

Coercive control

IS NOT SIMPLY ABOUT **CONTROLLING BEHAVIOUR**.

It is about the **gradual replacement** of a person's **internal authority**

with the expectations, fears, narratives and demands of another.



EXPECTATIONS
that pressure you to conform.



FEARS
that keep you walking on eggshells.



NARRATIVES
that distort the truth and silence your voice.



DEMANDS
that take over your choices and freedom.



REFLECTIVE SAFEGUARDING™

IS THE INTENTIONAL PRACTICE OF RESTORING THAT AUTHORITY,



so every person can remain deeply rooted in their own



IDENTITY



DIGNITY



GIFTS



RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

You were created for freedom, not for control.

RESTORE. RECONNECT. RECLAIM.

*You are **more yourself** than you've been told.*



NOTICE

What actually happened?



LISTEN

What is my body telling me?



NAME

What behaviour am I seeing?



PLACE RESPONSIBILITY
Who owns this?



RESPOND
What protects my dignity?



RELEASE

I am not responsible for managing another person's behaviour.



YOU MATTER. YOUR VOICE MATTERS. YOUR STORY MATTERS. YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

HELP IS AVAILABLE. HOPE IS REAL. HEALING IS POSSIBLE.



The Reflective Safeguarding Framework™

Recognising Coercive Control

A practical framework for recognising patterns of control and restoring internal authority, dignity and freedom in relationships, families, workplaces, churches and communities.

Why Coercive Control Matters

Many people imagine abusive relationships begin with violence.

Most do not.

They begin with small moments that seem insignificant.

"Where are you?"

"Who are you with?"

"I don't like your friends."

"Don't wear that."

"You've changed."

"If you loved me..."

"I was only joking."

"You always overreact."

One comment is not usually coercive control.

One disagreement is not coercive control.

One argument is not coercive control.

Coercive control is a repeated pattern that slowly takes away another person's freedom, confidence, identity and ability to make independent decisions.

Over time the person being controlled often becomes:

- quieter
- more anxious
- isolated

- constantly apologetic
- afraid of conflict
- disconnected from family and friends
- unsure of their own judgement

The greatest danger is that this process is usually gradual.

Many people do not realise they are experiencing coercive control until they no longer recognise themselves.

It Can Happen Anywhere

Although coercive control is now recognised in NSW law as a criminal offence in current or former intimate partner relationships, the underlying behaviours can appear in many settings.

In Dating Relationships

- jealousy presented as love
- monitoring phones
- demanding passwords
- isolation from friends
- guilt and pressure

In Families

- excessive control
- emotional manipulation
- financial dependence
- threats of rejection
- constant criticism

In Churches

- unquestioning obedience demanded
- fear used as motivation
- spiritual shame
- isolation from outside support
- leaders replacing personal conscience

In Workplaces

- intimidation
- humiliation
- micromanagement
- exclusion
- impossible expectations
- retaliation for speaking up

In Friendships

- controlling who you spend time with
- guilt if you say no
- emotional blackmail
- constant drama
- making you responsible for another person's emotions

The pattern is always the same.

Power increases.

Freedom decreases.

The Reflective Safeguarding Principle

Rather than asking,

"Is this person abusive?"

ask,

"What is happening to me?"

Am I becoming:

- smaller?
- quieter?
- more anxious?
- more isolated?
- less confident?
- afraid to disagree?
- responsible for someone else's emotions?

If the answer is yes, pause and become curious.

Your body and your relationships are giving you important information.

Why It Matters

Research consistently shows that coercive control is not a harmless relationship style.

It is recognised internationally as one of the strongest indicators of serious domestic violence and homicide risk.

Many domestic violence deaths are preceded by months or years of:

- isolation
- stalking

- monitoring
- threats
- financial control
- emotional abuse
- intimidation
- coercive control

Importantly, coercive control can be present even when there has never been physical violence.

This is why early recognition matters.

Learning to recognise unhealthy patterns before they become normal is a safeguarding skill that can protect relationships, mental health and, in some circumstances, save lives.

Reflective Safeguarding™

Reflective Safeguarding™ recognises that coercive systems—whether in relationships, families, churches, workplaces or communities—often operate by eroding internal authority.

They replace observation with narrative.

Discernment with compliance.

Responsibility with blame.

Freedom with dependency.

The practice of Reflective Safeguarding™ is the intentional restoration of a person's God-given capacity to observe clearly, think critically, exercise their gifts, set healthy boundaries and remain deeply rooted in their dignity, identity and relationship with God.

The Reflective Safeguarding Questions

Every relationship, workplace, church or friendship should allow you to answer YES to these questions.

Do I feel safe?

Do I feel free?

Do I feel respected?

Can I still be myself?

Healthy love expands your world.

Healthy leadership develops your confidence.

Healthy friendship leaves room for other friendships.

Healthy workplaces encourage respectful disagreement.

Healthy churches point people towards God rather than dependence on a single leader.

Healthy authority restores dignity.

Control always asks you to become smaller.

A Biblical Reflection

From the opening pages of Scripture, every human being is described as bearing the image of God.

This means every person possesses dignity, agency and worth that should never be dominated, manipulated or diminished.

Jesus consistently restored dignity.

He invited rather than coerced.

He asked questions rather than demanded compliance.

