

Case Study 2: Difficult home circumstances

A boy, Mogas, joined my secondary school in Form 3. He was very attentive in school and always completed his homework, but he was often late. One day when he was late to my class, I started to get cross, but then I noticed that he seemed dishevelled and agitated. Usually when he was late he apologised, but on this day he just looked at the floor and mumbled something. I stopped short and didn't shout at him – and thank goodness I didn't.

During the lesson, I tried really hard to be kind to him. I congratulated him on his work and on his contributions to the lesson. After the class, he seemed more relaxed. I decided to ask him about the lateness. I asked him where he lived and was surprised that it was actually quite close to school. I commented that I was surprised that he was often late. Finally, he sat down and told me about his situation.

His parents had been killed during political unrest. The parents left behind seven children, including four boys and three girls. He and the eldest girl had passed the exams to secondary school and were both really struggling to keep up with their work and look after their siblings. His sister had attended the local girls' school but had given up a few weeks ago. He told me how he was desperate to carry on at school so that he could realise his ambition of being a lawyer, and support his family.

As we talked, I got him to describe his home life – his siblings, who lives near them, and how they manage. I agreed to explain to the other teachers that he should not get into trouble if he was late. We talked about Joshua, his friend, who studied the same subjects as him. The next day, he and I met Joshua and together we made a plan. Joshua would keep track of any work that Mogas missed and help him to catch up by using break times to explain things. In my lessons I organised more pair work and more group work. This provided the opportunity for Mogas to be supported by more of his peers, and it gave me the chance to talk to him individually and establish where the gaps in his knowledge were.

As more teachers came to know and understand Mogas's situation, other ways to help him became apparent: some of the older children who live in his village worked out a rota to look after his younger siblings on a Saturday afternoon so that Mogas could catch up with his work. After a few weeks, Mogas's sister was also able to go back to school.