

Relationships & Marriage - Defining Violence

“But I thought that ‘domestic violence’ had to involve marks or bruises,” said a woman whose boyfriend had recently destroyed a piece of patio furniture after an argument, and who had once forced himself upon her sexually. A discussion ensued about why many people are unaware that their home would be considered violent. I let my client know that violence is about intimidating and controlling others- it doesn’t have to involve physical touch. A single individual can control a house full of people with behaviors such as yelling, name calling or other shaming/degrading words, property damage, and threats or gestures to commit physical harm. Physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional abuse are all forms of violence. I recommended that the aforementioned woman file a police report related to her boyfriend’s past behavior. I also encouraged her to call the police immediately in the future if her boyfriend destroyed property or attempted to have forcible sex with her. Many of my clients seem shocked the first time I recommend such action, while they would think it perfectly normal to call the police if such things were happening to someone else (particularly in the public arena, such as at a restaurant or park). This inability to identify violence and act to defend oneself are most often related to a history of violence in one’s family of origin. This is why we must be motivated to seek help from friends, family, small groups, counselors, and shelters in our communities to identify and break the cycle of abuse before our children grow up and become perpetrators themselves or choose partners who will victimize them.