

Exercise

Defining Violence

AVERT
FAMILY VIOLENCE



**Collaborative Responses in
the Family Law System**



An Australian Government Initiative

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Defining Violence Exercise

Purpose:

- To promote discussion about what is considered violent and what is not

Materials required:

- Set of *Defining Violence cards* for each small group
- A3 sheet of paper for each small group, divided into three columns: 'Violent'; 'Not Violent'; and 'Depends'.

Process:

1. Ask participants to work in groups of 4–7 members. Consider each of the 28 defining violence cards and decide if it constitutes violence. Write each behaviour in one of the three columns – 'violent', 'not violent' or 'depends'. In the latter case, the group must be able to give examples of what it depends on. Give groups about 15 minutes to do this.
2. When each group has completed this, ask a representative from each group to identify what they think is violent and what is not. If it 'depends' – then ask them on what does it depend? Who is behaving towards whom? What the reason is? What the intention is? How the behaviour is understood by the actor or recipient? etc.
3. Analyse and discuss the behaviours each group has placed *differently*. For instance, some people may say yelling is violent, whereas others may say it is not. Ask people to explain the reasons for their classifications. If by some chance all the groups come up with the same division of violent and not violent, ask them if this division would have been the same 50 years ago, or 100 years ago? What do you notice, if anything, about different cultural interpretations? What if there were different cultures represented in the room than the ones you already have present? In what ways would changes in time or culture affect our distinction between violent and not violent?
4. What difference does it make if something is considered violent or not violent? Why is this relevant to family violence prevention and response?



Key elements to draw out of the discussion:

- Violence entails practices of power and control. It is not only physical assault. Therefore individual practices such as yelling can be a violent act, or they can be accepted expressions of feelings, depending on the context and the use of power.
- Power and control by husbands over wives, parents over children, men over women, have been accepted in many centuries and cultures. And this can make some people think that some behaviours and practices are 'normal'.
- The context of power and control therefore needs to be explored when people raise issues such as: What about when a woman hits a man? It is certainly possible for a woman to use violence and to be abusive. However, the system of power and control involved needs to be identified because it is also possible for women who are subjected to violence to use an act of violence, such as hitting or yelling, as an expression of desperation or defence. Who is controlled by the behaviour? Who is in fear?
- How realistic are our strategies for action? (cultural, rural and disability issues)



Defining violence cards

Hitting	Yelling
Constant texting or phoning	Deliberately isolating
Monitoring behaviour	Put downs



Lying	Threats
Dominating	Punishing
Tearing up photos	Hitting own head
Cutting own wrists	Smashing toys



Smashing crockery	Owning a gun
Controlling the finances	Opening someone else's mail
Slamming doors	Banging things
Punching walls	Pushing



Poking	Shaking someone
Being 'in your face'	Verbal abuse online
Always returning children late after contact visits	Not speaking for lengthy periods when displeased