The First Five Minutes Can Change Everything

Your Initial Response to Disclosure

Name _____ Date _____

BEGIN HERE

If someone told you the hardest thing in their life after church this Sunday, what would your first sentence be?

This worksheet walks you through three invented disclosures. At each crossroads you will choose a response, think through what it would communicate, and write the words you want ready before you ever need them.

WHAT TO KNOW

A disclosure is a test

Most people tell a small piece of their story first and watch what you do with it. Without saying so, they are asking: Will you believe me? Will I get in trouble? Will you take this out of my hands? Will you tell everyone? Your first few minutes answer those questions.

In those minutes you have five goals: help the person feel heard and believed, keep them in charge of how much they share, find out whether anyone is in immediate danger, agree on one next step, and do no harm. Deciding what really happened, fixing the problem, confronting anyone, and diagnosing anything are not on the list.

Painful stories can stir up the body. A person may laugh, go flat, or lose track of details. These are common stress responses, not signs of lying. Keep your own face and voice steady, and never promise to keep everything secret.

THE WORD

Job 2:11–13. When Job's three friends first came, they sat with him in silence for seven days. Their trouble began later, when they started explaining his suffering to him. The passage does not tell us to stay silent forever; it shows that presence comes before explanation.

James 1:19. James, writing to scattered early believers, urges them to be quick to hear and slow to speak. It is a call to listen first, not a rule that leaders must never offer comfort or guidance.

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CROSSROADS 1

The Ride Home

Derek drives Gloria, a widow in her seventies, home from Wednesday prayer each week. Tonight she sits in the car outside her house and does not get out. She says her adult son moved back in last spring. "He gets rough when he's been drinking. He took my bank card. I shouldn't complain, he's all I have." She has a fading bruise on her wrist. Then she says, "Please don't make a fuss. He'll be angry if he sees us talking out here."

YOUR RESPONSE

For each crossroads, check the response closest to what you would say first.

- ☐ A. "Gloria, that's elder abuse. I'm going in to talk to him right now."
- ☐ B. "Thank you for telling me. What he's doing is not your fault, and you don't deserve it. Do you feel safe going inside tonight?"
- ☐ C. "Every family has hard seasons. Let's pray he finds his way back to the Lord."

What might Gloria conclude about telling anyone again after each of the other two responses?

Her son may be watching. What would you say about safety and about how to reach her privately?

CROSSROADS 2

The Late-Night Text

At 10:40 p.m. Hannah, a youth volunteer, gets a text from Micah, a sixteen-year-old in her small group: "thanks for always being nice to me. i don't think i want to be here anymore. please don't tell my mom." Micah has been quiet for weeks and skipped the last two youth nights. Hannah is at home, and her youth pastor's phone goes to voicemail.

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YOUR RESPONSE

- ☐ A. Reply in the morning, when she can think more clearly.
- ☐ B. Text back, “I’m so glad you reached out. When you say you don’t want to be here, are you thinking about ending your life? Are you safe right now?” and stay in contact while she gets help.
- ☐ C. Text back, “Don’t talk like that. You have so much to live for!”

If Micah says yes, he has a plan for tonight, what do you do next? Include 911 and 988 in your answer.

Write an honest reply to “please don’t tell my mom” that does not promise secrecy.

CROSSROADS 3

After Young Adults Night

Bethany, twenty-two, helps Pastor Ray stack chairs after the young adults gathering. Without looking up she says, “Something happened at a party last month. I keep thinking it was my fault because I didn’t say no loud enough.” Her voice is flat and she half laughs. Two students are still talking near the door.

YOUR RESPONSE

- ☐ A. “Who was it? Had you been drinking? Walk me through what happened.”
- ☐ B. “Thank you for telling me. What happened is not your fault. You can share as much or as little as you want.”
- ☐ C. “I can’t believe that. Are you sure you’re remembering it right?”

Her flat voice and laugh might tempt someone to doubt her. Why is that a mistake?

Bethany is an adult. What choices are hers, and what one next step could you offer before she leaves?

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PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Write the words you want ready. Practice them aloud with a colleague using invented scenarios only.

My first two sentences: _____

An open prompt I can use instead of "why": _____

My honest statement about confidentiality: _____

My two safety questions: _____

The person I consult after a disclosure: _____

SCOPE AND SAFETY

Your role in the first five minutes is to listen, believe, check for danger, and connect the person with help. Leaders do not investigate abuse, assess suicide risk clinically, or confront anyone. Reporting duties for children and vulnerable adults vary by state; follow your church protocol and legal counsel.

Immediate danger: call **911**. Suicide or crisis: call or text **988** (988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline). Domestic abuse: National Domestic Violence Hotline, 1-800-799-7233, or text START to 88788. Sexual assault: RAINN National Sexual Assault Hotline, 1-800-656-4673.

CLOSING REFLECTION

Which of the three crossroads would be hardest for you to stay calm in, and why?

_____

_____

_____

What will you practice this week so the right words come out under pressure?

_____

_____

TAKEAWAY

You do not need perfect words. You need a few steady, practiced sentences that say: I believe you, it is not your fault, and you are not alone.

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