He protected the vulnerable and challenged those who used power to burden others.

Love never requires you to surrender the person God created you to be.

Freedom, truth and mutual respect are safeguarding principles woven throughout the biblical story.

Evidence Base & References

Australian Government & NSW

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare – Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence
- Australian Institute of Family Studies – *What the research evidence tells us about coercive control*
- NSW Government – Coercive Control information
- NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR)
- NSW Domestic Violence Death Review Team

Research & Best Practice

- ANROWS (Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety)
- Australian Domestic and Family Violence Death Review Network
- Our Watch

- DV-alert Foundation Training
- eSafety Commissioner
- Safe and Equal
- World Health Organization

Key evidence

- Coercive control is recognised as a risk factor for homicide, even where there has been no history of physical violence.
- Domestic and family violence deaths rarely occur without warning and are often preceded by an identifiable pattern of violence or coercive control with missed opportunities for intervention.
- Almost 2 in 5 recorded homicides and related offences in Australia are related to family and domestic violence.
- In NSW, a specific coercive control offence commenced on 1 July 2024, recognising that repeated controlling behaviours can constitute criminal conduct in current or former intimate partner relationships.

"The goal is not to teach you to fear unhealthy people. The goal is to help you become so deeply rooted in your own dignity, identity and relationship with God that anything asking you to abandon them becomes immediately recognisable."

You Were Created for Freedom

One of the greatest safeguards you will ever develop is not learning to spot red flags.

It is learning to know yourself.

Many young people enter relationships while they are still discovering:

Who am I?

What do I enjoy?

What do I believe?

What are my gifts?

What kind of life do I want?

What makes me feel alive?

What are my boundaries?

What brings me peace?

If someone enters your life before you know these things, it becomes very easy for them to answer those questions for you.

Slowly...

Your music becomes their music.

Your friends become their friends.

Your opinions become their opinions.

Your dreams become their dreams.

Your values become whatever keeps the relationship peaceful.

Over time, you may look in the mirror and realise:

"I don't actually know who I am anymore."

That is why self-discovery is a safeguarding practice.

You cannot protect a self you have never been allowed to know.

Coming Into Inner Union

Inner union is the experience of becoming a whole person.

It is learning to live from your own values, your own convictions, your own relationship with God and your own sense of identity.

It is becoming comfortable in your own company.

It is discovering that your worth is not determined by whether someone chooses you.

It is becoming rooted enough that you can welcome another person into your life without disappearing inside theirs.

Healthy relationships are not built from two incomplete people trying to rescue each other.

They are built from two whole people choosing to walk together.

Before Dating, Build a Life

Spend time discovering:

What makes you laugh?

What makes you curious?

What gives you peace?

What are your gifts?

What do people naturally come to you for?

What kind of friendships make you feel safe?

What dreams has God quietly placed inside you?

Build friendships.

Learn new skills.

Travel if you can.

Volunteer.

Create art.

Play sport.

Join communities.

Develop your faith.

Find mentors.

Read books.

Spend time alone without being lonely.

The stronger your own identity becomes, the more easily you will recognise relationships that ask you to become smaller.

The Garden Principle

Imagine your life is a beautiful garden.

It contains your family.

Your friends.

Your faith.

Your education.

Your creativity.

Your hobbies.

Your dreams.

Your relationship with God.

Your quiet moments.

Your laughter.

A healthy relationship is someone who walks into your garden and says,

"This is beautiful. How can I help it grow?"

An unhealthy relationship begins pulling out flowers to make room for itself.

Soon there is no garden left.

Only them.

Love should add to your life.

It should never require you to abandon it.

A Biblical Reflection

The first relationship God invites us into is not romance.

It is relationship with Himself.

Before Adam and Eve became husband and wife, they were already known.

Already loved.

Already given purpose.

Already entrusted with responsibility.

Already created in the image of God.

Your identity comes before your relationships.

You are not searching for someone to complete you.

You are discovering the person God is already forming you to be.

Healthy love is an invitation, not a replacement for your identity.

Reflection

Before I ever enter a relationship, I want to know...

What makes me feel most alive?

What gifts do I believe God has given me?

What kind of life do I dream of building?

What friendships do I want to protect?

What boundaries will I never apologise for?

What freedoms do I never want to lose?

What parts of myself deserve to keep growing, whether I am single or in a relationship?

Reflective Safeguarding Principle

The healthiest relationship you will ever build is the one you have with yourself and with God.

Everything else grows from there.

Know yourself.

Value yourself.

Protect your dignity.

Listen to your body.

Walk in freedom.

And choose relationships that help you become more fully yourself, not less.

Chapter 2

What Healthy Love, Leadership and Community Look Like

Healthy Relationships Help You Become More Yourself

Reflective Safeguarding™ begins with a simple observation:

Healthy people, healthy leaders and healthy communities do not require you to abandon yourself in order to belong.

Instead, they create environments where you become more confident, more curious, more creative and more fully yourself.

Healthy love expands your world.

Healthy leadership develops your gifts.

Healthy workplaces encourage initiative.

Healthy churches strengthen your relationship with God rather than your dependence on a particular leader.

Healthy friendships make room for other friendships.

Healthy authority restores dignity.

Control slowly removes it.

The Internal Authority Principle

Every person is born with an internal sense of identity.

