

# FOOD STORE ROBBERY

The automobile factory where Ed has worked for the past 10 years is experiencing hard times because of a recession and is forced to lay off a number of employees. Management has left the responsibility to each of the plant managers. Ed's plant manager has been protecting his job for a long time and has always been worried that Ed might get his job. He lays Ed off to remove this threat.

Ed cannot find a job anywhere. After 18 months of unsuccessful job hunting, his unemployment runs out and Ed is forced to sell his insurance so his family can have food and make the house payments. When that money runs out, Ed and Hilda discuss the possibility of applying for welfare. Hilda will not hear of it. She considers it degrading and a sign of failure. In fact, Hilda considers Ed a failure and constantly nags him to do something about their situation. She threatens to leave him.

One evening one of Ed's children is playing in the street. (The child had been warned many times to stay out of the street.) A stolen car driven by a 19-year-old runaway runs into Ed's child, seriously injuring him. The child requires hospitalization and the bills will be enormous. Of course the runaway does not have any insurance or money.

In desperation Ed goes to the bank to apply for a loan. Ed does have good credit, but the banker refuses the loan. (The banker has involved the bank's money in a number of questionable investments and has overextended the bank's loan limit.)

Ed explains the situation to Hilda. She explodes into a rage, hysterically threatens to leave, and calls Ed a failure and a no-good who doesn't care about his child and his wife. She gives him an ultimatum to be gone when she returns and stomps out of the house. Distraught and confused, Ed robs the local food store. When his wife returns he shows her the money and explains that a close friend loaned it to them. They use the money to purchase food and clothing for the children, but within a day Ed is arrested by the police. He explains, "All I wanted to do was feed my family."

After discussions with the city officials, the prosecutor decides to drop the case if Ed will pay back the money and seek counseling with the welfare department. But the store owner is a strong law and order advocate and refuses to drop the charges. He believes that Ed is a thief and ought to be punished. Ed is forced to go to trial where he pleads guilty and is sentenced by the judge.

# THE FOOD STORE ROBBERY

This is an excellent situational story centered around the issue of stealing. There are many subtopics that can be discussed, such as the corporate structure, family stress, justice, and law and order.

To use with your group, simply tell the story as and discuss the questions that are provided (or any other questions that may arise). You might find it useful to distribute copies to each person. As you will discover, the circumstances of the story present some very difficult problems not unlike those that we have to deal with every day of our lives. The answers are not as clear as we would often like for them to be, which is the beauty of an exercise such as this. It is through struggles with the hard questions that we grow and learn.

The story involves seven people:

The husband, Ed

The injured child

The teenage driver

The wife, Hilda

The plant manager

The banker

The food store owner

Questions for discussion:

- Which person was most responsible for the robbery of the food store? Rank the characters from most responsible to least responsible. Give reasons for the order that you chose.
- Was Ed wrong to rob the food store? Why or why not?
- Hilda was certainly a nagging wife, but didn't she have something to nag about? Do you feel any compassion for Hilda?
- Do you agree with Hilda's refusal to accept welfare?
- What do you think Hilda did after Ed was arrested? What should she have done?
- If you were the food store operator, would you press charges?
- If you were the judge at the trial and Ed confessed to the crime, what sentence would you hand down?
- Which person was the worst? Which was the best? Why?
- What is your concept of "justice?"