

Ashley Cashion, you plead guilty to five counts of assault, one count of aggravated assault, two counts of strangulation and one count of perverting justice. All but one of the crimes were committed overnight on 14 January 2024 against Ella Meredith. One of the assaults was committed jointly with a female, Hayley James, but you committed all of the other crimes yourself.

In late 2022 or early 2023, you commenced a relationship with Ms Meredith. You began living with her at your mother's home in Waverley where you slept in a caravan in the yard. In December 2023 or very early January 2024 your relationship broke up and she moved out. You were then 29 and she was 19.

Until 2020 you were in a relationship with Hayley James with whom you had one daughter. They lived in Victoria but visited from time to time. On 13 January 2024 your daughter was staying overnight with you and your mother at your house while Ms James stayed elsewhere. Although your relationship with Ms Meredith had ended, you invited her to your home to spend time with your daughter with whom she had grown close during her visits. You and Ms Meredith spent time with your daughter that afternoon. Later in the evening, when your daughter was in bed and being cared for by your mother, you and Ms Meredith went to a hotel and to a friend's house. You arrived back at your home at around 11.00 pm. You asked her inside on the pretext of seeing your mother but having returned to the caravan, you began to interrogate her about who she had been seeing since you had broken up and prevented her from leaving. Thereafter, until she left on the following day, you subjected her to what must be described a terrifying and prolonged ordeal comprising repeated assaults and strangulations accompanied by vile abuse and threats of serious violence. You took her into the house where you grabbed her by the throat and pushed her onto the couch. That assault is the subject of count 1. After abusing her you produced a long forearm, screwed a silencer on to it, pointed it at her head and said to her "I should just shoot you now shouldn't I." That aggravated assault is the subject of count 2. She was frightened and distressed and began to cry. You took her phone, demanded the names of those she had been seeing while threatening violence to them and calling her a slut and a whore. When she attempted to leave you sprayed her with capsicum spray, and took her car keys. Unknown to Ms Meredith, your plan to inflict violence on her was formed hours earlier when you sent a series of messages to Ms James asking whether she would bash Ms Meredith for money. She readily agreed. Just before 4.00 am you told Ms James where Ms Meredith was and she arrived shortly thereafter. On her arrival she immediately began to assault Ms Meredith by punching and kicking her. She knocked her to the ground and, while she was on the ground, punched her to the left side of her head several times. While she was doing this you again sprayed Ms Meredith's face with capsicum spray. One of the blows inflicted by Ms James to Ms Meredith's head was particularly hard. She thought she had been stomped on. Ms James only stopped her attack when you told her "that's enough". The various assaults just described are the subject of count 3. You are criminally responsible for all of the violence Ms James inflicted. I regards your criminal culpability is greater than hers. Even though she was responsible for most of the force, you instigated and encouraged the attack and actively participated in it. She was acting under your direction and control.

You were then directly responsible for the infliction of further violence. You summoned Ms Meredith into the caravan, where you continued to question her about the contents of her phone as you scrolled through it. When she gave answers you did not like you repeatedly struck her

face with an open hand. You threatened to knock her out. One of the blows was sufficiently hard to make her feel light headed and cause a ringing sensation and hearing loss in her left ear. Those assaults were the subject of count 4. A later medical examination disclosed that there had been internal bleeding to her eardrum, and both the outer and inner ear were swollen and bruised. You then grabbed her throat with both hands and squeezed until she could not breathe and was gasping for air. That strangulation is count 5. Your acts were enough to prompt Ms James, who was still present, to ask you to stop. A short time later you again grabbed Ms Meredith around the throat until she was gasping for air. That strangulation was count 6. She later told police that everything then became a bit hazy because you were constantly hitting and choking her. You left for a few minutes telling Ms James to not let you go anywhere. On your return you resumed the process of going through Ms Meredith's phone and hitting her face as she responded to your questioning. You again pushed her down onto the bed by grabbing her throat. Again Ms James had to intervene, although for this instance you are charged only with assault rather than strangulation. That is count 7.

