

Case Studies for Deacons

As you think about these case studies, consider your role and what resources your church has in place or might need to address. These vignettes aim to brainstorm and showcase the complexity of abuse. Each of them triggers the potential for abuse to be present. Remember being curious about abuse is not the same as making an accusation. God calls his people to be discerning, to protect the sheep, and to be a refuge for the vulnerable.

1. You meet with a couple to help them budget after the wife asks the church for help. She says they are taking on too much debt. When you meet with the couple, the husband appears defensive. You are not getting the sense that he is being open and disclosing things. The wife is largely unable to answer basic questions about the contour of the family's budget. When you ask her questions, she timidly looks to her husband to answer. If she starts to speak, he interrupts and corrects her somewhat harshly.
 - a. What red flags do you see that might cause you to screen for abuse?
 - b. What questions might you ask to be more curious about the dynamics of their relationship?
 - c. How might you follow up with concerns?

2. The pastor calls the deacons and asks for help with an abusive marriage. It has been determined that separation for safety is needed. This family has 5 children and a dog. The husband is unwilling to leave home and has frozen the wife out of her accounts. He accuses his wife of having an affair. The pastor tells you several members have challenged him and believe the wife is at fault, given this is a beloved and well-respected member.
 - a. What support can the deacons lend to this family?
 - b. What concerns do you have?
 - c. What are safety issues that might arise?

3. Your wife comes to you after Bible study and expresses concerns after making observations about another woman. She says that she seems withdrawn and overwhelmed; something does not sit right with her. The following Sunday, you ask the husband how things are going at home. He complains about his wife's anxiety and inability to keep up with home-schooling and the house. He questions her faith and work ethic.
 - a. What questions might you ask him to unearth his attitudes and responses?
 - b. How might you find out more about what is happening at home? Who else would you involve?

Three months later, you pick up their child for a church event and notice that the wife has a bruise on her face. You ask her what happened, and she says she fell.

- c. What should your next steps be?
- d. What safety concerns do you have?
- e. What do you do if she continues to deny there are any problems?