

Controlling or coercive behaviour in an intimate or family relationship

Serious Crime Act 2015 (section 76)

Triable either way

Maximum: 5 years' custody

Offence range: Community order - 4 years' custody

Also refer to the *Domestic Abuse: Overarching Principles* guideline

STEP ONE
Determining the offence category

The court should determine the offence category with reference only to the factors in the tables below. In order to determine the category the court should assess **culpability** and **harm**.

The level of **culpability** is determined by weighing up all the factors of the case. **Where there are characteristics present which fall under different levels of culpability, the court should balance these characteristics to reach a fair assessment of the offender's culpability.**

Culpability demonstrated by one or more of the following:

A - High culpability

- Conduct intended to maximise fear or distress
- Persistent action over a prolonged period
- Use of multiple methods of controlling or coercive behaviour
- Sophisticated offence
- Conduct intended to humiliate and degrade the victim

B - Medium culpability

- Conduct intended to cause some fear or distress
- Scope and duration of offence that falls between categories A and C
- All other cases that fall between categories A and C

C - Lesser culpability

- Offender's responsibility substantially reduced by mental disorder or learning disability
- Offence was limited in scope and duration

Harm

The level of harm is assessed by weighing up all the factors of the case.

Category 1

- Fear of violence on a number of occasions
- Very serious alarm or distress which has a substantial adverse effect on the victim
- Significant psychological harm

Category 2

- Fear of violence on at least two occasions
- Serious alarm or distress which has a substantial adverse effect on the victim

STEP TWO
Starting point and category range

Having determined the category at step one, the court should use the corresponding starting point to reach a sentence within the category range below. The starting point applies to all offenders irrespective of plea or previous convictions.

Harm	Culpability		
	A	B	C
Category 1	Starting point 2 years 6 months' custody Category range 1 - 4 years' custody	Starting point 1 year's custody Category range 26 weeks' - 2 years 6 months' custody	Starting point 26 weeks' custody Category range High level community order – 1 year's custody
Category 2	Starting point 1 year's custody Category range 26 weeks'- 2 years 6 months' custody	Starting point 26 weeks' custody Category range High level community order- 1 year's custody	Starting point Medium level community order Category range Low level community order- 26 weeks' custody

The court should then consider any adjustment for any aggravating or mitigating factors. Below is a **non-exhaustive** list of additional factual elements providing the context of the offence and factors relating to the offender.

Identify whether any combination of these, or other relevant factors, should result in an upward or downward adjustment from the starting point.

Factors increasing seriousness

Statutory aggravating factors:

- Previous convictions, having regard to a) the nature of the offence to which the conviction relates and its relevance to the current offence; and b) the time that has elapsed since the conviction

- Offence committed whilst on bail
- Offence motivated by, or demonstrating hostility based on any of the following characteristics or presumed characteristics of the victim: religion, race, disability, sexual orientation, or transgender identity.

Other aggravating factors:

- Steps taken to prevent the victim reporting an incident
- Steps taken to prevent the victim obtaining assistance
- A proven history of violence or threats by the offender in a domestic context
- Impact of offence on others particularly children
- Exploiting contact arrangements with a child to commit the offence
- Victim is particularly vulnerable (not all vulnerabilities are immediately apparent)
- Victim left in debt, destitute or homeless due to exploitation of finances
- Failure to comply with current court orders
- Offence committed on licence or post sentence supervision
- Offences taken into consideration

Factors reducing seriousness or reflecting personal mitigation

- No previous convictions **or** no relevant/recent convictions
- Remorse
- Good character and/or exemplary conduct
- Serious medical condition requiring urgent, intensive or long-term treatment
- Age and/or lack of maturity where it affects the responsibility of the offender
- Mental disorder or learning disability (where not taken into account at step one)
- Sole or primary carer for dependent relatives
- Determination and/or demonstration of steps having been taken to address offending behaviour

STEP THREE

Consider any factors which indicate a reduction, such as assistance to the prosecution

The court should take into account sections 73 and 74 of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 (assistance by defendants: reduction or review of sentence) and any other rule of law by virtue of which an offender may receive a discounted sentence in consequence of assistance given (or offered) to the prosecutor or investigator.

STEP FOUR

Reduction for guilty pleas

The court should take account of any potential reduction for a guilty plea in accordance with section 144 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 and the *Guilty Plea* guideline.

STEP FIVE

Totality principle

If sentencing an offender for more than one offence, or where the offender is already serving a sentence, consider whether the total sentence is just and proportionate to the overall offending behaviour in accordance with the *Offences Taken into Consideration and Totality* guideline.

STEP SIX

Compensation and ancillary orders

In all cases, the court must consider whether to make a compensation order and/or other ancillary orders.

Compensation order

The court should consider compensation orders in all cases where personal injury, loss or damage has resulted from the offence. The court must give reasons if it decides not to award compensation in such cases.

Other ancillary orders available include:

Restraining order

Where an offender is convicted of any offence, the court may make a restraining order (section 5 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997).

The order may prohibit the offender from doing anything for the purpose of protecting the victim of the offence, or any other person mentioned in the order, from further conduct which amounts to harassment or will cause a fear of violence.

The order may have effect for a specified period or until further order.

STEP SEVEN

Reasons

Section 174 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003 imposes a duty to give reasons for, and explain the effect of, the sentence.

STEP EIGHT

Consideration for time spent on bail

The court must consider whether to give credit for time spent on bail in accordance with section 240A of the Criminal Justice Act 2003.

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