It is the quiet voice that says:

"I don't think this is right."

"I feel uncomfortable."

"I need more time."

"I disagree."

"I need help."

"I have another idea."

"I don't want to do this."

Healthy environments teach you to trust that voice.

Controlling environments teach you to ignore it.

Green Flags

In Relationships

You feel safe.

You laugh.

You disagree without fear.

You spend time with friends.

You have privacy.

You make decisions together.

You are encouraged to grow.

Your dreams matter.

You never have to earn respect.

In Friendships

You are accepted without performing.

You can say no.

You are not punished for having other friends.

You can disagree without losing belonging.

You celebrate one another.

You feel lighter after spending time together.

In Workplaces

Healthy workplaces trust people.

Healthy managers provide guidance without humiliation.

They explain expectations clearly.

They welcome questions.

They admit mistakes.

They celebrate growth.

They develop leadership in others rather than creating dependence.

You are allowed to think differently.

You are allowed to contribute ideas.

You are allowed respectful disagreement.

Your competence is recognised rather than quietly undermined.

In Churches

Healthy churches point people towards Christ rather than towards dependence on a particular leader.

Questions are welcomed.

Discernment is encouraged.

Conscience is respected.

Healthy spiritual authority serves rather than controls.

Leadership exists to equip people, not to make them smaller.

People leave feeling more connected to God, more confident in their gifts and more secure in their identity.

What Undermining Authority Looks Like

Control is often subtle.

It may sound like:

"We've already decided."

"You're too sensitive."

"That's not what happened."

"No one else thinks that."

"You're remembering it wrong."

"You always create drama."

"We know what's best."

"You should just trust us."

Over time these messages slowly replace your own judgement.

You stop asking,

"What do I think?"

and begin asking,

"What am I allowed to think?"

Building A False Story

One of the most common safeguarding concerns is narrative control.

This happens when another person or group repeatedly tells a story about you that is not true.

You become:

"The difficult one."

"The emotional one."

"The rebellious one."

"The unreliable one."

"The problem."

Eventually you may begin to believe the story yourself.

Reflective Safeguarding asks a different question.

What are the observable facts?

What evidence supports this story?

What evidence contradicts it?

Who benefits if I stop trusting my own experience?

Micromanagement and Control

Guidance says,

"I'll help you succeed."

Micromanagement says,

"I don't trust you."

Healthy supervision develops confidence.

Micromanagement creates dependency.

Healthy leaders gradually give people more responsibility.

Controlling leaders make themselves indispensable.

Healthy authority equips.

Unhealthy authority replaces.

Reflection

Think about a place where you feel completely yourself.

What happens in your body there?

Think about a place where you constantly second-guess yourself.

What happens in your body there?

Which environment helps you become more fully the person God created you to be?

Reflective Safeguarding Questions

Does this relationship make me:

More confident?

More peaceful?

More creative?

More curious?

More connected?

More myself?

Or does it make me:

Smaller?

Quieter?

More anxious?

More dependent?

More afraid?

More confused?

Healthy authority helps people stand.

Control slowly teaches people to disappear.

Biblical Reflection

Jesus never diminished the people He encountered.

He restored sight.

He restored dignity.

He restored voice.

He restored belonging.

He restored identity.

He consistently moved people from fear towards freedom.

Healthy leadership follows the same pattern.

It equips rather than controls.

It serves rather than dominates.

It restores rather than diminishes.

Because every person bears the image of God and deserves to flourish.

Chapter 3

Your Body Is One of Your First Safeguarding Systems

Learning to Listen Before You Explain

Reflective Safeguarding™ begins with a simple observation:

Your body is constantly collecting information about the world around you.

Long before your mind has formed an opinion, your nervous system is already asking:

Am I safe?

Am I free?

Do I belong?

Can I relax?

Sometimes we ignore these signals.

Sometimes we explain them away.

Sometimes we have learned not to trust them at all.

This chapter is an invitation to become curious again.

Not fearful.

Curious.

Your Nervous System Is Trying to Protect You

Every human nervous system has one primary job:

To keep you alive.

It is constantly scanning your environment for signs of safety or danger.

Most of this happens automatically.

You do not consciously decide to become tense.

You do not consciously decide to hold your breath.

Your body notices first.

Fight

Your body prepares to defend itself.

You may feel:

- angry
- restless
- argumentative
- frustrated
- energetic
- unable to sit still

Fight is not bad.

It is your body trying to create safety.

Flight

Your body prepares to escape.

You may:

- overwork
- overthink
- leave conversations
- stay busy
- avoid conflict
- constantly distract yourself

Sometimes running away is physical.

Sometimes it is emotional.

Freeze

Your body becomes still.

You might:

- go quiet
- struggle to think
- forget words
- feel numb
- feel disconnected

- become compliant

Many people mistake freeze for agreement.

It is often a survival response.

Fawn

Fawn says:

"If I keep everyone happy, maybe I'll stay safe."

You might:

- apologise constantly
- say yes when you mean no
- avoid disappointing people
- become responsible for everyone else's emotions
- ignore your own needs
- struggle to identify what you actually want

Many caring young people confuse fawning with kindness.

They are not the same thing.

When Danger Feels Exciting

This is one of the most important things you will ever learn.

Not every butterfly means love.

Sometimes butterflies mean anxiety.

