted colleague, school leader, or external professional if needed.

Take space when needed: If a session feels emotionally heavy, it's okay to pause. Step outside, take a deep breath, or ground yourself with a positive thought or calming strategy.

Approach content with confidence: Being familiar with the lesson content before you teach it is one of the best ways to feel prepared and confident — especially when working with sensitive or challenging topics.

Find more information here:

- [\*Youth healthy and safe relationships: a literature review - University of Otago\*](#)
- [\*The Trauma and Mental Health Impacts of Coercive Control – Sage Journals\*](#)
- [\*The Impact of Coercive Control on Use of Specific Sexual Coercion Tactics – Sage Journals\*](#)
- [\*Defining and responding to Coercive Control - ANROWS\*](#)
- [\*Coercive control - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare\*](#)
- [\*Navigate the messy stuff in Relationships | Love Better\*](#): A primary prevention initiative aimed at 16–24-year-olds. It aims to foster positive, safe, and equal relationships.
- [\*Nest Consulting\*](#): Access trauma-informed facilitators providing student programmes and PLD for teachers on all health & wellbeing topics.
- [\*Sexual Wellbeing Aotearoa | Sexual health advice & clinics in NZ\*](#): Information and courses for teachers and educators covering all aspects of sexual wellbeing. They provide a range of lesson plans, trainings, forums, and advice pages for teachers in Aotearoa.

Seek Support: If a student disclosure or classroom moment affects you, debrief with someone you trust—ideally someone who can hold that space without compromising confidentiality. [\*Find support services here.\*](#)

Be Kind to Yourself: You're doing meaningful, courageous mahi by guiding these conversations. Remember to recharge in ways that work for you—spending time in nature, connecting with whānau, mindfulness, rest, or creative outlets.

## Disclosures

[\*Sourced from NZ Police\*](#)

Ensure the safety of the student: If the student is in immediate danger or unsafe, act immediately to secure their safety. Do not alert the alleged abuser.

Listen: Do not ask leading questions or put words into the student's mouth. Use "Tell me.... eg what that looked like, felt like, where that was. Allow them to tell you as much as they want. Believe what they say, don't criticise.

Say: I'm glad you told me. I'm sorry this happened. I'll do something to help.

Keep calm: If the student detects your discomfort or anxiety, they may not want to share any more of their problem.

Document: Listen carefully to what they are saying – is it sexual? physical? Ask the very basics – who? when? Once you have found out the basics, DO NOT question them further. Document what the child has said – include date, time, and who was present. Document any observations of their physical state and behaviour.

DO NOT begin your own investigation, that is not your role. Keep the student safe in a safe place.

Follow your school policy: It will have practical procedures for you to follow. Respect confidentiality.

Find support for yourself: You may need to have access to an employee support programme or similar counselling service. It is unwise to talk to other staff because this may affect the integrity of the evidence.

## **Glossary for Educators**

This glossary is designed to support teachers with key terms that may come up during discussions about relationships, power, and safety. Some of the language in this space can be new or carry layered meanings, so having clear definitions helps ensure consistent, respectful conversations. Use this resource to build your own confidence and to clarify concepts for ākonga if needed.

### **Boundaries**

Personal rules or limits that help people feel safe and respected in relationships.

### **Breadcrumbing**

When someone gives just enough attention, affection, or messages to keep another person interested—without committing. It's often inconsistent and confusing, and can leave someone feeling uncertain, or strung along.

### **Coercive Control**

A pattern of behaviours that a person uses to dominate or control another person in a relationship. It can include isolation, manipulation, intimidation, and surveillance—often without physical violence.

### **Consent**

Freely given, informed, enthusiastic, and reversible agreement to engage in an activity. Consent must be clear and ongoing.

### **Emotional Abuse**

Using words, actions, or lack of action to control, belittle, shame, or emotionally harm another person.

### **Gaslighting**

A form of emotional abuse where someone tries to make another person doubt their own memories, feelings, or perception of reality.

### **Ghosting**

When someone suddenly cuts off all communication without explanation. It often happens in dating or friendships and can leave the other person confused or hurt because there's no closure.

### **Healthy Relationship**

A relationship based on mutual respect, trust, honesty, support, fairness, good communication, and consent.

### **Isolation**

When someone cuts another person off from friends, whānau, or support systems in order to control them or make them dependent.

### **Love Bombing**

When someone gives excessive attention, gifts, or affection early in a relationship as a way to gain control or fast-track emotional closeness.

### **Mana**

A person's sense of dignity, power, and self-worth. Coercive control often works to diminish a person's mana; healthy relationships protect and uplift it.

### **Manipulation**

When someone tries to influence another person's decisions or feelings in an unfair, deceptive, or exploitative way.

### **Red Flags**

Warning signs that a relationship might be unsafe or unhealthy. These could be behaviours that feel controlling, disrespectful, or make someone feel uncomfortable or afraid.

### **Tikanga**

Customs, values, and traditions that guide respectful and appropriate behaviour in te ao Māori. Important when discussing relationships and safe spaces.

### **Unhealthy Relationship**

A relationship where there may be poor communication, disrespect, or lack of boundaries, but the harm is not part of a deliberate pattern of control. Unhealthy behaviours can sometimes be unintentional or come from inexperience, and the relationship may still feel safe to leave.

## Understanding Coercive Control: Te Mahere Ako | Lesson Guide

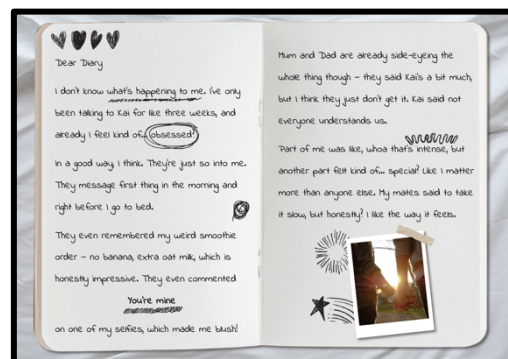
This lesson plan has been split over two sessions (with additional extension activities) and where possible they should be included as part of comprehensive relationships and sexuality education. It is designed to help ākonga understand what coercive control looks, feels, and sounds like. Through interactive activities, guided discussions, and real-world scenarios, students will build the knowledge and language to identify coercive control patterns in relationships and reflect on what respectful, safe connections look like.

**Rationale:** Young people in Aotearoa are three times more likely to experience or use coercive control than the general population.

**Target age group:** 16–18-year-olds (years 11, 12 and 13).

**Lesson duration:** These lessons are in two 40–45-minute segments, these can be used together or separately over a few weeks.

**Set up:** These activities range from large class learning to individual and small group exercises. Resources attached can be distributed to individuals or groups either physically or digitally. An optional slide-deck is also included to support facilitation and engagement in the classroom.



### Topics include:

- What coercive control is and how it shows up in relationships
- The difference between healthy, unhealthy, and abusive behaviours
- Recognising patterns of emotional manipulation & control
- Where to go for help and how to support others safely

### Learning outcomes:

- Define coercive control and identify key warning signs
- Understand that abuse doesn't always look physical or obvious
- Recognise how coercive control can affect a person's self-esteem, decision-making, and wellbeing
- Recognise it is important to act on coercive control and this may be difficult.
- Use clear language to talk about relationship behaviours
- Know where and how to seek help for themselves or a friend



# Lesson 1 of 2 Kaupapa: Exploration & Awareness

## Te Haerenga o te Akoranga | The Journey of Learning

- |  |         |
|--|---------|
| • Setting ground rules and creating an emotionally safe learning environment | 15 mins |
| • Understanding Unhealthy vs. Abusive relationship behaviours                | 10 mins |
| • Understanding Coercive Control   | 5 mins  |
| • Unpacking power, control, patterns   | 10 mins |

## Ngā Rauemi | Resources

- Optional slide-deck
- Papers and pens for brainstorming
- Whiteboard for scribing group discussions
- Relationship Reflection Web Worksheet

## He Whāinga Ako | Goals & Gains

- Understand and agree to shared ground rules for safe, respectful discussion
- Describe what coercive control is and how to spot it in relationships
- Identify key behaviours that demonstrate power and control in relationships
- Recognise the difference between unhealthy behaviours and abuse
- Begin to explore how patterns of control can develop over time

### Introducing the session

We are building on our Healthy Relationship Education and digging deeper into what unhealthy and abusive behaviours might look like in romantic relationships. Let's check in and remind ourselves:

Why is this education important for rangatahi?

