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A PRACTICE BRIEF · RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE RESOURCE

When the legal process becomes part of the abuse

Recognising post-separation coercive control in family-law work. For family lawyers, community legal practitioners and family-violence support workers who hear “she wants to settle” and have to decide, in the room, how to respond to it.

INDEPENDENT DEMONSTRATION BY LEJACIE · PORTFOLIO EXAMPLE · DRAFT 2 · NOVEMBER 2026

THIS BRIEF IS FOR YOU IF

- You are a family lawyer or community legal practitioner
- You are a family-violence support worker
- A client has told you “I can’t keep going” or “I just want to settle”
- You want to carry one published study into that conversation

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Part of the post-separation coercive control collection: a plain-language summary, a practice brief, a team activity and a policy brief, all developed from one published study.

Draft 2, 4 November 2026. Independent demonstration. Not commissioned or endorsed by the authors. Not legal advice. Review and testing outstanding. Based on Meyer, Reeves, Walklate, Fitz-Gibbon and Chalmers (2026), Experiences of Post-Separation Coercive Control, Violence Against Women. Numbers in brackets point to the sources on the last page.

RESEARCH-TO-PRACTICE RESOURCE · PORTFOLIO EXAMPLE BY LEJACIE

Before treating these statements as a change of instructions, ask what is driving them

“She wants to settle.” “She cannot afford another report.” “She says she cannot keep going.” Before treating these statements as a straightforward change of instructions or willingness to participate, ask what is driving them.

In a qualitative Australian study, women described legal proceedings exhausting the money, time and emotional resources they needed to pursue safety. Some reported former partners deliberately using the process to continue control after separation. Exhaustion may be part of the circumstances shaping a person’s choices, not simply the end result of a difficult case. Independent demonstration, not endorsed by the study authors. Numbers in brackets point to the sources on the last page.

For
Family lawyers, community legal practitioners and family-violence support workers.

Based on
Meyer, Reeves, Walklate, Fitz-Gibbon and Chalmers (2026), Experiences of Post-Separation Coercive Control, Violence Against Women [1].

Status
Independent demonstration. Not commissioned or endorsed by the authors. Not legal advice. Review and testing outstanding.

SECTION 01

What this research helps us see

Separation does not necessarily end coercive control. In this study, participants described threats, repeated proceedings, financial pressure and legal-process tactics that they experienced as continuing the abuse. Some also described system responses that failed to recognise or interrupt it [1].

THE PRACTICAL QUESTION IS NOT SIMPLY

“Is this proceeding expensive or contested?”

IT IS

“What is happening across the course of this matter, how does it relate to the history of control, and what is it doing to this person’s ability to participate and make decisions?”

This resource proposes questions for examining that context. It is not a diagnostic checklist, legal test or validated assessment tool.

THREE FINDINGS

Three findings, and what to examine in practice

Findings Meyer et al. (2026), Violence Against Women [1]. **Practice responses** proposed by Lejacie, not tested or validated.

1 Pursuing safety could consume the resources needed to rebuild

Women described spending savings, borrowing from family or friends, and using assets to fund proceedings. Achieving an outcome could still leave them with substantial debt or reduced housing security. Some had been financially independent before separation [1].

PROPOSED PRACTICE RESPONSE

Do not assume that employment, qualifications or ownership of assets means someone can sustain the cost of proceedings. **Consider asking:**

- "What resources can you actually access now?"
- "What is paying for this process affecting: housing, food, work, health or the children's needs?"
- "Are you borrowing or using resources you need for longer-term security?"
- "What costs are coming next, and have we explained them?"

These are prompts to understand circumstances, not a financial eligibility assessment.

2 Financial and emotional depletion changed what women could continue doing

Participants described lost work opportunities, career disruption, difficulty returning to work and profound emotional exhaustion. Some said they could no longer continue proceedings or pursue the outcome they had wanted [1].

PROPOSED PRACTICE RESPONSE

When someone says "I'm done", clarify what that means without pressuring them to continue or stop. **You might say:**

> "I hear that you cannot keep going like this. Is your preferred outcome changing, or are the costs, pressure or safety concerns making it impossible to keep pursuing it?"

