



Community Connect

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Back to school time

New teachers, making new friends and bullying. Going back to school isn't always easy. We interviewed Claire, one of our Social Workers in Schools team, to get her advice on how to help your children prepare to go back to school, kindy or daycare.

What are common struggles you see for children going back to school?

Children have had a six week break and will have got used to a different routine. Starting school again can be a little daunting as they have to adjust back to getting out of bed on time and doing all their morning tasks. They might have to start going to bed earlier too, so they have enough sleep to best manage the next day. The holiday routine also involved not actually being at school so the simple fact of getting their head around returning can be a challenge for some. For children who struggle with learning or peer relationships, returning to school can cause them extra worry.

Most children will experience some form of change – either having a new teacher or new classmates. Of course some children look

forward to returning, but children who worry about it may be more teary, sensitive or clingy, or sometimes tense and angry. These are normal responses, and are also the ways adults may react to stressful situations.

What advice do you have for parents?

To help prepare your child for a return to school, kindy or daycare, discuss it with them. Make conversation light, and talk about school in a positive way. Talk about the exciting things about starting in a new class or school – opportunities to make new friends and going on school trips – but also problem solve with them about any worries they may have. For example, if your child is nervous about friendships, talk to them about what makes a good friend and skills that help form friendships such as introducing yourself, or talking about shared interests.

You might want to ask them about when they have been through other situations they have been worried about, how they managed it, and what helped. Talking about the practical details can help too – how they will get to school, and who will drop them off and pick them up. Kids might want to ask the same questions more than once: this helps them process it and feel more confident, so keep answering in a calm, friendly way (even though you might feel like a broken record!).

If you can, take your child to the school over the holidays several times to play in the playground and look at their classroom. If you are going to walk to school, practice this with them so it is familiar and fun. If they are going to wear a uniform, talk about this positively; some kids love uniforms and some kids don't, but a lot of this can be influenced by important people like parents or other family.

If you can, try to plan some nice things in their lunches for the first wee while – not all treats (they need the healthy stuff more) but something nice to look forward to, like maybe a favourite biscuit, yoghurt, or some chippies alongside a sandwich and fruit. Some kids might like to see a special note from mum or dad in their lunchbox.

If you are worried about how your child will settle in at school, do talk to their teacher about it. You can arrange to meet them after school, or to discuss it by phone or email. They will be keen to talk about your child's needs, and how the school and parents can work together.

It is normal for kids to be a bit anxious about school starting back, even if they are in high school. Talk with older children about expectations for homework, ideally building this into an afterschool routine, with something they like to do (such as TV, games, or phoning their friends) left until afterwards as a reward.

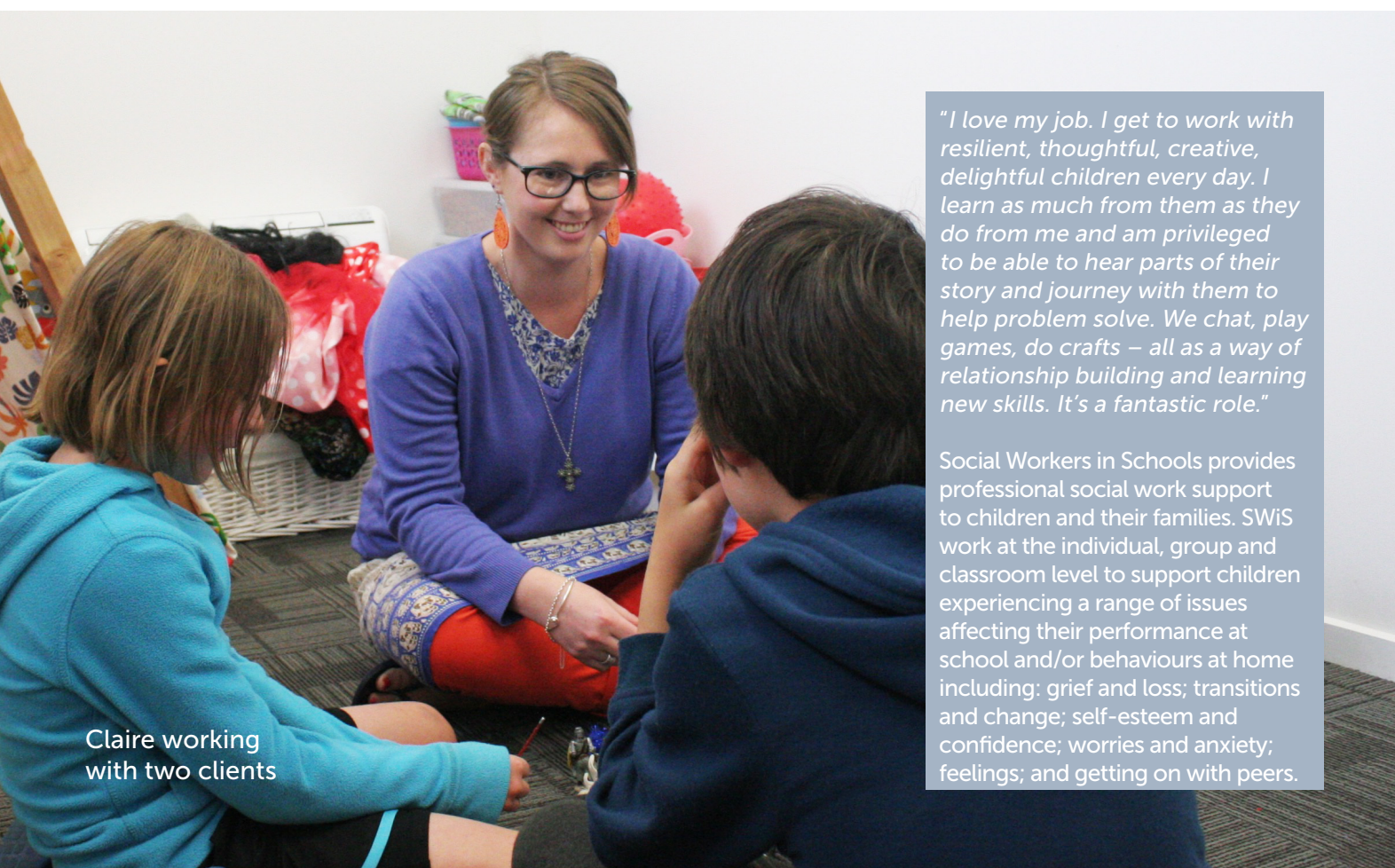
What advice do you have for parents whose child is anxious about returning to school due to bullying?