- *Reducing harm & empowering young people to seek help or speak out. Recognising red flags early, navigating consent confidently, build respectful connections.*
- *Regular kōrero about positive values, feelings and behaviours in relationships early and often can help shape young people's expectations about how they are treated and how they treat others.*
- *When healthy relationships are talked about and taught from a young age, young people and rangatahi build positive skills and behaviour.*

### Explain

Having a safe space to learn is always important — but it's especially important when we're talking about sensitive topics. We want to be able to have real, meaningful conversations. That can only happen when people feel safe enough to think clearly, reflect honestly, and maybe even share their own experiences. That's how we learn — not just from the person at the front, but from each other.

### Activity

Have a class discussion about what it means to feel emotionally and socially safe. Use this kōrero to co-create a Class Kirimana — a shared agreement that can be displayed and used as a touchstone for behaviour and emotional safety.

These conversations may bring up old or uneasy feelings, so acknowledge this gently and emphasise that you're working together to create a space where everyone feels supported.

Choose from the options below to guide this process in a way that suits your class dynamics and student strengths:

**Kinaesthetic:**

- Students write down what helps them feel safe when talking about sensitive things (e.g., "not being laughed at," "time to think," "being able to leave the room"). Stick these on the board or a poster.
- Students rotate silently between three stations with prompts: write one boundary you want respected / choose from cards with pre-written agreements and vote on favourites / add a value or an attitude to a poster

**Technology:**

- Create a prompt (e.g., "what does safe feel like?" or "what helps you feel comfortable sharing in class?") and allow students to submit words, phrases and ideas to create a wordcloud on [www.mentimeter.com](http://www.mentimeter.com)

**Verbal:**

- Students pair up and discuss what helps them feel safe or respected in group discussions.
- Ask each student to offer one word they want to define the space (e.g., "honest," "calm," "gentle"). Collate into a visible poster.

**Visual:**

- Students draw pictures that represent what safety means to them in the classroom.

## **Discussion Prompts**

How can our group agreement allow for open and honest conversations?

- *Respecting different opinions without judgement*
- *Allowing students to choose when to speak*
- *Using kind and respectful language*
- *Normalising that it's okay not to know everything*

How can our group agreement protect diverse experiences?

- *Avoiding assumptions about people's lives, identities, or relationships*
- *Using inclusive language*
- *Respecting everyone's privacy*
- *Encouraging empathy & open mindedness*

How can our group agreement support the class when we are having an uncomfortable conversation?

- *Offering opt-out or alternative ways to participate*
- *Checking in with each other and the teacher*
- *Grounding in the agreement to stay respectful*
- *Ending the class on a light note*



## Explain

This space is for kindness, curiosity, and care. Let's work together to keep it safe. Creating a class agreement is a way of practising kotahitanga — working together with a shared purpose. It helps us build a space that feels safe and respectful for everyone. It shows manaakitanga, by caring for each other through how we speak, listen, and behave. And it strengthens our whanaungatanga — our connections. Because we create it together, we're all responsible for upholding it. If someone forgets, we can gently remind them, so the space stays safe and inclusive for everyone.



There are places we can go for help if we experience any of these behaviours (this includes if we are doing the harmful behaviour, if it is being done to us, or if is happening to someone we care about).