Sometimes intensity feels exciting because your nervous system mistakes unpredictability for connection.

You may think:

"I can't stop thinking about them."

"They make me feel alive."

"They're so passionate."

"They need me."

"They're different."

But ask another question.

Do they make me feel...

Safe?

Or activated?

Calm?

Or constantly waiting for the next message?

Free?

Or responsible?

Excitement and safety are not always the same thing.

Why Calm Can Feel Strange

If you have grown up around conflict, unpredictability, criticism or emotional inconsistency, your nervous system may become familiar with chaos.

Chaos becomes normal.

Calm feels unfamiliar.

A healthy relationship may initially feel:

Too quiet.

Too slow.

Too ordinary.

Too respectful.

Too independent.

This does not mean something is wrong.

It may simply mean your nervous system is learning a new definition of safety.

Listen to Your Body

Before asking,

"What do they think of me?"

Try asking,

"What happens inside me when I am with them?"

Reflection

When their name appears on my phone...

Do I feel:

- ☐ relaxed
- ☐ curious
- ☐ peaceful
- ☐ excited in a steady way

or

- ☐ guilty
- ☐ panicked
- ☐ responsible
- ☐ sick
- ☐ tense
- ☐ afraid to answer

After spending time with them...

Do I feel:

- ☐ bigger
- ☐ more confident
- ☐ more creative
- ☐ more myself
- ☐ energised

or

- ☐ smaller
- ☐ exhausted
- ☐ confused

☐ anxious

☐ guilty

☐ disconnected from myself

The Reflective Safeguarding Pause

Before explaining away uncomfortable feelings, pause.

Notice.

Listen.

Become curious.

Ask:

What happened?

What am I feeling?

What is my body noticing?

What story am I telling myself?

What evidence do I have?

What protects my dignity?

Your Body and Your Identity

The goal of Reflective Safeguarding™ is not to become suspicious of every uncomfortable feeling.

The goal is to become deeply connected to yourself.

The more you know yourself, the more easily you recognise environments that ask you to abandon yourself.

Healthy relationships help your nervous system settle.

Healthy friendships allow you to breathe.

Healthy leaders make you feel more confident, not more dependent.

Healthy churches deepen your relationship with God rather than replacing it.

Healthy workplaces develop your gifts rather than diminishing them.

Biblical Reflection

Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly says,

"Do not be afraid."

Not because danger never exists.

But because His desire is for people to live in truth, freedom and peace.

The fruit of the Spirit includes peace, patience, gentleness and self-control.

These qualities create environments where people flourish.

Perfect love does not erase your identity.

It strengthens it.

Healthy love allows your soul to exhale.

Healthy leadership restores your dignity.

Healthy community helps you become more fully the person God created you to be.

Chapter 4

The Slow Fade

Recognising the Pattern Before You Lose Yourself

One of the most dangerous myths about unhealthy relationships is that they begin with violence.

Most do not.

Most begin with attention.

Affection.

Excitement.

Feeling chosen.

Feeling special.

Feeling understood.

That is why so many intelligent, capable and confident people find themselves in controlling relationships.

They did not ignore obvious danger.

They slowly adapted to small changes until unhealthy behaviour began to feel normal.

Reflective Safeguarding™ teaches us to recognise the pattern before the pattern becomes our reality.

Stage One

Charm

"I've never met anyone like you."

"You understand me."

"We're so connected."

"I've never felt this way before."

They message constantly.

They compliment you.

They make you feel special.

They want to spend all their time with you.

This feels wonderful.

And sometimes it is completely healthy.

Reflective Safeguarding is not about becoming suspicious.

It is about staying curious.

Ask yourself:

Can I still hear my own voice?

Can I still make my own decisions?

Can I still spend time with other people?

Stage Two

Fast Attachment

Suddenly everything feels urgent.

"I love you."

"We're meant to be."

"I've never trusted anyone like this."

"We don't need anyone else."

"You are my whole world."

The relationship begins to move faster than your own sense of identity.

Healthy relationships grow.

Control often rushes.

Healthy people respect your pace.

Control pushes past it.

Stage Three

Isolation

This stage rarely begins with,

"You can't see your friends."

Instead it sounds like:

"I just don't think they respect us."

"I only want what's best for you."

"They're a bad influence."

"Why do you need them when you have me?"

Slowly...

You stop going to youth group.

You stop seeing friends.

You stop calling family.

You stop talking to mentors.

Your world becomes smaller.

Control grows best in isolation.

Healthy love grows in community.

Stage Four

Small Controls

These requests seem harmless.

"What's your password?"

"Turn your location on."

"Send me a photo."

"Who liked your post?"

"Why didn't you answer?"

"Wear something else."

"Delete him."

"Delete her."

One request may seem reasonable.

The pattern is what matters.

Healthy relationships ask.

Control expects.

Healthy relationships respect "no."

Control treats "no" as rejection.

Stage Five

Guilt

This is where responsibility begins to shift.

"If you loved me..."

"I wouldn't get angry if you just listened."

"You made me do this."

"I'm only like this because I care."

"You always upset me."

Slowly you become responsible for:

their emotions

their insecurity

their jealousy

their anger

their choices

Reflective Safeguarding asks:

Whose responsibility is this?

Stage Six

Confusion

You begin apologising for things you didn't do.

You replay conversations.

