

Supporting Your Child in Moving to High School

After the excitement – and worries – of your child starting school for the first time, this is probably the next time that you'll feel anxious about a change of school. This is a significant milestone in a child's life, when they will be moving to a much larger school, with many different teachers throughout the day, a changing timetable and lots of new people to get used to. They are moving from being the oldest in their school to being the youngest, and their workload is likely to increase significantly. So what can you do to support your new year 7 at this key time?

- **Involve your child in the choice of high school.**

If possible in your area, have a look around a number of schools with your child. Even if your choice is limited to one school, you should still attend the Autumn Term open evening with your child so that you can both get a feel for the place.

- **Talk with your child about what is going to be happening.**

During the summer holidays, talk with your child about any fears or worries about high school, and reassure them. They may feel their worries are trivial, but they are no less real for this – and if you can open up good communication channels now, you will be grateful as your child gets older. If there is something concerning your child, make a plan to deal with it – if they are worried about missing the school bus, for example, discuss how they should always have a fully charged mobile phone with them (if this is allowed) or some spare cash, so they can call someone.

- **Encourage your child to become organised and independent.**

Having the correct equipment, being at lessons on time and ready to learn – these are expected very early on at high school. Teach your child to check their timetable every evening and pack the books and equipment they need, as well as laying out their uniform. Check your child's daily timetable and homework timetable (usually in their planner or school diary) and talk to them about how they should organise their time. If it helps in your household, agree a rota for using the bathroom so that mornings are less stressful. Resist the urge to do everything for your child – now is the time when they should be starting to take responsibility for organising themselves.

- **Nurture your child's confidence and social skills.**

Children with good self-esteem are less likely to bully or be bullied, or to become involved with gangs. Compliment your child as much as you can to bolster confidence. Talk about how to be friendly and approachable by smiling and making eye contact. Encourage your child to be friendly to new schoolmates, especially those who may appear quiet or shy. Although many children go to high school along with a large number of their year 6 classmates, they often have little contact with them during the school day, so it's worth seeking out new friends as well. If your child struggles with friendships, the greater number of people at high school will provide them with a wider pool of friends to choose from. After-school clubs are a good way to make new friends, so encourage your child to try a few – most high schools offer a good range.

- **Talk with your child about staying safe.**

Bullying and cyberbullying can be a problem in high schools, but all young people are entitled to attend school

without fear of bullying. Your child should know that it is OK to tell someone if they are being bullied, and to expect it to be dealt with. Talk also about personal safety – if they are walking to school or using the school bus or other public transport, they need to be fully aware of road safety, as well as the risks of walking alone on dark mornings or evenings. And at a time when many young people have a mobile phone for the first time, make sure you are communicating about your child's online safety.

- **Back the school up.**

Have high expectations of your child's behaviour and attitude at school, and back the school's rules and expectations too. Make sure your child has the correct school uniform and that they are aware of school rules. Don't speak critically of the school or its teachers in front of your child – if you have a problem, speak to your child's form teacher or the person in charge of pastoral care.

- **Be homework-friendly.**

Homework is an essential way of building independent study skills, and the workload is likely to increase once your child is at high school. Make sure your child has a suitable place where they can complete homework, and encourage them to plan ahead – if they have football training on Saturday, followed by a party, and then a match on Sunday, it may be worth completing Monday's homework on Friday night rather than Sunday night! Check your child's school diary or planner, as this is where they should record any homework set.

- **Attend induction days and information evenings, and keep an eye on the school website.**

Many parents comment that they feel far less 'in touch' with what is going on at school once their child is at high school – a situation not helped by the fact that teens and pre-teens are not known for their willingness to talk! Attending school events, especially information evenings and after-school events, can help you keep in touch better. Many schools organise a 'walkabout' for new year 7s, so they can familiarise themselves with the school layout – go to this if you can. The school's website is usually a good place to find out what is going on through the school year. Alternatively, you could volunteer for the school PTA or inquire about becoming a governor. If you have real concerns about your child's welfare in school, their form tutor is usually the first port of call.

- **Keep school informed of significant events in your family.**

If something changes for your child, such as parental separation or family illness, let the school know.

- **Plan downtime.**

You can expect your child to find the first few weeks of high school just as exhausting as they found the first few weeks of primary school – and you may also find they are just as grumpy as they were back then! Help your child to build in some downtime each day, even if this is just going for a kick-about outside or curling up on the sofa to watch some TV with the family. Make sure your child is getting plenty of sleep and physical activity, and encourage them to keep up with any activities or clubs they have always done.

Here's a checklist of things to think about in the summer holidays and those first few weeks at high school:

- Buy uniform in plenty of time.
- Find out what other equipment your child will need. Unlike primary schools, high schools do not typically provide stationery such as pens, pencils, rulers and so on. You may also need some PE equipment, such as shin pads and football/hockey boots.
- Enquire about transport to and from school if this will be needed. If your child is using public transport, do a couple of 'dummy runs'. Find out if anyone else from your area will be travelling to school the same way.

- Have a family calendar, diary or planner up in your kitchen. Write everything on it – key school events, extracurricular activities, clubs and family events. Encourage your child and the rest of the family to use this, refer to it and record anything new on it.
- In the last week of the holidays, start to encourage earlier bedtimes and earlier get-up times, so that the first day back is not such a shock.
- Think about having easily accessible, healthy snacks available for your child when they return ravenous from school – especially if you are not going to be there when they get home.

Remember – this is the start of a new and exciting chapter in your child’s life – and a bitter-sweet time for you, as they start to want and need more independence from you. As long as you can keep the communication going, your child’s confidence at high school should grow and flourish. Good luck!