Write on the board, or somewhere ākonga can access discretely:

- An adult you trust (if they don't take action, ask someone else)
- School counselling support services

Phone lines or Online chats | Free & Confidential

- 0800 What's Up: 0800 942 8787
- Youthline: Txt 234 or Call: 0800 376 633
- Safe to Talk: Txt 4334 or Call: 0800 044 334

### Example Class Kirimana

- Confidentiality
- Allowing space for thoughts & opinions
- Keep on track
- Respectful language
- Your choice to share
- All questions & input are valued
- Supporting ourselves & others
- Ending a class on a positive note

## Explain

Begin the session by recapping previous discussions about healthy relationships or provide a brief overview. Discuss the spectrum of relationships. Not every relationship that feels "off" is abusive — but it's important to learn how to spot early signs that things might be unhealthy, so we can address them before they get worse.

Relationships can be:

- Healthy – based on respect, trust, communication, and choice. You feel safe, supported, and free to be yourself.
- Unhealthy – something's not quite right. Maybe there's poor communication, jealousy, or pressure. It might not be abusive, but it's still not okay — and it can sometimes be a warning sign of something more serious.
- Abusive – one person uses power and control to dominate the other. It's a pattern, and it's harmful. Abuse can be emotional, physical, sexual, social, or digital — and it's never the victim's fault.



## Activity

Ask students to create three columns (either on their own or in small groups) and label them: Healthy | Unhealthy | Abusive.

- Write a short definition for each type of relationship
- List examples of what it might look like (behaviours) and feel like (emotions or gut feelings)

## Discussion Prompts

What are some things that make a relationship healthy?

- *You can be yourself.*
- *You feel listened to.*
- *You both make decisions together.*
- *You feel safe saying no.*

What might be a sign that a relationship is unhealthy but not abusive?

Guide them to spot warning signs — like poor boundaries or controlling behaviour that isn't yet a pattern.

- *They get jealous a lot.*
- *They guilt-trip you.*
- *You're always the one apologising.*
- *They ignore you to 'teach you a lesson.'*

How can we tell when a relationship has become abusive?

Gently emphasise patterns, fear, and loss of choice. Validate that this can happen slowly and be confusing.

- *"You feel scared to speak up.*
- *They control who you see or what you do.*
- *You feel like you're walking on eggshells.*
- *They blame you for their behaviour.*

Why might someone stay in an unhealthy or abusive relationship?

Avoid judgment — this is about building empathy and understanding systemic or emotional barriers.

- *They don't want to be alone.*
- *They think it's normal.*
- *They're scared the person will hurt them or someone else.*
- *They love the person and hope they'll change.*

## Activity

- Distribute the Relationship Reflection Web Worksheet to students
- Ask them to think of a fictional couple from a TV show, book or movie
- Score the couple from 1 – 5 on each point and join up each score to form a web.
- Decide if the relationship is healthy, unhealthy or abusive

Students can see where the relationship feels balanced and where it might be lacking or red flags. When the scores are joined up to create a shape, it gives a quick snapshot of how healthy (or unhealthy) the relationship might be overall.

## Explain

The definition for Coercive Control is: A pattern of behaviours used to dominate, isolate or control someone. The term helps us understand how some relationships that start off feeling close, intense, or even romantic can become unsafe over time. A lot of controlling or harmful behaviours don't begin as obvious abuse — they can show up as jealousy, over-protectiveness, or someone wanting constant contact, which might even feel like care or love at first.

But when these kinds of behaviours start to repeat and build on each other — when they become a pattern — they can lead to something much more serious: a relationship where one person is being controlled, isolated, or made to feel afraid. These behaviours revolve around an imbalance of power and control.

These behaviours are often non-physical they can be much harder to spot than physical abuse. This subtlety means it can take time for someone to realise what's happening.

## Discussion Prompts

What does "power" mean in a relationship? Who can have it?

Help them see that power isn't always bad – it can be shared or misused.

- *Power means having a say in things.*
- *Both people should have power, not just one.*
- *Sometimes parents or teachers have power too, but they should use it fairly.*

What are some ways people might try to control someone in a relationship?

Invite them to think beyond physical violence — emotional, social, digital control, etc.