You question your memory.

You wonder if you're too sensitive.

You stop trusting yourself.

This is sometimes called gaslighting.

You hear:

"That never happened."

"You're imagining things."

"You're overreacting."

"No one else thinks that."

Eventually the loudest voice in your head is no longer your own.

It is theirs.

Stage Seven

Dependency

Your life slowly revolves around keeping another person emotionally comfortable.

You check your phone constantly.

You avoid upsetting them.

You change your plans.

You hide parts of yourself.

You become smaller.

Your identity begins to depend on their approval.

Healthy relationships encourage independence.

Control creates dependence.

Healthy leaders equip.

Control makes itself indispensable.

Healthy churches strengthen your relationship with God.

Control asks you to replace your own discernment with someone else's.

Healthy workplaces develop confidence.

Control creates self-doubt.

Stage Eight

Fear

This stage is not always physical.

Sometimes it is emotional.

You become afraid of:

saying no

asking questions

having friends

making mistakes

being successful

being yourself

disappointing them

leaving

The most painful part is that many people still call this love.

It isn't.

Love expands freedom.

Fear reduces it.

The Slow Fade

Look back through these stages.

Notice that almost none of them involve violence.

Instead they involve small moments where another person's need for control slowly becomes more important than your freedom.

Reflective Safeguarding asks a different question.

Not,

"Are they a bad person?"

But,

"What is happening to me?"

Am I becoming:

more confident?

more peaceful?

more creative?

more connected?

more myself?

Or am I becoming:

smaller?

quieter?

more anxious?

more isolated?

more confused?

more afraid?

That question may protect your dignity long before you recognise the word "abuse."

The Reflective Safeguarding Reminder

You do not lose yourself all at once.

You lose yourself one compromise at a time.

One apology at a time.

One silence at a time.

One cancelled friendship at a time.

One abandoned dream at a time.

Healthy love should never require the slow disappearance of the person God created you to be.

If you are becoming smaller so someone else can feel bigger,
pause.

listen.

reflect.

tell someone safe.

protect your dignity.

Because healthy love never asks you to disappear.

Chapter 5

The Reflective Safeguarding Framework™

Restoring Your Internal Authority

Healthy relationships do not replace your ability to think, feel, question or choose.

Healthy relationships strengthen it.

Coercive control works differently.

It slowly disconnects you from your own thoughts, your own body, your own values and your own judgement until someone else's voice becomes louder than your own.

Reflective Safeguarding™ is a practice of returning to yourself.

It is a slow, intentional process of noticing what is happening, listening without judgement, and responding in ways that protect your dignity and freedom.

It is not about becoming suspicious.

It is about becoming deeply rooted.

Step One

NOTICE

What actually happened?

This sounds simple.

It isn't.

When we care about someone, we often explain away behaviour before we acknowledge it.

We minimise.

We justify.

We excuse.

We tell ourselves:

"They didn't mean it."

"They're just stressed."

"I'm probably overreacting."

Reflective Safeguarding begins with observation.

Not interpretation.

Not justification.

Simply observation.

Ask:

What actually happened?

What words were spoken?

What behaviour did I see?

What changed?

What would an independent person have observed?

Reflection

Write only facts.

No explanations.

No excuses.

No stories.

Just observations.

Step Two

LISTEN

What is my body telling me?

Your nervous system notices things long before your mind creates a story.

Instead of immediately asking,

"What should I think?"

pause and ask,

"What am I experiencing?"

Do I feel:

safe?

calm?

free?

curious?

relaxed?

Or do I feel:

small?

tight?

anxious?

guilty?

confused?

frozen?

afraid?

Your body is not giving you a verdict.

It is giving you information.

Become curious.

Listen.

Step Three

NAME

What behaviour am I seeing?

Naming behaviour reduces confusion.

Instead of saying,

"I don't know why I feel uncomfortable."

try naming what is happening.

Is this:

Respect?

Curiosity?

Kindness?

Pressure?

Guilt?

Control?

Isolation?

Gaslighting?

Micromanagement?

Humiliation?

Narrative control?

Spiritual manipulation?

Emotional dependency?

Healthy relationships become clearer when behaviour is named honestly.

Confusion often loses its power once it has a name.

Step Four

PLACE RESPONSIBILITY

Who owns this?

This is where many people lose themselves.

Especially people who are caring, empathic and compassionate.

You begin carrying:

someone else's anger

someone else's insecurity

someone else's disappointment

someone else's jealousy

someone else's choices

Reflective Safeguarding asks a different question.

Whose behaviour is this?

Whose emotions are these?

Whose responsibility is this?

You are responsible for your choices.

You are not responsible for regulating another person's behaviour.

Step Five

RESPOND

What protects my dignity?

Not every situation requires confrontation.

Not every situation requires leaving.

But every situation deserves a thoughtful response.

Ask:

What action honours my values?

What protects my peace?

What protects my safety?

Who is a trusted person I can speak with?

What boundary needs to be communicated?

What support do I need?

Healthy responses are grounded rather than reactive.

Step Six

RELEASE

I am not responsible for managing another person's behaviour.

One of the most powerful safeguarding practices is learning what does not belong to you.

You cannot:

make someone tell the truth

make someone respect boundaries

make someone stop manipulating

make someone become healthy

make someone choose accountability

You can choose your response.