Your child will look to you for guidance about how to respond to bullies and will take their cues from you. It is most effective to be empathetic with your child, hearing their feelings and helping them to find constructive solutions rather than getting worked up, angry, worried or reactive in front of them.

Strategies to discuss with your child could include:

- Sometimes just acting brave is enough to stop a bully (even if you don't feel it) so stand tall
- Try to distract yourself by counting backwards in your head so that they can't see they have upset you
- Act as if you don't notice and don't care
- Make sure you are with a friend whenever you think you might meet the bully, for example at playtime

Children who know they can come to their parents or caregivers to talk and be listened to, and in turn be given tools to work out their problem, often cope better.



Claire working with two clients

"I love my job. I get to work with resilient, thoughtful, creative, delightful children every day. I learn as much from them as they do from me and am privileged to be able to hear parts of their story and journey with them to help problem solve. We chat, play games, do crafts – all as a way of relationship building and learning new skills. It's a fantastic role."

Social Workers in Schools provides professional social work support to children and their families. SWiS work at the individual, group and classroom level to support children experiencing a range of issues affecting their performance at school and/or behaviours at home including: grief and loss; transitions and change; self-esteem and confidence; worries and anxiety; feelings; and getting on with peers.

Lovely lunchboxes

Back to school means back to preparing school lunches everyday. Try to get your kids involved in helping to make their lunch and talk about healthy options to include.



HEALTHY IDEAS:

- Aim for wholegrain bread and alternate sandwiches with wraps, rice crackers or unsalted tortilla chips
- Chopped carrot, celery sticks, sugar snaps peas and cherry tomatoes travel well in lunchboxes
- Include a small tub of peanut butter, pesto or hummus for dipping vegetables
- Make a mini fruit salad and add lemon juice to stop it going brown throughout the day
- Include a tub of dried fruit, nuts and seeds
- Include last night's leftover macaroni cheese or stir-fry rice and vegetables with a fork
- Bought cheese triangles or cheese cut into cubes
- Sushi rolls
- Plain popcorn
- A pottle of yoghurt
- Encourage your kids to drink water or milk.

TRY TO AVOID:

- Chips, lollies and chocolate bars that will result in energy slumps and poor concentration
- Sugar-sweetened beverages such as fruit juices, fruit drinks, cordials, sports drinks, energy drinks, artificially sweetened or flavoured waters, iced teas and soft drinks. These are high in energy (kilojoules) and sugar, and can lead to weight gain and oral health problems in children
- Packaged snacks: cheese and dip snack packs, coated muesli bars, oven-baked savoury biscuits, muffins, rice crackers, crisps and biscuits are often high in salt or fat
- Processed meats such as salami, bacon, pastrami sausages which are highly processed and salty.

NEW NORTH OTAGO SERVICES FOR CHILDREN

We were delighted to officially launch our new North Otago Family Start and OCEANS Grief and Loss Programmes in Oamaru at St Luke's Church on 2 December 2016. Waitaki Mayor, Gary Kircher said the new North Otago services have been very well received. "Society these days is becoming more and more complex... [Family Start is about] helping those people who may not have family support."

The Family Start programme, which Anglican Family Care already offers in Dunedin, provides intensive on-going support to parents of young children focusing on health, education and development. The OCEANS Grief and Loss Programme is for children and young people experiencing the pain of loss or separation from someone they love.

Director Nicola Taylor is very excited about the launch, saying there has been a "very real need in this community for support around parents and children who are living with daily stress."



Waitaki Mayor Gary Kircher and Anglican Family Care Director Nicola Taylor

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