

Top Tips to Support Your Child to Move Positively to Secondary School

When your child is preparing to move to secondary school, it is both an exciting and an anxious time for the young person and their family. Being positive and supportive will help your child remain calm and embrace the changes.

1 Be open and positive.

Discuss the changes openly and ensure that your questions are positively phrased, e.g. What are you most excited about? What are you looking forward to about your first day? Have you seen the fantastic trips that you can go on?

2 Plan what will happen on the first day.

Try to do things that will make the first day seem magical. Involve your child in decisions about what will happen, e.g. whether they are going with a friend, going alone or whether you are taking them. Find out if they want something special for a packed lunch or if they want a special meal when they come home. Ask whether they want to go somewhere after school, such as to a grandparent's to tell them about their first day. If they have siblings at their old primary school, they may want to help you collect them and tell their previous teacher how their first day went.

3 Help them to make new friendships.

Wherever possible, arrange for your child to meet other young people in the holidays who will be going to the same secondary school. You could organise a day out for other young people and their parents. You could exchange phone numbers, if you feel comfortable doing this. Manage any communication sensitively, ensuring your child feels happy and confident around the other young people.

4 Involve them in buying new school supplies.

Involve your child in choosing new school equipment, such as a new school bag in addition to their uniform. They will enjoy having the choice about some items and this will help them feel better prepared and more independent.

5 Discuss possible scenarios that might happen at school.

Talk about scenarios that relate to questions you have been asked, such as, 'What happens if I get lost and I am late for my class?' Try and ask them what they think might happen first - a young person will often think of a sanction that will be far worse than what will actually happen. Explain that lots of people will get lost to start with but that there will be someone to ask and people they can walk to class with. Encourage using good manners if they arrive late for class.

6 Practise the route to school.

Take your child on a practice run a few times in the school holidays. Walk to the bus stop, catch the bus and walk the route they will take. Talk about any landmarks on the way and consider the time the journey will take. Encourage your child to take the lead on the second practice so they feel in control. Once the real day arrives, they will be more confident.

7 Speak to a young person who is already at the secondary school.

Encourage your child to speak to someone who is already at the school and ask questions. They will be able to explain what it is like, dispel any negative myths and be positive about change. Choose the young person wisely and help your child prepare a list of questions beforehand.

8 Be patient.

As the first day approaches, the young person may start to feel increasingly anxious. They may change their behaviour and become quieter or they may ask more and more questions. Be patient and supportive. Most of us can remember our first day at school or when we started a new job. Even if you have already answered their questions, continue to do so - this could be their way of seeking further reassurance.

9 Provide distractions.

Try to provide distractions during the summer so that your child is not focussing solely on the move to the new school - they need respite from any anxious thoughts. Consider trying a new activity. This will encourage them to be brave, to meet new people and to find their way around a new venue. It will demonstrate that they can manage change and encourage resilience and positivity.



Remember that some young people will settle into a new school more quickly than others. This doesn't matter. What matters is that they feel comfortable to share their thoughts and feelings with you.

Continue to ask questions and talk about times when you found starting a new school or a new job challenging. Share what helped you and let them know that you will help and support them.