You can choose your boundaries.

You can choose your community.

You can choose your future.

Release is not giving up.

Release is returning responsibility to the person who owns it.

The Reflective Safeguarding Circle

Notice.

Listen.

Name.

Place Responsibility.

Respond.

Release.

Then return to Notice again.

This is not a one-time exercise.

It is a lifelong practice.

Reflection

Think about a recent situation that left you unsettled.

Without explaining or defending anyone, work through the framework.

NOTICE

What actually happened?

LISTEN

What did my body experience?

NAME

What behaviour am I seeing?

PLACE RESPONSIBILITY

Whose responsibility is this?

RESPOND

What protects my dignity?

RELEASE

What am I carrying that does not belong to me?

Biblical Reflection

Jesus consistently returned dignity to people.

He asked questions.

He listened.

He restored identity.

He refused manipulation.

He walked away from unhealthy demands.

He spoke truth without surrendering compassion.

Reflective Safeguarding follows the same pattern.

It invites us to become people who are deeply rooted in truth, secure in our identity, attentive to our bodies, wise in our responses and free enough to release what was never ours to carry.

The Reflective Safeguarding Promise

I will notice without minimising.

I will listen without shame.

I will name what is true.

I will place responsibility where it belongs.

I will respond in ways that protect dignity.

I will release what was never mine to carry.

And I will continue becoming more fully the person God created me to be.

Chapter 6

Where Coercive Control Shows Up

Recognising Patterns of Power

Many people hear the words "coercive control" and immediately think of dating relationships.

But coercive control is a pattern of power.

Wherever power exists, there is the possibility that it will be used to serve others or to control them.

Reflective Safeguarding™ teaches us to recognise the pattern rather than simply the setting.

The question is always the same:

What is happening to my dignity, my freedom and my internal authority?

Dating Relationships

Healthy love says,

"I trust you."

Control says,

"Prove yourself."

Healthy love celebrates your friendships.

Control slowly replaces them.

Healthy love helps you become more yourself.

Control slowly teaches you to disappear.

Families

Healthy families guide.

Healthy families encourage independence.

Healthy families allow children and young adults to develop their own identity.

Control keeps people emotionally dependent.

Control may say:

"You owe us."

"You always disappoint us."

"You'll never cope without us."

Healthy authority prepares people to stand.

Control prepares people to stay.

Friendships

Healthy friends celebrate your success.

Healthy friends apologise.

Healthy friends respect boundaries.

Control creates drama, guilt and dependency.

If you feel responsible for constantly keeping a friendship alive, something deserves reflection.

Workplaces

Healthy leaders develop leaders.

They explain expectations.

They encourage questions.

They celebrate initiative.

They admit mistakes.

Control looks different.

It may include:

constant micromanagement

public humiliation

changing expectations

withholding information

creating favourites

building false narratives

discouraging independent thinking

making one person the problem

Healthy workplaces increase confidence.

Control slowly replaces confidence with self-doubt.

Churches

Healthy churches point people towards Christ.

Healthy leaders equip people for ministry.

Healthy communities encourage discernment.

Healthy authority serves.

Control asks for unquestioning loyalty.

Control discourages questions.

Control isolates people from outside perspectives.

Control replaces personal conviction with institutional expectation.

Jesus consistently restored dignity.

He never required people to surrender their humanity in order to follow Him.

Young Women and Their Gifts

Every young woman is created in the image of God.

Every young woman carries gifts.

Wisdom.

Leadership.

Creativity.

Compassion.

Discernment.

Teaching.

Hospitality.

Justice.

Mercy.

Administration.

Prophetic imagination.

Healthy communities make room for these gifts to flourish.

Healthy leaders celebrate them.

Healthy mentors help them grow.

Reflective Safeguarding asks a simple question:

Does this environment encourage women to become more fully themselves, or does it require them to become smaller in order to belong?

A Safeguarding Reflection

If a community consistently teaches that:

women should not think independently

women should not ask questions

women should not lead

women should not exercise their gifts

women should simply submit regardless of harm

women should ignore their own discernment

women should remain silent when something feels wrong

then every young woman should pause and ask:

What is happening to my internal authority?

Am I becoming more confident?

Or more afraid?

More alive?

Or more invisible?

More connected to God?

Or more dependent on human approval?

Healthy authority develops people.

Control develops dependence.

The Image of God

The first chapter of Genesis tells us that humanity—male and female—is created in the image of God.

Before anyone held a position.

Before anyone held authority.

Before anyone entered a relationship.

There was dignity.

There was purpose.

There was shared responsibility.

Reflective Safeguarding begins here.

Not with fear.

Not with suspicion.

But with the conviction that every person deserves to grow into the fullness of the gifts God has entrusted to them.

Anything that consistently asks you to abandon your voice, your conscience, your wisdom, your relationships, your creativity or your God-given gifts deserves thoughtful reflection.

Healthy authority never fears flourishing people.

It delights in them.

Because the Kingdom of God grows stronger when every person is free to become fully alive.

The First Relationship

Why Some Patterns Feel Like Home

One of the hardest truths to understand is this:

People rarely choose what is healthy.

They usually choose what feels familiar.

If you grew up in a home where you were encouraged to think, ask questions, make mistakes and develop your gifts, healthy relationships may feel natural.

