

Scenario Packet

Scenario 2: Michelle & Mike

Background: Michelle and Mike divorced 18 months ago. They have two children (ages 7 and 10). Mike was ordered to pay \$800 a month in child support. Michelle works part-time in retail and receives childcare benefits. Michelle calls the child support office because Mike's payments have become increasingly irregular. Michelle sounds anxious and mentions:

- She never knows when money will come.
- Mike often brings the children items they don't need instead of paying support.
- He tells the children he's "helping mommy because she can't handle things alone."
- He frequently texts her about "better ways" to handle their arrangement.
- When the caseworker contacts Mike, he presents himself as cooperative and concerned, saying:
- "I've been helping Michelle in other ways; I bought school clothes for the kids and paid her electric bill last month."
- "She's not good with money management, so I thought it was better to help directly."
- "I can show you receipts for everything I've spent on the kids."
- "Michelle gets confused about finances; maybe you should mainly communicate with me."

Model Response:

"Mike, I appreciate you taking the time to speak with me. Let me clarify how our process works and what we need to focus on moving forward. Our records show that you have a court-ordered obligation to pay \$800 per month in child support. I see that payments have been irregular over the past several months. I understand you've mentioned purchasing items for the children and paying some of Michelle's bills. While I'm sure the children benefit from those contributions, they don't fulfill or reduce your court-ordered support obligation. Regarding communication, our standard practice is to work directly with each parent separately. This ensures we have accurate information from both parties and can address each person's questions or concerns appropriately. Moving forward, we need to see consistent monthly payments of \$800. Do you have any questions about the payment process or methods?"

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Scenario 3: Kevin & Christine

Background: You are in the courthouse in one of the conference rooms talking to both parties and gathering some last-minute documents. You notice that Kevin is well-prepared - he brought pay stubs, and all his forms are neatly completed. He is calmly going through all his documents with you.

Kevin: "I've always supported my children; I pay for all kinds of things all the time. Look, I even brought receipts. She's the one who's always disorganized, can't keep anything straight. (*points in Christine's direction*) Look at her, she is a mess! You can see what I'm saying, you understand, right?"

Across from him, you can see Christine visibly agitated and crying. She is having trouble finding her paperwork and she is struggling to speak clearly.

Christine : "I thought I brought everything I had. I can't find anything in this stupid bag. Is the judge even going to be able to see us if I don't have my pay stubs? Three days ago, I had to leave my house with my kids and now I can't find anything I need!"

Model Response:

Addressing Kevin: "It is important that we keep these interactions respectful. I'm here to focus on the child support process and make sure that it is handled fairly for everyone. What we are talking about today is your child support responsibility, not how the other parent is doing." I need to redirect our conversation. My role here is to facilitate the child support process fairly for both parties. Comments about the other parent's personal characteristics aren't part of what we're going need to address today. Let's focus on the documentation and process requirements."

Addressing both parties: "Let's pause for a moment. I want to make sure that both of you have an equal opportunity to participate fully in this process. Court proceedings can be stressful, and everyone deserves time to organize their materials properly. It is okay to take your time, we can go at a pace that works for everyone. If either of you need additional time to gather documentation or submit information, you can ask the court if they can grant you a continuance. It is up to the judge to decide, but you can ask. Why don't we take a short break and come back in 15 minutes." Let's take a 15-minute break so everyone can gather what they need. When I return, I'll work with each of you to review your documentation."

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Scenario 4: John

Background: John, who is known to have a history of abusive behavior, walks into the office visibly angry. He is holding a letter notifying him that the child support case is up for review, and he is concerned that his child support obligation will increase due to changes in income.

John (agitated and loud, fists clenched, voice raised): "This is BS! I already pay enough. You people don't care about fathers. I'm ending all of this NOW!"

Model Response: Follow your agency's protocol!

Immediate response: "I need you to lower your voice immediately. I understand you have concerns about your case, but I will not continue this conversation if there are threats or aggressive behavior toward me or this office. If you can speak respectfully, I'm willing to discuss the letter you received and what it means. If you cannot, this meeting ends now, and you'll receive information about next steps by mail."

(If John's behavior continues or escalates: "This meeting is over. You need to leave this office now. You will receive written communication about your case.") Call security/supervisor immediately.

Contacting the survivor (as soon as possible): "Hello, this is [Name] from [Office]. I'm calling because we had contact with John regarding your child support case. During that interaction, there was some concerning behavior we wanted to make you aware of. He came in upset about a review letter and made statements including 'I'm ending all of this NOW' while displaying aggressive behavior. While this may have been directed at our office or the legal process, we wanted you to know about it in case it's relevant to your safety. I can connect you with an advocacy program for safety planning if that would be helpful. I also want to discuss some options for how we handle your case moving forward to help ensure your safety – things like remote hearings, phone-only contact, modified enforcement actions, or case closure, if that's what you feel is the safest option. Do you have any immediate safety concerns? And do you have any questions about your case or next steps?"