

He told me that he couldn't do his homework last night . . .

When interviewing a new family for enrolment I always state that the education of the students is a joint undertaking between family and school. No one ever disagrees with me! However this requires a relationship based on mutual trust and respect.

To achieve this our college has chosen to establish a House system. Annually each House hosts a casual family evening which includes a meal and fun activities. More families are attending these functions and believe they are a great way to feel a part of the school. Twice each year parents meet with their child's Home Class teacher and this has proven to be valuable in establishing positive links between home and school. Generally this structure has been quite successful in achieving good relationships with parents and they view us as a caring community.

But is that all? What happens once we establish ourselves as a caring community – the opportunity to be there to love, support and walk with families in their times of need. Our schools are uniquely placed to spread the love of Christ as families come to know and trust us but do not at this stage in their lives identify with mainstream churches or perhaps have had a bad experience in the past . . .

He was waiting outside of my office as I came back from class. He asked if we could talk. My first reaction was to ask him to make an appointment to see me at a more convenient time. I knew how the pile of work on my desk was growing exponentially! He immediately sensed my hesitation. His shoulders dropped even further. I invited him into my office.

'I've been kicked out of home' he muttered. Slowly, the sad story evolved. The family had been celebrating his sixteenth birthday the previous night, when he decided to challenge his stepmother about alleged rumours that she had been spreading about him. An argument ensued, he walked out, and his father and stepmother told him that the rest of his belongings would be packed up and put in the carport for him to collect in the morning.

He was hurting. He admitted that he had not chosen the time nor the place to confront his stepmother and realised what a difficult position he must have put his father in. Silence . . . 'I just want to know if they like me' he managed to say. I could understand where he was coming from. Previously he had lived with his mother interstate. This had not been a good situation for him and he had reacted by constantly truanting from school. He had come to live with his father and stepmother to make a fresh start and now he believed he had blown this too. In his mind, they obviously didn't like him and saw him as a trouble-maker in their home. I quickly established that he was living with someone that I felt created a 'safe' environment for him temporarily and then urged him to go and attend classes even though he protested he would not be able to concentrate.

What do you do in a situation like this? Experience told me that to enter a family argument without invitation was fraught with all kind of dangers. While I was trying to get my mind off the topic and tackle that pile of work on my desk, the phone rang. It was his father. He

wanted to tell me the events of the night before from the parent's point of view. I knew from previous conversations with the father that he had had very little to do with the upbringing of the boy until now. Now he was struggling to work out how to be a father to a teenager and I jokingly said that most of us would say that still remains a mystery!

I offered the services of our college pastor. The father hesitated and I knew why. A pastor was an unfamiliar person to them and he already felt out of his depth with the child-rearing scenario. Would a pastor make the situation more difficult? Sensing his hesitancy I quickly reassured him that our pastor had excellent family counselling skills and he would not make them feel uncomfortable.

It is at least three months and many long nights of counselling since that day that he walked into my office. Today, in class, I asked him

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why he hadn't done his homework. He told me that he couldn't do it because last night he had been shifting back into home. 'We've pretty much worked things out,' he said with a grin on his face.

What a blessing it is to have the opportunity to build relationships between home and the school. What a privilege it is to build on those relationships to minister to our families in times of need and to present to them the love of Christ in a meaningful and relevant way.

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