- *Telling someone who they can be friends with.*
- *Checking someone's phone or messages all the time.*
- *Getting angry if someone wants space or time with others.*
- *Making threats, or using guilt to get their way.*

Why do you think someone might use control over another person?

Encourage empathy and understanding without excusing harmful behaviour.

- *They might feel insecure or jealous.*
- *They might want to feel powerful or in charge.*
- *Maybe they grew up around that and think it's normal.*
- *They're afraid the person will leave them.*

How can someone tell the difference between care and control?

Important to tease out how control can be disguised as "protection" or "love."

- *If it only benefits one person.*
- *If it makes the other person feel trapped or scared.*
- *Caring is about giving choice. Control is about taking it away.*
- *If you feel like you have to ask permission all the time, that's not love.*



## Wrapping up the Session

Today we've unpacked some really important ideas about healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationships — and started to understand how coercive control works as a pattern of behaviours based on power and control. Remember, recognising these early signs can help keep you and those around you safe.

Next time, we'll meet Parker and Kai — two young people whose stories will help us see how these things can play out in real life.

Parker is 17 and has never been in a romantic relationship before and we will see how their relationship with Kai progresses through a few of their diary entries.

## Ending the Session

Take a moment to check in. Remember, it's okay to have all kinds of feelings — and there are resources available to support everyone. Before we finish, let's all think of one thing we are going to do today that will bring us some joy (invite students to share if they wish).

**You may also wish to choose from the following to support an upbeat transition out of the lesson:**

- A gentle stretch
- Play a song
- Play a classroom game unrelated to the topics discussed
- Breathing exercises
- Pair & share prompts such as, what are your weekend plans, what is something you are grateful for, etc



## Lesson 2 of 2 Kaupapa: Parker's Story

### Te Haerenga o te Akoranga | The Journey of Learning

- |   |         |
|---|---------|
| • Recap of previous lesson & Class Kirimana   | 5 mins  |
| • Parker's Diary & Discussions                | 30 mins |
| • Getting support for ourselves & our friends | 10 mins |

### Ngā Rauemi | Resources

- Optional slide-deck
- Papers and pens for brainstorming
- Whiteboard for scribing group discussions
- Parker's Diary Entries

### He Whāinga Ako | Goals & Gains

- Understand and agree to shared ground rules for safe, respectful discussion
- Describe what coercive control is and how to spot it in relationships
- Identify key behaviours that demonstrate power and control in relationships
- Explore safe ways to get help, including how to involve trusted adults or services
- Build confidence in speaking up or seeking support, either for themselves or others



### Introducing the session

Last session, we started looking at what coercive control is and how power and control can show up in relationships — sometimes in really subtle ways. We talked about the difference between unhealthy behaviours and abuse, and how coercive control often happens over time and isn't always physical. Today, we're going to look at Parker and Kai's story. Before we get into that, let's remind ourselves of the Class Kirimana we made.

### Activity

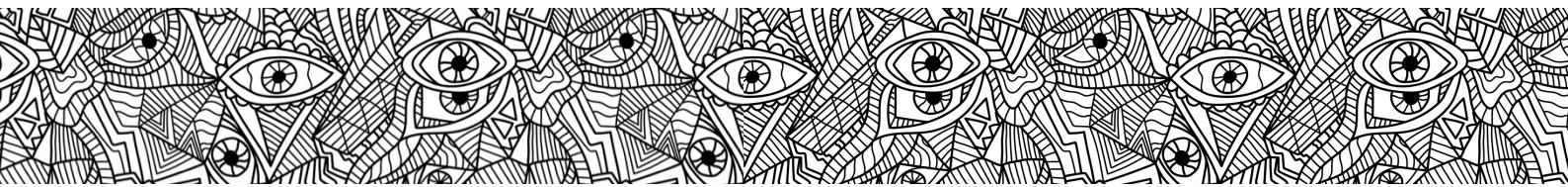
- Play the first Love Creep clip.
- Distribute Parker's first diary entry to your students either individually or in small groups.
- The questions provided will help to guide the discussions.
- Allow 3-5 minutes for student discussion and 2-3 minutes for a class discussion.
- Repeat for each diary entry.



