

# Supporting children through change

Your school community may be facing a difficult time right now. They are experiencing significant change while continuing to provide education and support to the children in their community. You can help the children and adults in your school community in a number of important ways. Above all else you can provide a supportive environment for your children, allowing them to talk with you and each other about their thoughts and feelings. This helps everyone understand that they are not alone and that there are others who share their concerns.

Some children may be more worried or anxious than usual whereas others may react with excitement. This can be an opportunity to talk about what things they might look forward to at a new school and what they will remember most about their time at their old school.

As you listen to your child (ren), show that you are interested and attentive. Try to understand what they are saying from their point of view and not make judgements about what they say, even if it sounds silly or illogical at first. If you don't understand something, ask them to explain it. Show you respect them and their ideas.

If your child seems to be struggling to make something clear, it can be particularly valuable and reassuring to have you help them summarise and focus their concerns. For example, you might say, "It sounds to me as if you are really worried about what might happen at school right now." Clarifying questions and statements can help all young people sort out their ideas and feelings.

Good listening also involves paying very careful attention to the things children may not be saying. Be aware of their nonverbal messages – for example facial expressions, fidgeting, gestures, posture, tone of voice – which may indicate that they are anxious or unsettled.

What you say to children and young people will depend on your own beliefs and fears about the change. You might find that you are feeling anxious and uncertain right now. It is important to keep in touch with people and share your feelings, fears and concerns with friends, while being mindful that children pick up the emotions of those around them.

Suggestions you may find useful include:

- Talk with your child and provide simple clear information to questions. If you don't know the answer let them know you will try to find out
- Listen and talk with your child about his/her own feelings, recognise their fear, anxiety, insecurity, anticipation or excitement
- Talk about practical and positive ways they might celebrate all the great things that they have enjoyed at their school
- Let your child know it is OK to feel apprehensive
- Respond to their need for increased reassurance
- Let your child express both negative and positive feelings. Even though some of their concerns may seem minor, take them seriously, listen and see if you can help them find ways to manage their concerns – e.g. talk to a teacher, talk to a friend. Follow up in a few days to see how things are going.
- Talk about the opportunities going to a new school will bring
- Plan time for family fun. When changes happen, families are a stable source of love and support.
- Remember the importance of just spending time together. Do things together that feel good:
  - Laugh and be silly together
  - Read your favourite stories and listen to music together
  - Take walks and enjoy new discoveries
  - Enjoy spending time together
  - Plan special outings like a picnic in the park, a trip out or a visit to a friend
  - Talk with other parents and caregivers

These can provide an important foundation for coping during difficult times.



## Resources – People and Organisations

The emotional impact of change can have long lasting effects on the well-being of individuals of all ages. For many of us, it is easy to focus on helping other people or on maintaining daily schedules and routines. Although these efforts deserve attention, it is important to remember to take care of yourself and to notice how your emotions are affecting you during difficult times. Looking after your health and emotional well-being will make you a better, more reliable support for friends and family members.

Here are some websites and organisations which you may find useful:

**Canterbury Support Line** – Feeling distressed and overwhelmed right now? Talking can help. If you, your family or friends need support call the **Canterbury Support Line 0800 777 846**. The Support Line can help with your questions, give information, and connect you with free counselling services or organisations that can offer you practical support, information or advice. You can also be connected with an Earthquake Support Coordinator.

**The Mental Health Foundation** - The Mental Health Foundation promotes the mental health and wellbeing of New Zealanders. It has a free library and information service, accessible online or by phone and email. Anyone can use these services. [www.mentalhealth.org.nz](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz)

For information about **Health Promoting Schools**  
<http://www.cph.co.nz>

### Ministry of Education

[www.wellbeing.tki.org.nz](http://www.wellbeing.tki.org.nz)

[www.shapingeducation.govt.nz](http://www.shapingeducation.govt.nz)

**Mental Health Education and Resource Centre** - The Centre provides information on a wide range of mental health matters from our staff and an extensive resource library, to the people of the Canterbury. We offer a rural service with free return postage of information and library books, videos, audio etc to people living in Canterbury. [www.mherc.org.nz](http://www.mherc.org.nz) 314 Selwyn Street, Christchurch. **Ph:** 03 365 5344.

## For more information

Further information available on the *Shaping Education* website  
[www.shapingeducation.govt.nz](http://www.shapingeducation.govt.nz)

