



Cases to Examine: What Are We Afraid Of?

Read the following cases. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer in writing the questions at the end of the handout as they apply to each case.

Case 1: Lamia

Lamia has been taking care of the Sawyers' three-year-old child, Kendra, after school two days a week for almost a year now. Lamia's dad works at the Sawyers' photography studio. Nearly every time Mrs. Sawyer sees Lamia's parents, she goes on and on about how much Kendra adores Lamia. "I can't think of anyone I'd rather have taking care of my little girl."

Within the last month or so, though, Lamia has noticed that Kendra's upper arms have been bruised a lot. The first time she saw this, Mr. Sawyer said that his daughter had fallen down the stairs. "You know kids," he laughed it off. So Lamia didn't think much of it. But a week later, when Kendra whimpered as Lamia picked her up, there were fresh bruises on Kendra's arms. "Another tumble on the stairs," Mr. Sawyer said shortly.

Yesterday, while giving Kendra a bath, Lamia saw more bruises. "No kid could fall down the stairs four or five times in one month," she thought to herself. As she sat down to do her homework after tucking Kendra in to bed, Lamia couldn't get her mind off the bruises. Nor could she dismiss the feeling that Kendra had not been her usual self lately. Normally she was happy and full of energy. Even though she could be strong-headed at times, Kendra was usually a joy to take care of.

Today in Lamia's religion class, a guest speaker is talking about child abuse and how to spot it. Suddenly a flash of horror shoots through Lamia's mind. At first, denial wells up inside of her: No, it can't be true. The Sawyers are nice people. Everyone respects them.

A whirlwind of confusion and anxiety sweeps over Lamia: I can't report the Sawyers for child abuse. They trust me. And Kendra is so attached to me. Would anyone believe me? Besides, maybe I'm wrong. Oh no! My dad would probably lose his job with the Sawyers.

Case 2: Rebecca

Rebecca offers these insights from her own experience: "It takes courage to try to say something to a friend that you think could help them. Like if their mother or father is drunk a lot. Maybe you say to your friend, 'It must be hard for you when your dad gets like that' or 'Have you ever talked to your parents about it?' or 'Do you wish it were different?' Your friend could say to you, 'Who are you to tell me anything about my parents?' Or 'Shut up, it's my life. My dad doesn't have a problem.' You could lose a friend while you're trying to help, and that's a risk."

Case 3: Matt

Matt describes his reaction to the release of a new album: "Every time a new album comes out by one of my favorite groups, I just have this itch to have it. I can't think of anything else until I get it. If I don't have the money, I go crazy. Sometimes I borrow the money from my sister—she always has lots of money—but I don't tell her. Later I try to pay it back, but a few times I haven't been able to. When my sister gets all nuts about her missing money, I act real shocked that it's gone."

Case 4: Chris

Chris recalls an incident about getting involved in team sports: "I wanted to go out for the tennis team to learn the game and get good at it and just have fun. Everyone who tries out makes the team, and then the really good players go to the tournaments. It was tough to think of facing all those people who expect that if you're signing up for a sport, you should be a winner. Finally, I just didn't have the nerve to go out for it."

Case 5: Cynthia

Cynthia relates what happened when she told her boyfriend she did not want to go any further sexually with him: “He said, ‘Well, what did you think this whole relationship was *for*, anyway? I just don’t understand you.’ We had a lot of arguments after that, but eventually he accepted it and understood. I thought for sure we were going to break up, though.”

Case 6: Joe

Joe has made up his mind. He signs his letter of intent to join the Maryknoll Lay Missioners, a Catholic organization working with poor people in Third World countries. Now he just has to wait for admission into the training program. For reasons that he doesn’t completely understand himself, he badly wants to go to the Philippines to work in a grassroots economic development project that the Maryknoll workers have already begun.

The decision had not come easily. His parents had expected him to take the offer from a major insurance firm. Over Easter break, his father admitted, “Look, Joe, can’t you do good some other way? We put you through college so you could get a good job and not start at the bottom like I did.” Joe loves his dad but knows that once he began working in the corporate world, leaving it would be difficult.

Joe’s friends got on his case, too, challenging him with comments and questions like, “What a waste. With all the corruption over there, what good can you do?” and “Who do you think you are, Mother Teresa?” Especially hard to take was Angie’s reaction to the idea. He realizes that she fully expects they will be married in a year or so, even though they haven’t talked about it. Now her anger at him taints their every meeting.

Joe wants to use his skills and talents to help people, and he wants to open his eyes to other ways of seeing life. He knows that he can learn a lot with Maryknoll in the Philippines. So as he puts the stamp on the envelope, he feels excited and sure, despite the opposition and lack of understanding.

Case 7: Dave

Dave’s chronic fatigue certainly isn’t helping him now. His stomach is doing cartwheels as he stands outside the classroom filled with high school seniors. He barely hears what the principal and the public health educator are saying. All he knows is that in a few minutes he will have to sit before a hundred students and talk about his own fight with AIDS.

Even giving sales projections before corporate boards had not prepared him to talk about something as personal as this. One part of him wonders how he could have been so foolish as to agree to come here. Another side of him says, They’ve got to understand this disease. If they won’t pay attention to teachers and health experts, maybe they will to me. But he fears his reaction if he detects sneers or repulsion from the students. He has encountered enough of that already.

As the principal opens the door, the room grows quiet. Dave takes two deep breaths, steels himself, and enters. After the health educator introduces him, Dave begins, “I want to tell you about AIDS from the point of view of someone who lives with it each moment of every day. . . .”

- ❶ What good is at stake?
- ❷ What fear or fears does the main character in the case have to face for the sake of the good?
- ❸ Imagine what this person might quietly say to herself or himself to deal with the fear.
- ❹ What do you think this person should do?