But if you grew up learning that love meant keeping everyone else happy, something very different can happen.

You may learn:

Don't make waves.

Don't ask questions.

Don't disagree.

Don't upset people.

Don't be too loud.

Don't be too successful.

Don't outshine others.

Don't have boundaries.

Don't say no.

Don't trust yourself.

Don't leave.

These lessons are rarely taught as rules.

They are absorbed through experience.

Over time they become part of the way we understand love.

Self-Abandonment

Perhaps the greatest danger of coercive control is not that another person controls us.

It is that we slowly learn to abandon ourselves.

One apology.

One compromise.

One silence.

One cancelled dream.

One ignored instinct.

One dismissed feeling.

Until we no longer know where we end and someone else's expectations begin.

The Good Girl Trap

Many young women are praised for being:

easy-going

helpful

self-sacrificing

quiet

agreeable

obedient

accommodating

There is nothing wrong with kindness.

There is nothing wrong with generosity.

But kindness without boundaries becomes self-abandonment.

Compassion without discernment becomes vulnerability to control.

Reflective Safeguarding™ asks a different question.

Not,

"Am I making everyone happy?"

But,

"Am I remaining connected to the person God created me to be?"

Internal Authority

Healthy parents gradually transfer authority to their children.

Healthy teachers encourage independent thinking.

Healthy mentors celebrate questions.

Healthy churches develop discernment.

Healthy leaders create more leaders.

The goal of healthy authority is not lifelong dependence.

It is maturity.

It is freedom.

It is confidence.

It is wisdom.

A New Pattern

Perhaps you have spent years believing:

My needs don't matter.

My feelings are too much.

My gifts make people uncomfortable.

My opinions create conflict.

My boundaries disappoint people.

Reflective Safeguarding™ invites you into a different story.

Your voice matters.

Your body matters.

Your gifts matter.

Your questions matter.

Your boundaries matter.

Your relationship with God matters.

You do not become holy by disappearing.

You become whole by becoming more fully yourself.

A Biblical Reflection

Jesus never asked people to abandon their humanity.

He restored it.

He restored sight.

He restored voice.

He restored dignity.

He restored women to places of honour.

He listened to Mary.

He spoke publicly with the Samaritan woman.

He entrusted the first announcement of His resurrection to women.

Again and again, Jesus moved people from shame to dignity, from silence to voice, from fear to freedom.

The invitation of Christ is not self-erasure.

It is restoration.

Reflective Questions

What messages did I learn about being a girl?

What parts of myself have I hidden to belong?

When do I feel most fully alive?

What gifts come naturally to me?

What dreams have I quietly placed on a shelf?

What would it look like to stop abandoning myself?

Who might I become if I trusted that God delights in the person He created me to be?

Reflective Safeguarding Principle

You are not learning to become someone new.

You are learning to return to the person you have always been.

Deeply rooted.

Deeply loved.

Deeply known.

Deeply free.

Anything that asks you to abandon your dignity, your gifts, your voice or your relationship with God deserves careful reflection.

Because healthy love does not ask you to disappear.

It helps you become more fully yourself.

Chapter 7

Reflection Journal

Returning to Yourself

Reflective Safeguarding™ is not about judging other people.

It is about noticing what is happening inside you.

These questions are invitations.

There are no right or wrong answers.

Answer honestly.

Your body often knows long before your mind is ready to admit it.

The Becoming Journal

Am I becoming more myself, or less myself?

After spending time with this person, church, workplace or community...

Do I feel:

- ☐ More peaceful
- ☐ More creative
- ☐ More confident
- ☐ More joyful
- ☐ More connected to God
- ☐ More curious
- ☐ More courageous
- ☐ More fully myself

Or do I feel:

- ☐ Smaller
- ☐ More anxious

- ☐ More confused
- ☐ More apologetic
- ☐ More dependent
- ☐ More afraid
- ☐ More responsible for everyone else
- ☐ Less like myself

The Women's Reflection

Are women respected here?

Not tolerated.

Not accommodated.

Respected.

Ask yourself:

Can women lead here?

Can women ask difficult questions here?

Can women disagree respectfully here?

Can women teach here?

Can women make decisions here?

Can women exercise authority here?

Can women be recognised for their gifts here?

Can women be visible without being criticised?

Can women succeed without making themselves smaller?

Can women be intelligent, strong, creative and influential without threatening the culture?

The Internal Authority Reflection

Can I be as big, bold and powerful as God created me to be in this place?

Can I laugh loudly?

Can I ask questions?

Can I think differently?

Can I challenge ideas respectfully?

Can I use my gifts?

Can I lead?

Can I create?

Can I have boundaries?

Can I say no?

Can I change my mind?

Can I rest?

Can I be fully myself?

Or am I quietly learning to shrink?

My Body Check-In

When I enter this space...

My shoulders feel:

My breathing feels:

My stomach feels:

My thoughts become:

After I leave...

I feel:

☐ Lighter

☐ Inspired

☐ Calm

☐ Seen

☐ Valued

or

☐ Drained

☐ Confused

☐ Guilty

☐ Invisible

☐ Exhausted

☐ Not enough

Green Flag Journal

Today I noticed people who...

celebrated my ideas

listened without interrupting

encouraged my gifts

respected my boundaries

allowed disagreement

made me laugh

made me feel safe

helped me become more myself

Write about one of those moments.

