

Caregiver Abuse Power and Control Wheel Information

Power and control dynamics are based on:

Belief system – The abuser feels entitled to exert his or her will over the other person and believes that person is entitled to obey.

Choice – The abuser acts intentionally, choosing tactics that are targeted and to control someone within his/her influence.

Pattern – Abuse used to gain power and control occurs as a pattern of behaviors rather than an isolated incident. Typically, the abuse begins in small ways and becomes more severe over time.

This diagram is known as a Power and Control Wheel. It was originally developed by a group of domestic violence survivors to illustrate ways in which the person abusing them maintained power and control in their intimate relationships. Here it has been adapted by the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence to portray controlling tactics in a relationship in which a caregiver is abusing a person with disabilities.

Next, are the descriptions of the elements that appear between each spoke.

Isolation – The person controls access to one or more areas of social contact outside of the relationship. Examples would be controlling access to friends, family, neighbors, advocates, and other service providers. Access to phone, TV, or news may be restricted. Employment opportunities may be limited.

Minimize, Justify and Blame – Denying or making light of abuse or physical and emotional pain. Justifying rules that limit autonomy, dignity, and relationships. Excusing abuse as behavior management or due to other controllable causes, such as caregiver stress or substance abuse. Blaming the person's disability for the abuse. Saying the person is not a credible reporter of abuse.

Withhold, Misuse, or Delay Needed Supports – Using medication to sedate the person for the caregiver's convenience. Ignoring equipment safety requirements. Breaking or not fixing adaptive equipment. Refusing to use or destroying communication devices. Withdrawing care or equipment to immobilize the person. Using equipment to torture the person.

Economic Abuse – Stealing the person's property and/or money, or using it for the caregiver's benefit. Using property and/or money as a reward or punishment for the behavior desired by the caregiver. Making financial decisions based on other than the person's needs (e.g., to meet the caregiver's needs or the needs of a family member). Limiting access to the person's financial information or resources resulting in unnecessary impoverishment.

Caregiver Privilege – Treating an adult person as a child. Treating the person as a servant. Making unilateral decisions. Defining narrow, limiting roles and responsibilities. Providing care in a way that accentuates the person's dependence and vulnerability. Giving an opinion as if it were the person's opinion. Denying the right to privacy. Ignoring, discouraging or prohibiting the exercise of full capabilities.

Coercion and Threats – Threats to hurt the person, such as threats to withhold basic support and rights, threats to terminate relationship and leave the person unattended, threats to report noncompliance to other providers, and threats to use more intrusive equipment. Using consequences and punishments to gain compliant behavior from the person. Pressuring the person to engage in fraud or other crimes.

Intimidation – Raising a hand or using looks, actions, or gestures to create fear. Destroying property and abusing pets. Mistreating service animals. Displaying weapons.

Emotional Abuse – Punishing and ridiculing. Refusing to speak and ignoring requests. Ridiculing the person's culture, traditions, religion, and personal tastes. Enforcing behaviors through punishment. Enforcing a program of any kind to which the person does not give his or her consent.

IMPORTANT CLOSING POINT: Remember, power and control dynamics may be present and driving abusive behaviors whether or not other problematic conditions that contribute to risks of abuse exist.