Still the ordeal continued. You took Ms Meredith to her car and made her drive towards the Tasman Highway. You made her park in a residential estate past Waverley. As you went through her phone you smoked Ice and asked her why you were not good enough. You then made her drive further away from the city. You said to her "Do you realise you are not coming back" and that you would "bash the fuck out of her". She feared for her life. At your instruction she drove to Nunamara. When she stopped the car you hugged her, told her that she was lucky you loved her and that you did not kill her, and then told her to drive back.

Ms James left shortly after your return. Ms Meredith fell asleep on the bed. When she woke at around 10.00 am her face was swollen and sore but the violence continued. You began consuming alcohol, and continued to strike her with your right open hand to the left side of her face. Those assaults are the subject of count 8. It was not until that afternoon that she told you that she wanted to leave to buy cigarettes. This time you did not stop her. She returned to her mother's house. Her injuries were obvious. She told her mother only that Ms James was responsible. She was too scared of you to go to the police. It was not until 18 January that she told her mother of your involvement. The police were notified and you were arrested the following day. A subsequent medical examination of her, and a search of your home, provided strong evidence of the truth of her allegations.

None of the counts to which you have pleaded guilty include assault by deprivation of liberty. In particular, you are not charged with any offence arising from the trip to Nunamara. However, the assaults to which you have pleaded guilty were committed in the context that the violence and threats, including against her life, occurred when Ms Meredith felt, with justification, that she was unable to escape. That must have added to the fear she experienced. You were arrested on 19 January 2024.

The final count on the indictment is perverting justice. On 8 March 2024 you were in custody. A restraint order was in place prohibiting contact with her. Despite that, with the help of others, you contacted Ms Meredith by phone. During the phone call you blamed Ms James for what had happened, asked Ms Meredith to change her police statement to say that Ms James was responsible and offered her a substantial amount of money to do so. You told her that you could still get things done while you were in gaol, but that this was "not a threat." You spoke to her again during the same night and again offered her money to change her statement.

You are now aged almost 32. Your record includes common assaults in 2016 and 2017. However, since 2019 you have been sentenced for numerous offences of violence, drug offences, drug related driving offences, firearm offences, breaches of family violence order and other anti-social conduct. Many of these offences were committed against Ms James. You were made subject to fines, a community correction order, a suspended term of imprisonment and then actual imprisonment. On 29 June 2023 you were ordered to serve a total term of about four and a half months. Your offending did not cease following your release. You very soon began to commit a series of breaches of the family violence orders in place to protect Ms James, including in the period immediately before and following 14 January 2024, when you committed the crimes against Ms Meredith. The breaches were not restricted to mere contact, but included threats and abuse. Why, in those circumstances, Ms James agreed to join you in assaulting Ms Meredith is baffling to say the least.

To add to that, you were at the time on bail for other offending for which you have since been sentenced. On 9 December 2024 you were sentenced to imprisonment for two years and nine months from 3 February 2024 with one year suspended and a non-parole period of one year for three counts of trafficking in methylamphetamine between late 2021 and early 2023. You were not sentenced for the family violence breaches to which I have referred until 24 July 2025. You were sentenced to a term of 15 months from 3 February 2025, which I infer was the day that you became eligible for parole under the previous sentence, with eligibility for parole after 10 months. Then on 19 March 2026 you were sentenced to a cumulative term of six months for being found on 19 January 2024, the day of your arrest, in possession of stolen property. I have no information about a parole order but I infer from the length of the sentence that no order was made.

The result is that you have already been in custody for almost two and a half years. If my calculations are correct you will have been eligible to apply for parole on 3 June 2026. I am informed that you have behaved well in prison and you hold positions of responsibility. Frequent lockdowns have made prison more difficult for most people in custody. You have undertaken some rehabilitation programs and occupational training. The principle of totality requires that I consider the aggregate result of the sentencing orders to ensure that it is not disproportionate to your total criminality or crushing. The severity of a term of imprisonment compounds as it becomes longer. Nevertheless, each of the sentences to which you are, or will be subject, involve quite separate criminal conduct. I regard it as very important that there be adequate recognition of the individual interest of Ms Meredith and the harm suffered by her.

