



UNSW
SYDNEY

Moving from primary to high school: How you can help your child make the transition



What's the big deal?

Moving from primary to secondary school, or high school, represents significant change for a young person. Not only are they negotiating a new learning environment and greater expectations placed on them, they are also trying to re-adjust their friendships and social position. It is not a one-off event, but a process that must be planned for and worked on well in advance of the first day of high school.

In moving from primary to high school, your child will need to adjust to completing more school work, physically moving around the school to different lessons and adjusting to a number of different specialist teachers, working in a more independent and self-directed way, having more homework expected of them and tackling the new challenges that come with making new friends.

Managing this transition well is critically important. Prior research has found that student performance when moving through from primary to secondary school can dip by as much as 39%.¹

There are many possible reasons for this, and some are outside of your control. For example, some disruption is to be expected when a young person is moving from a small and familiar local primary school to a large secondary college. However, there are many strategies you can use to help your child cross the bridge to high school confidently and successfully.

If you have established a strong engagement in your child's learning journey already, keep this up. You might not be required to help at excursions anymore, and likely your child won't want you being too involved at the school, but you still have a very important role to play in supporting your child at home. You should keep communicating that you have high expectations of them to work hard, show that you care by helping them with homework, and find ways to tap into their interests. While it sometimes seems that your child's friends have more of an influence on

¹ Learning Cultures. (2017). Effective transition from year 6 to year 7. Retrieved from <https://www.learningcultures.org/news/tag/effective-transition-from-year-6-to-year-7/>

your child's behaviour and decisions that you do, research has shown that your parental support has stronger and longer-lasting effects on the success of this transition.²

Frequent and transparent communication with your child's school and teachers is extremely important. It is less likely that you will hear as much about the school day, or any problems your child is facing, from your child yourself as you did when they were in primary school. Therefore, communicating with your child's key teachers will help you get an insight into expectations of them academically and highlight any issues they may be facing. This information will help you collaborate as a partner in their learning.

It is at this time we often see an increase in the use of screens, especially in problematic ways. Encourage your child to keep playing and spending time outside, and keeping up your monitoring and restrictions. These will need to be reviewed once your child has their own phone or screen-based device and want to freely communicate with friends, but the same expectations that you previously established can be applied. For example, keep the same rules about where in the house that phones can be used.

The change from primary to secondary school is obviously much greater if your child needs to physically change schools or campuses. If this is the case, you will need to spend some time familiarising them with the new location, including landmarks around the school and new bus routes or transport arrangements. If you live in a regional, rural or remote area, it is worth investigating the transport options early on in case they are very lengthy or infrequent.

² Raising Children Network (2017). Starting secondary school. Retrieved from <https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/school-education/school-choosing-starting-moving/starting-secondary-school>

WHAT CAN WE DO AS PARENTS TO HELP OUR CHILDREN ADJUST SUCCESSFULLY?

Moving to high school is a time full of excitement and new opportunities, but it can also be difficult or scary for some children. You can help by making sure your child feels prepared and well-supported.

- ✓ Talk to your children often, and most importantly, listen to what they want to tell you.
- ✓ Accept that your child will likely want to be more independent. Try not to stifle this independence and increase their responsibilities so they understand that with independence, comes responsibility.
- ✓ Reassure your child that worries are normal and that everyone has some. Encourage them to talk to you about what they are concerned about.
- ✓ Share your own positive experiences of secondary school and even some fears you had that you overcame, where appropriate.
- ✓ Help your child keep contact with existing peers, as well as providing opportunities for them to make new friends.
- ✓ Practice time-management and timetabling activities. For example, you can ask your child to prepare a meal for the family. They will need to plan for, budget, shop, prepare, cook and clean up- all very important skills that will help them succeed in high school.
- ✓ Continue extra-curricular activities, especially those sporting or community activities that help your child bond with others.
- ✓ Keep an eye out for signs that your child is not coping with the extra pressure. If he or she seems especially down, withdrawn, anxious, angry or impulsive, or refuses to go to school, seek help from professionals. Getting in early allows small worries be managed, so they don't become major issues.



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