

## Case 11.5: My Uncle

Abdi was an energetic student who excelled academically. He was liked by peers, but their patience with him was diminishing because he often needed to be reminded to pay attention. At the annual Family Night, Abdi's teacher noticed that his excitement for school was obvious, but despite instructions from his mother to listen, he had difficulty following directions. It wasn't until his father reprimanded him that his behavior changed. Seeing this, Ms. Klein knew Abdi was *capable* of following rules, but he needed guidance.

As she was planning for November conferences, Ms. Klein was sure to remind Abdi that his mother *and* father should attend. She wanted to discuss Abdi's behavior with his parents in person because she did not want them to misinterpret her concerns and think Abdi was being disrespectful. Instead, she wanted them to understand he simply struggled to stop talking when he should be listening, becoming a distraction for other students. From what she observed at Family Night, she hoped Abdi's father would address the behavior concerns effectively.

When Abdi's designated conference time arrived, his mother, Ms. Asha, entered Ms. Klein's classroom with a man who introduced himself as Abdi's uncle. After hearing Ms. Klein's concerns, they agreed to speak to Abdi about his conduct. Ms. Klein, feeling skeptical that this would resolve the issue, suggested they inform Abdi's father on the issue. They promised to convey the information, but Ms. Klein worried they were saying so only to appease her.

After saying goodbye to Abdi's mother and uncle, Ms. Klein went to the main office to check her mailbox. "You look frustrated," the office administrator, Ms. Larson, observed.

"I *am* frustrated," Ms. Klein said. She scanned the office to make sure nobody was around. "I just finished Abdi's conference. I was hoping to speak with his father about Abdi's behavior, but he didn't come. Instead, Abdi's mom and someone who said he was Abdi's uncle came, and I don't have much confidence that either will be able to influence Abdi to behave better in class. Abdi's so bright. He needs guidance."

"Abdi is a sweet kid," Ms. Larson said. "As for the uncle, I've seen several people over the years arrive after school to pick up Abdi claiming to be his uncle. To be honest, I don't think any of them are related. I've seen the same thing with other immigrant students."

Shaking her head in disbelief, Ms. Klein said, "I'll keep you posted if I learn anything."

The next day as students arrived, Ms. Klein noticed Abdi was his usual talkative self. She approached him and said, "I had a good conference with your mom and uncle yesterday."

Abdi smiled and said, "That's what my mom said too."

"That's great!" replied Ms. Klein. She then inquired, "It was nice for your uncle to come, too. Is he your mom's brother or your dad's brother?"

Abdi, puzzled and embarrassed, replied, "Neither."

Ms. Klein sighed and thought, *I'll have to let Ms. Larson know she was right.*

### Questions

1. Based on Ms. Klein's observations, was Abdi's father's presence at conferences necessary? What are some reasons somebody else from the family might attend meetings at the school in his place?
2. How might Ms. Larson's mistrust of certain visitors affect how she interacts with them?
3. Ms. Klein asked Abdi about his relationship with his uncle in order to gather more information regarding who attended the meeting with his mother. Based on Abdi's response,

how might that exchange impact his comfort-level in the classroom and relationship with his teacher?