Red Flag Journal

Today I noticed...

pressure

guilt

control

fear

confusion

silence

micromanagement

false stories

walking on eggshells

feeling responsible for someone else's emotions

What happened?

What did my body notice?

What boundary might need protecting?

Values Reflection

No relationship is worth losing:

My relationship with God.

My dignity.

My integrity.

My friendships.

My creativity.

My curiosity.

My gifts.

My voice.

My laughter.

My dreams.

My peace.

Circle the three that matter most to you today.

The Mirror Exercise

Look in a mirror.

Take a slow breath.

Ask yourself:

What do I love about this woman?

What gifts do I see?

What strength has carried her this far?

What dreams still live inside her?

What would happen if she stopped apologising for taking up space?

Reflective Safeguarding™

Healthy love should make you feel more alive.

Healthy friendships should make you laugh more.

Healthy churches should deepen your relationship with God, not replace it.

Healthy workplaces should develop your confidence, not diminish it.

Healthy leadership should create more leaders.

Healthy families should prepare children to become independent adults.

Anything that consistently asks you to become quieter, smaller, less curious, less creative or less yourself deserves thoughtful reflection.

Because the Kingdom of God is not built by making women disappear.

It is built when every person is free to flourish in the fullness of the gifts, dignity and calling entrusted to them.

Final Reflection

Close your eyes.

Picture the woman God is quietly forming.

Is she:

confident?

wise?

creative?

joyful?

peaceful?

courageous?

compassionate?

strong?

Now ask one final question.

Does this relationship, workplace, church or community help me become that woman...

or does it ask me to become someone smaller?

The answer may be one of the most important safeguarding insights you will ever receive.

Chapter 8

Creating a Safe Life

Become So Deeply Rooted That You Do Not Need to Abandon Yourself to Belong

Reflective Safeguarding™ is not simply about recognising coercive control.

It is about creating a life where coercive control feels completely unfamiliar.

The safest life is not built by becoming suspicious of everyone.

It is built by becoming deeply rooted in who you are.

The Oak Tree

An oak tree does not become strong because it never experiences storms.

It becomes strong because its roots grow deep.

The deeper the roots, the less likely it is to be moved by every wind that comes along.

Your identity can become like that.

Deeply rooted.

Steady.

Grounded.

Alive.

Connected.

When you know who you are, you no longer need another person to tell you.

Know Yourself

Know what brings you joy.

Know what gives you peace.

Know what makes you laugh.

Know what breaks your heart.

Know your values.

Know your gifts.

Know your calling.

Know your boundaries.

Know your dreams.

Know your relationship with God.

Spend your life becoming more fully yourself.

Build a Big Life

Your life should be bigger than one relationship.

Fill it with:

friends

books

travel

music

faith

creativity

work

service

adventure

community

laughter

learning

mentors

quiet places

beautiful conversations

purpose

The more deeply rooted your life becomes, the harder it is for one person or one community to become your entire world.

Choose People Who...

Celebrate your success.

Respect your "no."

Want you to have other friendships.

Encourage your independence.

Support your dreams.

Ask questions rather than make assumptions.

Can apologise.

Can change their mind.

Can admit mistakes.

Speak well of others.

Tell the truth.

Protect your dignity.

Like seeing you grow.

Feel secure when you become stronger.

Healthy people do not fear your flourishing.

They delight in it.

Never Make Yourself Smaller

Never shrink your intelligence to protect someone else's insecurity.

Never hide your gifts to make another person comfortable.

Never silence your questions to keep the peace.

Never apologise for taking up space.

Never believe that love requires you to disappear.

Never mistake self-abandonment for humility.

You were not created to become less.

You were created to become fully alive.

A Letter to Young Women

There will be people who prefer a quieter version of you.

A version that never disagrees.

Never leads.

Never asks difficult questions.

Never challenges unhealthy systems.

Never shines too brightly.

Never takes up too much space.

Do not become that version.

Become the woman who laughs deeply.

Who thinks carefully.

Who creates beauty.

Who speaks truth with kindness.

Who protects the vulnerable.

Who knows her own mind.

Who trusts her body.

Who listens for the voice of God above the noise of every other voice.

The world does not need a smaller version of you.

It needs the fullness of the gifts you carry.

The Reflective Safeguarding Declaration

I will know myself.

I will honour my body.

I will trust my discernment.

I will develop my gifts.

I will protect my peace.

I will keep learning.

I will choose relationships that expand my life rather than reduce it.

I will never confuse control with love.

I will never surrender my dignity for belonging.

I will never abandon the person God is forming within me.

The Final Reflection

Close your eyes.

Picture yourself ten years from now.

She is walking with confidence.

She laughs freely.

She creates.

She leads.

She rests.

She loves deeply without losing herself.

She has friends who celebrate her.

She belongs without pretending.

She knows her worth is not earned.

She is deeply rooted in God.

Now ask yourself:

What choices today help me become her?

The Heart of Reflective Safeguarding™

The goal was never simply to avoid coercive control.

The goal was always this:

To become so deeply rooted in your identity, dignity, gifts, discernment and relationship with God that anything asking you to abandon them becomes immediately recognisable.

Because healthy love never asks you to become smaller.

Healthy love gives you room to become everything God created you to be.