

Assessment and engagement with infants and children

Case study – Zoe

Zoe is eight years old. She lives with her mother, Brigid and her 10-year-old brother, Sebastian. Lately, Zoe has been refusing to go to school. It started with the odd day off here and there, but now she's missing 2–3 school days a week. Brigid has been talking to the school and has been given work for Zoe to do at home. But Zoe is falling behind in her schoolwork and is not as close to her friends as she once was.

Zoe's refusal to attend school has increased since her parents separated. Her dad, Matt, has recently moved out and is living with his mum. The split is still new and there's no formal custody agreement. Brigid and Matt are trying to keep things as 'normal' for the kids as possible. Matt works as a landscaper and some of his equipment is still stored in the garage at home. He'll often come by early in the morning to pick something up and will drop off his gear later in the afternoon/evening. Some nights, he stays for dinner. But one minute Brigid and Matt are good 'friends', and the next they're having a heated argument with each other. Zoe's school refusal is just adding to this tension.

Brigid is worried that missing school is becoming a habit for Zoe. While she knows she's always been a bit of an anxious kid, Brigid can see that missing out on school and time with her friends is having a real impact on Zoe's mental health. Zoe tells Brigid that she feels 'dumb' when she's at school; and when she brings work home, Brigid is so busy with her own work that she doesn't have time to help Zoe. Brigid feels exhausted and doesn't know what more she can do.

[Watch this video](#) to see the first meeting between Brigid, Zoe and her psychologist, Carrie.