Then explore:

- What does the person want now?
- What do they understand about the options and their consequences?
- What constraints are shaping the decision?
- What assistance or adjustments could realistically be explored?

Respect the person's decision. The purpose is to understand its context, not substitute the practitioner's preferred outcome.

3 Some participants described deliberate use of proceedings to maintain control

Accounts included explicit threats of financial ruin, repeated litigation, excessive correspondence and delayed responses that participants experienced as driving up costs and prolonging control [1].

PROPOSED PRACTICE RESPONSE

Look beyond a single application, letter or delay. Consider its place in the wider pattern. **Questions to explore include:**

- Were threats made before or during separation?
- Does the reported conduct resemble earlier controlling behaviour?
- What happens repeatedly, and when?
- What financial, practical or emotional effects accumulate?
- What explanations or evidence need to be examined before drawing conclusions?

A lengthy case, disputed position or delayed response does not, by itself, establish litigation abuse. Identifying the pattern requires context and appropriate professional assessment.

SECTION 02

A short practice scenario

Fictional illustration informed by the study, not a participant account. A client says she wants to accept a settlement she previously considered unworkable. She has missed work for appointments, borrowed money for fees and become frightened whenever new correspondence arrives.

THE INCOMPLETE INTERPRETATION

"The client has lowered her expectations and now wants the matter resolved."

THE CONTEXT TO EXPLORE

"Has her assessment of the options changed, or has the process reduced what she feels able to pursue?"

A POSSIBLE OPENING

"We can discuss the settlement you want to consider. Before we do, I want to understand what has changed and whether there are pressures we need to take into account."

The research supports examining depletion and pressure. It does not tell the practitioner whether this fictional settlement should be accepted or rejected.

BEFORE THE NEXT STEP

A five-question pause

Proposed practice aid developed for this resource; not tested or validated.

1

What does the person want us to understand?

Record their priorities and concerns in their own terms.

2

What pattern needs examination?

Distinguish reported conduct, available evidence, professional interpretation and unresolved questions.

3

What is participation costing them?

Consider money, work, housing, health, time and care responsibilities, not legal fees alone.

4

What can we responsibly do within our role?

Identify what needs legal advice, specialist family-violence assessment, financial counselling, supervision or another form of support. Do not promise an intervention or outcome.

5

Who owns the next step?

Agree who will act, how contact can occur safely, and what happens if the proposed help is unavailable.

Framework These prompts apply the framework's requirement to connect understanding with realistic action while preserving professional boundaries. Framework: Safe to Say, Safe to Reach, Safe to Use, practice standard consultation draft (Lejacie, 2026) **[2]**.

SECTION 03

Make a referral more than another task

A proposed handover should answer

- Has the person agreed to the referral and the information being shared?
- What context does the receiving service need, and what should not be shared?
- Is the contact method safe and usable?
- Does the person contact the service, or does the worker?
- Who checks whether assistance was available?
- What is the fallback if it was not?

THE LIMIT TO NAME

> Better information cannot create service capacity, affordable representation or a safe outcome on its own.
>
> Those limits should be made visible rather than left for the person to discover after another unsuccessful referral.

EVIDENCE AND LIMITS

What the study does, and does not, establish

EVIDENCE FEATURE	WHAT IT MEANS FOR USING THIS RESOURCE
Fourteen women's accounts	The study offers detailed insight into experiences and mechanisms. It does not estimate how common they are.
Six survey accounts and eight interviews	The depth and opportunity for clarification differed between participants.
Data collected in 2021; article published in 2026	Publication date should not be mistaken for the date of the experiences or evidence about current procedures.
Participants selected for relevant experiences	The findings cannot be treated as representative of all separated parents or all family-law proceedings.
Participants' reported experiences	The article is not a set of independently adjudicated findings about particular former partners, lawyers or courts.
No evaluation of the prompts above	The practice suggestions are a translation developed here, not interventions shown by this study to improve outcomes.