### Diary Entry 1: All in | Love Creep Video

Coercive control can initially feel like love, attention, or intense care. The early stages can be confusing, especially when intensity is mistaken for closeness.

1. This is Parker's first relationship – why might they be excited? Do you think there are some red flags that Parker isn't seeing and why?
  - *Parker might be feeling seen, chosen, and special for the first time — that kind of attention can be really powerful.*
  - *They may not recognise red flags because they have no other relationship to compare it to — they're just going off how it feels.*
  - *The constant communication and possessive comments might be dismissed as romantic because Parker doesn't yet have the tools to recognise controlling behaviour.*
2. What are some early signs that something might not feel quite right, even if it seems romantic? What is love-bombing? Do you think it applies here?
  - *Love-bombing is when someone uses excessive affection, attention, or praise early on to create dependency — it can feel overwhelming but exciting.*
  - *Messaging non-stop, remembering tiny details, and calling someone "mine" within a few weeks are all intense signs that could point to love-bombing.*
  - *It applies here because Kai is flooding Parker with attention and emotional language, which could make Parker feel rushed into a deep connection.*
3. What might be going on beneath the surface when Kai says, 'Not everyone understands us'? How could that influence Parker's thinking?
  - *It creates an 'us vs. them' dynamic, which can isolate Parker from people who care.*
  - *It sounds romantic, but it's also planting doubt about whether Parker should trust other people's opinions.*
  - *Kai might be positioning themselves as the only person who truly gets Parker — which is intense and could be manipulative.*
4. From Kai's perspective, what might be motivating their behaviour?
  - *Kai might think they're being romantic and not realise how intense their behaviour is.*
  - *They might have been hurt or insecure and use constant contact to feel secure.*
  - *It's possible they're trying to control the relationship early — whether consciously or unconsciously — by creating emotional dependency.*
5. How can we tell the difference between intensity and genuine care?
  - *Genuine care respects your pace, space, and boundaries — intensity often tries to rush closeness or skip over consent and balance.*
  - *Intensity can feel overwhelming or all-consuming, while real care usually feels steady, respectful, and calm.*
  - *If someone reacts badly when you ask for space or time, that's usually a sign it's more about control than care.*



## Diary Entry 2: They Just Really Care? | Love Creep Video

Control can be disguised as protection or concern – these behaviours can escalate over time.

1. What might make Parker dismiss their gut feeling, even though something about the situation felt off?
  - *Parker probably doesn't want to believe someone who says they care would also be controlling.*
  - *Kai is justifying their behaviour by bringing up past hurt, which might make Parker feel like they need to be extra understanding.*
  - *When someone you like says it's "because they care," it can override your own instincts — especially in a first relationship.*
2. How can "protectiveness" cross the line into controlling behaviour? What signs of control are showing up here?
  - *Asking for constant updates or proof of where someone is can create pressure and take away freedom.*
  - *Being questioned about who you hang out with — especially when there's no trust — shows a lack of respect for your autonomy.*
  - *Protectiveness becomes controlling when it's not about safety, but about managing someone's actions and limiting who they can be around.*
3. Why might someone like Kai use past hurt or trauma to justify controlling behaviour? Does that make it okay?
  - *They might be using their past to get sympathy, so Parker feels guilty for questioning their requests.*
  - *It can be a way to shift responsibility — like saying, "I'm not controlling, I'm just scared," even when the behaviour is still harmful.*
  - *Having past hurt doesn't make it okay to control someone else — people are still responsible for their actions.*
4. These kinds of behaviours can escalate over time. What might this pattern look like if it continues?
  - *Kai might start demanding more proof, getting angry when Parker doesn't respond, or trying to control who Parker spends time with.*
  - *It could become harder and harder for Parker to make decisions for themselves without Kai's approval.*
  - *Parker might start isolating from friends and family to avoid conflict with Kai, which makes the control even stronger.*
5. What things might make Parker think this behaviour is okay — from Kai, their own thoughts, or what they see around them?
  - *Kai is saying it's because they care or because they've been hurt before, which makes it sound understandable.*
  - *Parker might believe that jealousy or needing constant contact is just part of being in love.*
  - *TV shows, music, or social media sometimes show possessiveness like it's romantic, so it can be hard to see it as a red flag*



### Diary Entry 3: It's Just Little Things... Right? | Love Creep Video

Small behaviours form a pattern of control.

