

Script for Exploring Washington Case Allegations

Introduction: After visiting the school, talking with twin siblings, DeeAnn and Dwight Washington, Jr., as well as the school nurse and social worker; Urban County Children & Youth caseworker (CW), Tracey Spencer, visited the children's mother, Charlene Washington, at Ms. Washington's apartment.

CW: *(Knocks on the apartment door. Chained door opens slightly and a female answers the door.)*

Client: Yes, what do you want?

CW: Hello, my name is Tracey Spencer. Are you Charlene Washington? *(Verifying the Person is the Client)*

Client: Yes. *(The client answers with a suspicious tone).*

CW: Ms. Washington, I'm a caseworker from Urban County Children & Youth Services. *(Worker shows agency ID)* I'd like to speak with you about an injury to DeeAnn. May I come in? *(Brief Statement of Purpose)*

Client: What kind of injury to DeeAnn?

CW: I'd rather speak with you inside than in the hallway where other people might hear. *(Shows Concern for Confidentiality)*

Client: Okay, come in.

CW: Thank you. *(Worker enters the apartment and notices a large picture on the wall depicting of a colorful Caribbean theme).*

CW: That picture you have hanging over the sofa is really alive and adds so much color to the room. *(Compliment)*

Client: Oh, yeah. I like it too.

CW: Where would you like me to sit? *(Shows Respect)*

Client: On the sofa is fine.

CW: As I said, my name is Tracey Spencer from Urban County Children & Youth Services *(The worker presents her business card to the client).* My job is to look into situations where a child sustained an injury and to ensure that the child is safe. Are you aware of the agency? *(Brief General Statement Clarifying Role)*

Client: Yeah, I spent time in care with CYS, but I guess you already know that, huh?

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CW: Well, yes. Before I came to see you I checked the agency records. You came into agency care as a teenager when your mother wasn't able to care for you. *(Factual Response to Client Question)*

Client: You mean when she got herself locked up.

CW: Yes; Ms. Washington. I came from the school and spoke with Dwight Jr. and DeeAnn. DeeAnn has a badly swollen lip and a cut in her mouth. Can you tell me what you know about her injury? *(Open-Ended Question)*

Client: She was foolin' around with Dwight and they got to pushin' and shovin'. Before you know it, DeeAnn gets knocked down hard and hits her mouth on the kitchen table.

CW: Hmm; in talking with the children it's my understanding that you slapped DeeAnn in the face; and, she fell hard and hit her mouth on the kitchen table.

Client: You know kids. They say stuff to cover up what they done.

CW: I don't think so. I talked to them separately; and, they gave the same story. I believe they are telling the truth. *(Mild Confrontation and Worker Feedback to Client)*.

Client: Well, if you believe that, why'd you ask me?

CW: It was important for me to hear your side too. I also want you to know that the children really care about you and want to stay with you. *(Identifying a Strength)*

Client: Are you sayin' you want to take the children?

CW: No, I'm not saying that at all. Children come into care when it is clear that they are not safe at home and there is no other alternative except placement out-of-home. Right now I don't have reason to believe that's the case with Dwight and DeeAnn. *(Providing Information)*

Let me assure you that if I do believe the children are not safe I will tell you. I won't spring surprises on you; still, I really need you to be honest with me so we can work together to be sure your children will be safe and not be injured. Now, I'd like you to tell me what really happened. *(Seeking Engagement; Establishing Mutual Honesty as a Condition for Work/Contracting)*

Script for Exploring Washington Case Allegations (cont'd)

Client: *(Pauses for a few seconds.)* Well, I was getting Malik and Melanie ready for daycare when DeeAnn spilled juice on the kitchen floor. She knows she can't handle that container. I gave her a little spanking.

CW: How were you feeling at that time? *(Reaching for Feelings)*

Client: Pretty angry and frustrated. It's hard getting all those kids ready in the morning. I need a little cooperation and don't get it.

CW: I see what you mean. Handling four kids in the morning is quite a job. *(Empathy)* Then what happened?

Client: Well, DeeAnn kept crying and carrying on for no good reason. I told her to shut up, but she just kept on. I gave her a little smack on the face to shut her up. She tripped and hit her mouth on the kitchen table when she fell down. It was just an accident.