The remaining important consideration is your plea of guilty. It is the only mitigating factor of any weight. Although it was not an early plea, it was entered on an amended indictment filed late in the proceedings as a result, I infer, of negotiations between your counsel and the prosecution. The plea facilitated justice. It meant that a trial was avoided and the complainant was saved from having to give evidence, at least in your case. I am satisfied that it is not indicative of genuine remorse. Nevertheless, it is in the interests of justice to allow a reduction in sentence and the earliest eligibility for parole to reflect your plea, not only because of your acceptance of responsibility, but also as an indication to others of the benefit of doing so in appropriate cases.

Despite that, the only appropriate sentence is a lengthy term of imprisonment. You were affected by alcohol and drugs but that does not lessen your responsibility or culpability in any way. Your conduct was a classic example of the family violence abuser. Apparently motivated by your wish to physically and psychologically dominate and control Ms Meredith even after your relationship

ended, you subjected her to prolonged, repeated, cruel and terrifying violence and threats. As has been stated on many occasions, strangulation is a particularly dangerous form of attack, strongly indicative of the exercise of the type of dominance and control to which I have referred. The same may be said of pointing a loaded firearm with a silencer accompanied by a threat to shoot. The assaults were committed in the context of emotional abuse, threats and intimidation. Her victim impact statement describes just the type of psychological impact which is to be expected: hyper vigilance, nightmares, anxiety and ongoing fear. As has frequently been said, courts and the community regard violence within, or in the aftermath of, family relationships as a blight on society. There is a very strong need to condemn such violence and to impose a sentence which adequately punishes it. Perverting justice is regarded as serious because it undermines the integrity of the justice system. Persons who are convicted of the crime are almost always sentenced to imprisonment, not only for punishment, but to send a message to those who might be tempted to act as you did that prison is the likely outcome. In your case, you acted as you did to attempt to avoid punishment for very serious crimes.

On 24 July 2025 a magistrate declared you to be a serial family violence perpetrator under the *Family Violence Act*, s 29A. That declaration was expressed to remain in force for two years and so would expire in July 2027. In my view, the nature of the offences for which I am to sentence you, taken with your record, require the declaration to remain in force for the maximum period of five years, and so I will make a further order. On 23 September 2024 a magistrate made a family violence order to protect Ms Meredith. It was expressed to be for a period of three years. To account for the possibility that it will expire before your release I will make a further family violence order with more general conditions.

Ashley Cashion, you are convicted on each count on indictment 120/2026. In accordance with the *Family Violence Act*, s 13A, I direct that each offence be recorded on your criminal record as a family violence offence. I declare you to be a serial family violence perpetrator and direct that the declaration remain in force for three years from the expiry of the declaration made on 24 July 2025. I make a family violence order to take effect on the expiry of the order made 23 September 2024 for a further period of five years. There are conditions of that order that:

- (a) you not stalk Ella Louise Meredith;
- (b) you not directly or indirectly threatened, abuse or assault Ms Meredith;
- (c) you not contact Ms Meredith directly or indirectly, including by any form of electronic or other communication;
- (d) you not enter or remain on any premises where, to your knowledge, Ms Meredith may be staying or living;
- (e) you not damage any personal or other property of Ms Meredith or any premises where she may be staying or living;
- (f) the firearms conditions in the terms of those in the order presently in force.

But for your plea of guilty I would have imposed a term of four and a half years and ordered a longer non-parole period. You are sentenced to imprisonment for three years and nine months, cumulative to the sentences imposed on 24 July 2025 and 19 March 2026. I order that you not be eligible for parole until having served half of that term.