1. Why might Parker be questioning themselves instead of the relationship?
  - *The comments and reactions are subtle enough to make Parker feel like they're overreacting.*
  - *Kai's disapproval is framed as concern or love, so Parker might think they're the problem.*
  - *When you care about someone, it's easy to take on the emotional labour of constantly managing their moods.*
2. What do Kai's reactions — like getting cold when Parker didn't show affection or commenting on their clothes — tell us about the power balance in this relationship?
  - *It shows that Kai is trying to set the rules for how Parker should act, which gives them more control in the relationship.*
  - *When one person's comfort and expectations always come first, it creates an uneven power dynamic.*
  - *Parker is starting to change their behaviour to avoid upsetting Kai — that's a sign that the power isn't equal.*
3. Why do you think Kai's comment — "You used to like me more" — might be hard for Parker to respond to?
  - *It's emotionally manipulative — it puts pressure on Parker to prove their feelings.*
  - *It suggests Parker is doing something wrong or that their love isn't "enough."*
  - *Parker probably feels confused and guilty, even if they haven't actually done anything wrong.*
4. How do small moments of control or criticism affect someone over time in a relationship?
  - *They can chip away at someone's confidence and make them doubt their own choices.*
  - *Over time, the person might start changing their behaviour just to avoid conflict.*
  - *It can create an uneven power dynamic, where one person is always adjusting, and the other is always reacting.*
5. Why might Parker be ignoring the pattern and focusing on how much they still like Kai?
  - *It's easier to focus on the good parts than to face the idea that something might be wrong.*
  - *Parker might believe that liking someone means putting up with the hard stuff.*
  - *They could be hoping that if they just try harder, things will go back to how they were at the start.*







#### Diary Entry 4: Is This Normal? | Love Creep Video

Coercive control isolates people and turns them against their support networks.

1. Why might Parker be starting to feel like they're the one always doing something wrong — even when they're not?
  - *Kai uses guilt-tripping and emotional pressure, so Parker ends up apologising just to keep the peace.*
  - *When someone constantly questions your actions, it's easy to start doubting yourself.*
  - *Parker's becoming used to managing Kai's emotions instead of feeling like an equal in the relationship.*
2. How does asking for social media passwords or constant texting link to control and trust?
  - *It crosses a boundary — trust doesn't mean giving up your privacy.*
  - *Kai frames control as "trust," which flips the meaning and puts pressure on Parker.*
  - *When communication becomes about checking up, not checking in, it's not really about trust — it's about surveillance.*
3. What does it say about the relationship when Parker feels like they're making excuses to others or hiding parts of what's happening?
  - *It's a sign that Parker knows, deep down, that something isn't quite right.*
  - *If you're hiding someone's behaviour from friends or whānau, it might mean you're trying to protect the image of the relationship.*
  - *Feeling like you have to explain things away can be part of how isolation starts — you stop reaching out because it's easier than defending it.*
4. Why might Kai be trying to turn Parker against their whānau or friends? What's the impact of that?
  - *Kai might see Parker's support network as a threat to their control.*
  - *Isolating Parker means they have fewer people to check in with or get reality checks from.*
  - *It can leave Parker more dependent on Kai emotionally, even if they're not happy in the relationship.*
5. How can someone tell when a relationship has shifted from intense to unhealthy?
  - *When you feel anxious more than excited or start avoiding people you care about to protect the relationship.*
  - *If one person's needs always come first and you're constantly walking on eggshells, that's a sign of emotional imbalance.*
  - *When the fun and closeness turn into pressure, guilt, and isolation — it's not just intense anymore, it's unhealthy and abusive.*

## Diary Entry 5: Where did I go? | Love Creep Video

Coercive control builds slowly and takes away freedom - it's confusing, emotional, isolating, and exhausting.

