

Supporting children and families to recognise and navigate paediatric anxiety

Case study – Lucy

Lucy is five years old and lives with her parents, Jane 35 years old and Patrick 37 years old. She has an older brother Tom who is eight years old. Jane works part time and Patrick is a fly in fly out worker with a two weeks on, two weeks off roster. Jane and Patrick had hoped for another child but experienced two miscarriages since Lucy's birth.

Lucy was born prematurely at 33 weeks and spent three weeks in the neonatal intensive care unit. She experienced respiratory distress syndrome in her early years and was hospitalised several times.

Lucy has attended day care since age two, but in the last two and a half years since Covid restrictions were introduced, Jane has been cautious with attendance due to her respiratory vulnerabilities.

Lucy started Kindergarten this year and made a few friends in the first two terms, but her friendships change often. In second term Lucy complained of intense tummy pains most nights and in the morning. These were impacting her sleep and she was waking up tired and grumpy. Lucy's appetite has declined, and her lunch box often comes home half full.

The morning school routine has gotten progressively harder with Lucy saying she doesn't want to go and becomes very clingy to Jane. If her school drop off routine doesn't go to Lucy's plan, she gets very upset and increasingly enters school crying or misses days due to her distress. When Patrick is home from work, he tries to do the school drop offs. Lucy's response to this is varied.

Lucy's teacher reports she is quiet in the morning but warms up by the afternoon. She feels Lucy tries her best but sometimes tunes out and will miss tasks if the teacher doesn't watch her closely.

At school pick up Lucy is often very emotional, crying for small reasons. This often escalates until Lucy slams her door and spends the afternoon in her room, she eventually calms down when Jane comes in and sits with her. Lucy likes imaginary play and will often spend a lot of time in her own little world.

Jane is feeling increasingly worried about Lucy, particularly her poor appetite and how this impacts her health. Patrick is concerned that not going to school is becoming more common and feels frustrated that he can't help when he is away for work. Jane and Patrick are uncertain about what to do next to help Lucy.