The sample was predominantly white and highly educated, and 13 of the 14 participants had dependent children when experiencing coercive control. The authors identify a need for research with more diverse populations [1].

SOURCE AND STATUS

Based on Meyer, Reeves, Walklate, Fitz-Gibbon and Chalmers (2026), Experiences of Post-Separation Coercive Control: Family Law-Involved Victim-Survivors' Perspectives on Coercion, Litigation Abuse and Financial Impacts, published in Violence Against Women [1]. The study identified three themes: the financial burden of pursuing safety, depletion of financial and emotional resources, and intentional litigation abuse as a strategy of coercive control.

Independent demonstration resource, not commissioned or endorsed by the authors. Research findings are distinguished above from proposed practice responses. This is not legal advice, a statement of current procedural remedies or a substitute for specialist assessment.

Developed using Safe to Say, Safe to Reach, Safe to Use [2]. Subject-matter review, survivor-informed and practitioner testing, accessibility review, and maintenance arrangements remain outstanding; applying the framework does not certify this draft as safe or effective.

CASE STUDY · PORTFOLIO · EXAMPLE 1

When legal process becomes continuing pressure

Portfolio · Example 1
Published research to practice resource. Meyer, Reeves, Walklate, Fitz-Gibbon and Chalmers (2026), Experiences of Post-Separation Coercive Control, Violence Against Women. A qualitative study of 14 Australian women.

The set
Research-to-practice resource, 5 pages. Three findings, each with a proposed practice response, a fictional scenario, a five-question pause, a referral check and an evidence table. Planned companion: a two-page conversation resource, Beyond the legal bill: questions about the impact of proceedings.

Status
Demonstration. Built from the published article. Not commissioned or endorsed by the authors. Intended contribution: to show research translation that preserves the study's limits.

CASE STUDY	WHEN LEGAL PROCESS BECOMES CONTINUING PRESSURE
The problem	A peer-reviewed article describes how family-law proceedings can continue coercive control after separation. Its findings sit in an academic journal in academic language. A practitioner who meets the client described on the cover has no way to carry the research into that conversation.
The audience	Family lawyers, community legal practitioners and family-violence support workers: people who hear "she wants to settle" and have to decide, in the room, how to respond to it.
The source	One published qualitative study: 14 women, six survey accounts and eight interviews, data from 2021. Its three themes are the resource's three findings. Nothing from outside the article is presented as research evidence.
The translation	Each finding is paired with a proposed practice response: what to stop assuming, what to ask, and what to say. A fictional scenario shows the incomplete interpretation beside the context to explore. A five-question pause and a referral check turn understanding into a next step within the practitioner's role.
The safeguards	Findings and proposed responses are labelled separately on every page. The evidence table states what the study does not establish: prevalence, representativeness, adjudicated facts, or the effect of the prompts. The scenario is marked fictional. The resource says what it is not: a checklist, a legal test, a validated tool or legal advice.
The status	Demonstration. Not commissioned or endorsed by the authors. Subject-matter review, survivor-informed and practitioner testing, accessibility review and maintenance arrangements are outstanding; the framework was applied, which does not certify the draft as safe or effective.

What this shows. That research can be interpreted for a specific audience and turned into something beyond a summary, without overstating the evidence.

SOURCES AND VERSION

Where this resource comes from

SOURCES

	DOCUMENT
[1]	Silke Meyer, Ellen Reeves, Sandra Walklate, Kate Fitz-Gibbon and Jaclyn Chalmers, Experiences of Post-Separation Coercive Control: Family Law-Involved Victim-Survivors' Perspectives on Coercion, Litigation Abuse and Financial Impacts, Violence Against Women (2026).
[2]	Safe to Say, Safe to Reach, Safe to Use: A proposed practice standard, Version 1.0 consultation draft, Lejacie Pty Ltd, October 2026, published on chamirupasinghe.com.au. Resource by Chami Rupasinghe · Admitted Australian lawyer (non-practising) · Founder, Lejacie.

VERSION

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Feedback. If something is wrong, out of date or hard to understand, email **info@lejacie.com** with the page number.

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