1. How do guilt and emotional pressure show up in this diary entry? How do they keep Parker stuck?
  - *Kai uses guilt-tripping to get their way — like saying Parker doesn't love them enough or shouldn't go out if they're upset.*
  - *The pressure makes Parker feel responsible for Kai's feelings, even when they haven't done anything wrong.*
  - *It becomes easier to just give in than to deal with the emotional fallout, so Parker stays quiet or avoids conflict.*
2. Why is it so hard for Parker to reach out or ask for help, even when they know something feels wrong?
  - *They're scared people won't take them seriously or will say they're overreacting.*
  - *Kai has made them question their own judgement, which makes it harder to trust themselves.*
  - *They've already pulled away from their support system, so reaching back out feels awkward, scary, or even shameful.*
3. What role does isolation play in this relationship now — and how does it affect Parker's ability to make decisions?
  - *Parker's been skipping things, losing touch with their friends, and staying close to Kai — their world has shrunk.*
  - *Without people to reflect with, Parker's stuck in their own head and starts believing Kai's version of things.*
  - *Isolation makes it harder to see that what's happening isn't normal or okay — and harder to imagine a way out.*
4. When Parker says they miss the person they used to be, what does that tell us about the impact this relationship has had on them?
  - *It shows how much they've lost — not just freedom, but joy, friendships, and self-confidence.*
  - *That reflection is a sign they're starting to recognise the harm — and maybe starting to think about change.*
  - *Missing your old self is a powerful warning sign that a relationship is no longer healthy or safe.*
5. If someone using controlling behaviour — like Kai — started to realise they were hurting their partner, what would they need to do to take responsibility and get help?

This question helps students explore how someone using controlling behaviours might recognise the harm they're causing. It's important to emphasise that accountability is key — and that it's never the victim's job to fix or rescue the other person.

- *They'd need to admit their behaviour is harming someone, even if that wasn't their intention, and be willing to change.*
- *Getting support from a trusted adult, mentor, or counsellor could help them understand where the behaviour is coming from and how to stop.*
- *Taking responsibility means not blaming the other person or their past — it means choosing to learn new, healthier ways to be in a relationship.*



## Explain

One of the most powerful ways coercive control works is through isolation. The person might slowly pull you away from your friends, your whānau, or your hobbies — and sometimes you don't even notice it's happening until your world feels really small.

When you lose that outside connection, it gets way harder to tell what's healthy and what's not. That's why having people around you — people who reflect the real you, who care about you without strings — is so important.

## Activity

- List all of the people in your safety network.
- Imagine a friend you really care about tells you they've been feeling like Parker. Maybe they've stopped doing the things they love. Maybe their partner makes them feel guilty for spending time with others. Maybe they feel like they're always the one saying sorry.
- Think about what would you say to them.
- Flip the script and imagine those words are coming from you to yourself. Use the script to write three positive affirmations for yourself.
- Invite students to share if they wish.

## Wrapping up the Session

We've talked about some big, complex stuff. What we've seen is that control in relationships doesn't always look obvious, but it can slowly chip away at someone's freedom, confidence, and connection to others. Whether you've related more to Parker, Kai, or been the friend on the outside, what matters most is knowing that everyone deserves to feel safe, respected, and supported — in every relationship. Staying connected to the people who reflect your worth, listening to your gut, and choosing kindness — for yourself and others — can make all the difference. You always have the right to reach out, reflect, and choose something healthier.

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- Play a song
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- Pair & share prompts such as, what are your weekend plans, what is something you are grateful for, etc

## Ending the Session

Take a moment to check in. Remember, it's okay to have all kinds of feelings — and there are resources available to support everyone. Before we finish, let's all think of one thing we are going to do today that will bring us some joy (invite students to share if they wish).