



Helping Parents Support Transition to Secondary School

The transition from primary to secondary school is a normal life stage but it is also a big change, particularly after the year we've just had. Ordinarily, the whole of year 6 will have prepared children for the step up to secondary but this year has been very different.

We've created the following information for schools to share with you to help you support your child as they transition this summer.

Whilst lots will be excited about the move, most will be scared to some degree and children may need extra support, particularly those who for example have:

- Additional learning needs
- Mental health difficulties or difficulties regulating behaviour
- Those who have had many changes to where they live or to their lives
- Children in care
- Those with anxiety
- Children who have suffered loss and bereavement
- Those who struggle to form relationships both with peers and or school staff
- Children who have been bullied

An important thing to remind children, however, is that they've already experienced lots of transition and change in their lives to really help build their confidence.

- Starting Infants
- Moving up into Juniors
- Maybe they have moved home
- Or gone through changes to their family
- They all will have gone through lots of change this year with learning online

Whether as an adult or a child, some of us can find change a struggle, it's important to acknowledge and normalise that we all feel worried at times. Remember this is a big change for children following what has been a difficult year for all of us, and of course, they have the additional physical and emotional challenges of puberty going on at the same time.



Common worries & concerns



There can be a number of things that both children and parents worry about when it comes to transition. Being aware of them and knowing they are shared by many can in itself be helpful. Here are some, you may be able to identify others.



Saying goodbye to the school both you and your child are used to, as well as the teachers and friends, is sad and can make some children (and parents) feel anxious.



Fitting in with new friendship groups at the new school, getting used to new peer-group language and wanting to be accepted all require a lot of emotional energy and adjustment.

Belonging is important to mental health. We all feel happier and can rise to challenges more when we feel secure of our place in a group.



Many children **start travelling to school by themselves**, possibly on public transport. They also need to find their way around the school, many can feel anxious about this and find it challenging.



Secondary School requires **children to be more independent**. There are expectations like how to wear their uniform, doing homework, taking things they need to school, how lunchtime is organised, and when they can go to the toilet.



Common worries & concerns

Continued



There can be **more expectations** about academic performance at Secondary School, with tests and exams. This can mean that children feel more pressure to do well and are worried when they don't.



Children are often put into ability groups. This can be hard if they are **not with their friends** or they are expected to work alongside others who are struggling.



Children with added challenges, like learning needs, are more likely to **feel alone and scared** because they are dealing with more.



Sometimes **parents feel worried** about who or what their child may experience at secondary school and it can feel hard to let your child go into an environment that you have less control over. Children can often pick up this feeling of anxiety.



Ways to help

Things you can do now



There are lots of things that you can do to help your child through transition. Here are a few things that will help to build their confidence, resilience and self-esteem.



Be understanding of the strain that changing school brings and talk to your child about it.



Check in with your child to see how they are and how they are feeling. This will help them to articulate their feelings more if they are struggling once they start secondary school.



If you haven't already done so, try to visit your child's new school before they start, this is helpful for both of you to know what to expect and what it might be like for your child.



Help your child to start taking responsibility for themselves more now so they are prepared before they go to secondary. As parents, you will know far less about what goes on in school than you have done in primary, so being more prepared for that and helping your child to be organised now will really help you both. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Start making your children responsible for remembering things for school - homework, PE kit, packed lunch etc.
- Encourage them to arrange things for themselves – meeting up with friends, trips to the cinema, park etc.
- If they don't already, encourage them to start making their own way to school (where safe to do so) be that on foot or public transport, particularly if they will be getting themselves to school for the first time come September. Start by doing the journey with your child and show them the way, then let them have a few trial runs before the Autumn term begins.



Help young people to feel confident about themselves, build them up by noticing what they are doing well, encourage them to keep trying and empathising if things are hard.



Ways to help

Ideas for when they start secondary



1

Looking at their timetable and the homework set will help you know what is expected. Then you can help your child think about what is required, help them plan school, home and family life and think about what support they need.

2

Encourage young people to ask for help when they need it from you, other family members or teachers they trust. Tell them about support lines, like SHOUT (see links below) that they can access for themselves. Children that can seek support and problem solve cope better than those that pretend there is nothing wrong.

3

Help your child to develop new friendships by encouraging them to meet up with friends outside school and going to after school events.

Again, look for the things that are going well and encourage them. Don't expect them to get everything right all at once. Trust that they will grow and get used to the change in time.

4

Make sure you look after your needs too. Remember to talk to someone supportive about how you feel. Talking to other parents can be helpful. Children can pick up if adults are anxious so trying to find ways of managing your own feelings will also help your child manage theirs.

5

If you or your child continue to be very worried after a few weeks, talk to the school and work with them to help support your child.

The main thing to remember is that this is a transition for you and your child and you might both find it challenging to begin with. Young people may explore their identity by trying new things, taking risks, breaking rules and putting their friends first. Parents can find it hard to let go and have less control over their child and their environment. It's a period of transition for all but remember, despite how it might feel, your child will still rely on and need you.

More resources and advice



Anna Freud
National Centre for
Children and Families

The Anna Freud Centre: Moving Up

[Moving Up, a video created by The Anna Freud Centre](#) 

reinforces all of the advice we've given above. You might like to take a look at it and maybe show other family members so they can support you and your child as they transition to secondary school.



here for you 24/7

Shout

(in partnership with Place2Be)

- Text CONNECT to 85258
- For: anyone in the UK
- Available: free, 24 hours a day
- More info: giveusashout.org



Kooth

Kooth is a safe online community where children aged 10 and older can get help from a library of content or from peers, and can access online counsellors for professional support. Visit kooth.com to learn more.