CW: Hmm, then what did you do after DeeAnn got hurt?

Client: Well, I didn't think she was hurt bad. I told her to put some cold water on her mouth. Then, I got the kids off to school and daycare. DeeAnn has to learn that she has to help out more and not add to the problems. *(Client may have unrealistic expectations of the child, and possibly some degree of role reversal).*

CW: Was anyone else around when DeeAnn was hurt?

Client: Only Dwight, Jr. and the two little ones.

CW: How do you let the children know you are upset with them?

Client: First I yell at them so they know to stop what they're doin'. If they don't get the message, then I give them a whippin' to let them know I mean business?

CW: When you say "whipping," what exactly do you mean? What would I see and hear if you gave DeeAnn or Dwight a "whippin'"? *(Seeking Clarification)*

Client: I'll give them a couple of smacks or a couple of licks from a switch. That's all.

CW: When you hit them, where on their bodies do you hit them?

Client: Usually on their butts or back. Once in a while I might give 'em a smack on the face if they get sassy. Look, I don't want you to get the idea I'm abusing them. Kids got to learn to mind.

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CW: Who gets hit the most?

Client: Well, I don't hit the baby at all. Once in awhile Malik may get a little swat on the butt. It's mostly DeeAnn. She has an attitude and likes to push me.

CW: What is it about DeeAnn's behavior that gets to you?

Client: Sometimes she thinks she's the boss in the family. I let her know that I'm in charge? I guess she reminds me a little of me when I was little. My mom never put up with that when I was a kid.

CW: When you hit the kids, how are you feeling at the time?

Client: Frustrated and angry mostly. Like I said, it's not easy raising four kids by myself.

CW: How do you feel afterwards when you punish the kids?

Client: Hmm, I don't know I think about that. I guess I feel they had it comin' and that I'm doin' what a parent needs to do to teach kids to mind.

CW: What else do you do to deal with the kids when they don't mind?

Client: Mostly yell. That's about it.

CW: Are there times when the kids act up and you don't yell or hit them? (*Exception Question*)

Client: I guess when I'm not so tired, or I know they're goin' for a visit with their dad, and I don't have to put up with them much longer.

CW: How often do you hit the children, especially DeeAnn?

Client: I guess she gets it a couple times a week, I don't know, maybe four or five times, but usually not a serious whipping'.

CW: Have any of the children ever been hurt because of being punished?

Client: No, this is the first time.

CW: The kids seemed pretty afraid of what you might do as a result of them telling how DeeAnn was injured. What are you going to do?

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Client: Nothin' really. What's done is done. What's the point?

CW: I'm glad to hear that. (*Giving Feedback*) If you and I are going to work together, it's important for the kids to know that we all need to be honest and that they will be safe. I'd like you to tell them that, and mean it. Can you do that? (*Checking for Agreement and Client Willingness to Commit to the Task*)

Client: Yes.

CW: Good, I would like to work with you about exactly what you will tell the children, and I'd like to be here when you tell them. I think it is important for them to see that we are working together and are on the same page about honesty. (*Facilitating Worker/Client Protective Partnership*)

CW: Ms. Washington, from what you've told me so far, I don't get the impression that you meant to hurt DeeAnn as much as she was hurt. But, I am concerned that yelling and hitting, especially when you are angry and frustrated are the main ways you use to try and get your children "to mind." I don't think you know your own strength or are thinking about consequences when you hit the kids. Even if you don't intend it, you can seriously hurt the kids, in this case DeeAnn. There are plenty of cases where children have been badly injured and even killed when they have been hit hard and fell into something hard or pointed, like a piece of furniture or an appliance. I think controlling your anger and learning other ways to get your children "to mind" are important to keeping your kids safe. What do you think? (*Giving Feedback and Reaching for Feedback*).

Client: (*Pause*) I guess you're right. What do you want me to do?

Commentary:

The worker achieved a beginning level of engagement with the client and gathered information about the allegations and the injury to DeeAnn. The worker is in position to broaden the assessment to other areas of the client-family's life through more open-ended questions.

