

SCENARIO 1: Kim, mother to Jackson

Jackson has great test scores, but his grades suffer when he misses class. He's late to school because he oversleeps and misses the bus in the morning. His mom, Kim, works three jobs and struggles to make ends meet as a young single mother. Jackson is responsible for making dinner, doing chores, and putting himself to bed most nights. It's hard for him to fall asleep because he worries about his mom driving home when she's tired. Kim is determined to prioritize Jackson's education and give him the opportunities she didn't have when she dropped out of high school to take care of him. She spends what little time she has between jobs running errands, planning meals, and making sure Jackson does his homework. She wants him to participate in more school activities, but money is always tight. Jackson wants to improve his grades and take advanced classes in high school, but it would mean a lot more homework. He's afraid if he can't keep up with his classes, he'll add to his mom's stress level. Plus, it would help his mom even more if he focuses on getting a job as soon as he's old enough.

SCENARIO 2: Viviana and Armando, parents to Sofia

Sofia enjoys learning, and with her outgoing personality, she easily makes friends at school. She likes her current school, but riding the bus home each day makes her anxious. The family has already moved three times this year, and Sofia dreads the thought of arriving home to find her things once again in boxes. Her parents, Viviana and Armando, move the household frequently so they can both find work to support the family. Viviana and Armando want Sofia to go to college so she will have more career opportunities, but neither of them went to college, and they're not sure if Sofia is on track. Armando doesn't feel confident enough to communicate his concerns with anyone since he is still learning English. Viviana is worried about letting the school know about their situation because of their undocumented status—she's not sure whom she can trust. Sofia avoids asking for help from her teachers and counselor because she senses Viviana's unease toward school personnel. Despite her worries, Sofia finds joy in school and simply hopes that when she comes home, everything is just as she left it.

SCENARIO 3: James, father to Curtis

Curtis is a talented artist, but he has trouble making friends. He keeps to himself, and his classmates see him as aloof because he comes from one of the wealthier families in their small town. In reality he avoids socializing—especially in large groups—due to social anxiety. His father, James, is an outgoing leader in the community but has an inconsistent work schedule due to his high-level job in tribal government. Since Curtis’ mother passed away two years ago, James has struggled to adjust to the demands of being a single parent. He often misses the parent-teacher conferences and other school events that his wife always attended. Seeing his late wife’s friends at the school makes her absence seem even more unbearable. James knows they mean well, but their sympathy makes it hard for him to maintain his composure. Curtis refrains from seeking academic help, choosing to coast by with average grades. The only person Curtis really talks to at school is his art teacher, who encourages him to join a school project to paint a mural in the cafeteria. Curtis really wants to participate in the project but hesitates to sign up when he finds out parents are required to volunteer with the students on the weekends.

SCENARIO 4: Jake and Sara, parents to Riley

Riley feels like a misfit in her large, extended family. She is academically gifted and likes to spend her free time playing video games since she finishes her schoolwork so quickly. She lives with her parents, three older brothers, and a younger sister in one of the three houses on her grandparents' cattle ranch. Riley's mom, Sara, was a barrel racing champion and standout softball player. Her dad, Jake, was the president of the school's FFA chapter and the team captain on the 2002 state champion football team. Jake and Sara are busy attending and managing activities for Riley's older siblings, including sports, livestock shows, and rodeos. Riley's aunt and uncle also have a house on the ranch, so her little cousins are usually at her house playing with her younger sister. Her family teases her about playing video games and watching YouTube videos of other people playing video games—they don't understand why it appeals to her. Riley is secretly preparing to try out for her school's new upcoming esports program next year. She's not sure how to talk to her parents about it. She doubts they'd approve of her playing video games even more than she already does.

SCENARIO 5: Walter and Deborah, grandparents to Marcus

Marcus greatly admires his grandparents, Walter and Deborah, who serve as co-pastors of a large church in their military town. Before living with them, Marcus lived with his parents, who are both Army officers. The family moved several times as they progressed in their careers. Marcus fell further behind academically each time the family moved. Right before Marcus entered middle school, Deborah encouraged his parents to have him tested by a friend in town who specializes in supporting students with learning disabilities. They discovered that Marcus has dyslexia. His parents made the difficult decision to let him live with Walter and Deborah to receive the help he needed to succeed in school. Two years later, Marcus is thriving academically. He serves on the student council and wants to join the debate team in high school to help him reach his goal of becoming an attorney. Despite his recent success, he's anxious about his future and wonders whether he will be good enough to get into the prestigious HBCU he wants to attend. Walter and Deborah don't want to discourage Marcus from pursuing his dreams, but they're concerned about how he might fare without the support of family nearby.