

3.4: Is There Abuse in My Marriage?

As we discussed in this chapter, there are at least two kinds of violence: “situational couple violence” and “intimate partner terrorism.” Situational couple violence involves things like pushing, shoving, kicking, yelling, etc., and is done by men and women equally, although men generally do more damage than women. When there is situational couple violence in a relationship, the couple needs to improve their communication and problem-solving skills. (Part B of this exercise will help you see if there is this kind of abuse in your marriage.) A second kind of abuse, intimate partner terrorism, is more serious. It involves more severe forms of physical, emotional, and sexual violence, and is done to control the other person. This kind of violence is almost always done by men against women.

A. Assessing Intimate Partner Terrorism.¹¹⁶ This questionnaire can help you judge whether there is intimate partner terrorism in your marriage, a very serious and dangerous form of violence in a relationship. For each question, circle the number that best represents your relationship. Then add up your scores.

My Spouse . . .	Never (0)	Rarely (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)	Almost Always (4)
1. Makes me feel like I'm walking on eggshells to keep the peace	0	1	2	3	4
2. Keeps me away from family and friends	0	1	2	3	4
3. Yells at me often, and calls me names	0	1	2	3	4
4. Doesn't care about my needs and expectations	0	1	2	3	4
5. Is unpredictable or has sudden mood swings	0	1	2	3	4
6. Puts me down, to look better	0	1	2	3	4
7. Retaliates when I disagree	0	1	2	3	4
8. Breaks or hits things in my presence	0	1	2	3	4
9. Is forceful with things like affection and/or sex	0	1	2	3	4
10. Controls all the money and gives me little or none	0	1	2	3	4
11. Is possessive of me, or jealous of me	0	1	2	3	4
12. Sometimes physically hurts me	0	1	2	3	4
Add up your TOTAL SCORE:					

Compare your score to these categories:

- 0–19 = little risk of abuse
- 20–30 = likelihood of minor abuse
- 31 and higher = likelihood of serious abuse

If your score is higher than 31:

- It is a good idea to get help (see <http://www.ncadv.org/> or a local agency).
- Also, individual counseling, rather than couples' counseling, is probably best.

B. Assessing Situational Couple Violence.¹¹⁷ This questionnaire can help you judge whether there is situational couple violence in your marriage, such as slapping and pushing. Although this kind of physical aggression in marriage is not as serious as intimate partner terrorism, it is still an indication of some unhealthy parts in a marriage.

No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree on decisions, get annoyed about something the other person does, or have arguments or fights because they are in a bad mood or for some other reason. A couple may also use many different ways to settle their differences. Below are some things that you or your partner may have done when you had a disagreement or fight. For each question, circle the answer that best represents what your spouse has done. Next, answer the same questions about what you have done.

Thinking about your spouse, during the past 12 months . . .							
1. How many times, if any, has your spouse hit you?	None	Once	Twice	3–5 Times	6–10 Times	11–20 Times	20+ Times
2. How many times has your spouse twisted your arm or hair?	None	Once	Twice	3–5 Times	6–10 Times	11–20 Times	20+ Times
3. How many times has your spouse pushed, shoved, or kicked you?	None	Once	Twice	3–5 Times	6–10 Times	11–20 Times	20+ Times
4. How many times has your spouse grabbed you forcefully?	None	Once	Twice	3–5 Times	6–10 Times	11–20 Times	20+ Times
5. How many times has your spouse slapped you?	None	Once	Twice	3–5 Times	6–10 Times	11–20 Times	20+ Times
Now, thinking about yourself, during the past 12 months . . .							
6. How many times, if any, have you hit your spouse?	None	Once	Twice	3–5 Times	6–10 Times	11–20 Times	20+ Times
7. How many times have you twisted your spouse's arm or hair?	None	Once	Twice	3–5 Times	6–10 Times	11–20 Times	20+ Times

8. How many times have you pushed, shoved, or kicked your spouse?	None	Once	Twice	3–5 Times	6–10 Times	11–20 Times	20+ Times
9. How many times have you grabbed your spouse forcefully?	None	Once	Twice	3–5 Times	6–10 Times	11–20 Times	20+ Times
10. How many times have you slapped your spouse?	None	Once	Twice	3–5 Times	6–10 Times	11–20 Times	20+ Times

There is no scale that says how much of this behavior in a relationship is acceptable or how much is “too much.” Any behavior like this in a marriage is unhealthy and indicates a need to improve your communication and problem-solving skills.

- Looking over your answers, what have you learned about “situational couple violence” in your marriage? Have you and your spouse been able to avoid these kinds of behaviors? If so, this is a strength in your relationship. Or do you and your spouse sometimes use these ineffective and unhealthy ways to deal with disagreement and problems? If so, do both of you behave this way sometimes, which is more common, or is it just one of you? Write down your thoughts here:

- If you and/or your spouse sometimes use these ineffective and unhealthy ways to deal with disagreements and problems, how can you improve your ability to discuss things and solve disagreements in a healthier way? You may want to consider some of the marriage education resources suggested in Ch. 2 to improve your communication and problem-solving skills. Write down your thoughts and plans here:
