

Supporting children and young people's transition to secondary school

Guidance for parents and carers



Anna Freud
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Preparing for secondary school

The transition from primary to secondary school can be an exciting time for children and young people. It marks an important stage in growing up, and children recognise that their lives are about to change in various ways.

Like any change, it can also bring uncertainty. While most children and young people will manage the transition to secondary school successfully, others may find it challenging.

There may be ups and downs. It's easy for children to go from feeling happy and confident one minute, to feeling nervous or anxious the next.

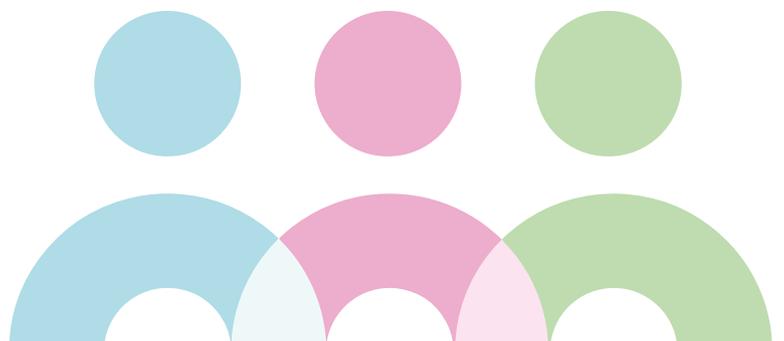
As a parent or carer, there is a good deal that you can do to help your child to find their feet during this transition period.

Adapting to change

The move from primary to secondary school comes at a time of great change for children and young people.

As well as adapting to their new school environment and developing new relationships, they are dealing with the physical and psychological changes that the start of adolescence brings.

All children and young people are different. The move to a new school, or even moving to a new part of a school, may affect each of them in distinct and sometimes unexpected ways.



Some respond well to change and will feel ready for the move, while others will need more reassurance and preparation.

Sometimes children who have enjoyed primary school and are expected to make a smooth transition may unexpectedly struggle with the change.

Most children adapt to secondary school well. However, if your child struggles with their new environment, it can be stressful not only to them, but for you as parents and carers, too. It's important to take this into account as you help your child prepare for secondary school.

Why is transition difficult for some children and young people?



Transition can be challenging for a number of reasons.

For example, some children may worry about making new friends. Others may have concerns around organisation and understanding new systems – being in a larger environment, knowing that they have different lessons in different classrooms, or having more homework to do.

Children in primary school are also generally used to having one teacher most of the time. Changing to having multiple teachers, who will have high expectations and additional classroom rules may feel daunting, especially if they have formed close bonds with their primary school teachers.



What can parents and carers do to support children and young people through transition?



As a parent or carer, you will probably have walked your child to their primary school and come to know other parents. You might have had the chance to chat to your child's teacher at pick up to discuss any concerns you or they have.

Secondary school is different for parents and carers as well as children. School staff recognise this, and many include thorough inductions for families, introducing them to pastoral care and the systems and support the school provides.

Taking advantage of this can be helpful in getting to know your way around secondary school.

What does successful transition look like?



How can you tell whether your child is settling in well at secondary school?

Research shows that the signs of a successful transition are:

- developing new friendships
- maintaining good self-esteem and confidence
- showing an increasing interest in school and school work
- getting used to new routines without major disruption
- experiencing continuity in learning.

Helping your child through transition



Some of the ways that you can support your child during this period of change are:

- encouraging them to explore their feelings
- helping them connect to their school
- building friendships and relationships
- empowering them by building their confidence and independence.

Exploring



The most valuable thing you can do to support your child is encourage them to explore their thoughts and feelings. Let them know that they can talk openly about their feelings, both positive and negative. Conversations can help pave the way to talking about your child's emotions as they prepare for their new school.

Make sure you mark the end of your child's primary school experience. Saying proper goodbyes to friends, teachers and other school staff is important. Talk about any favourite memories from primary school and recognise all the things they will miss.

Keep talking openly to your child to ask any questions they might have. Explore any worries or possible misunderstandings about starting a new school. Talk to your child what they are looking forward to, and whether they are worried about anything.

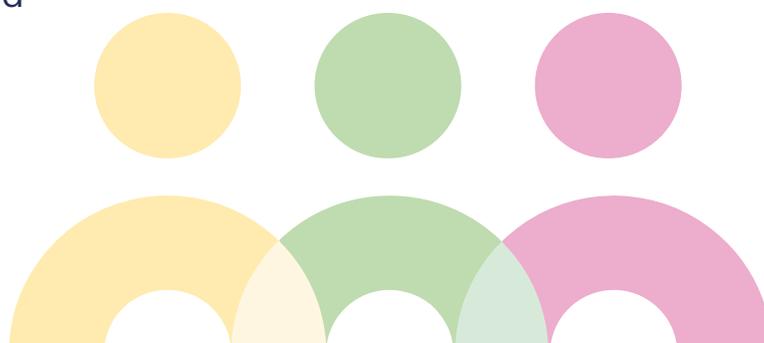
It can be helpful to think about how you felt when you were preparing for secondary school and share this with your child - children always like to hear stories about their parents' or carers' childhood. Were you excited about meeting new people and learning new subjects? How did you settle in? Your experiences may give you clues about how your child is feeling.

Find out what your child's primary school has been doing to support the transition from year six. Continue the conversation at home with your child or encourage conversations with older siblings, older cousins or anyone the child feels comfortable with.

Empowering your child



Building your child's independence and confidence will help them with the transition. Empower and support them to take steps towards independence, however big or small. Encourage them to take on small responsibilities in the home to build up their confidence and independence in preparation for this new and exciting phase of their life.

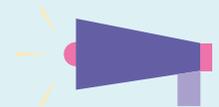


Give your child lots of praise where you can and notice the things that they are doing well. The greatest source of strength for any child going through change is knowing that they can fall back on the love and support of their parents and carers.

Providing stability and security is what you do best, and this gives children the confidence to explore and test their new environment and seek out new experiences. It means that transition can be an exciting and positive experience and that if there are any wobbles on the way, they can come to you for reassurance and help.

Remember, too, that you don't have to have all the answers and that you don't have to do this on your own. Your school is there to help - and between you, school staff and your child, you have all the skills and resources you need to help your child make a successful transition.

Use our supportive resources



Moving up!

Our [Moving up! animation](#) and accompanying resources have been developed to support children and young people to:

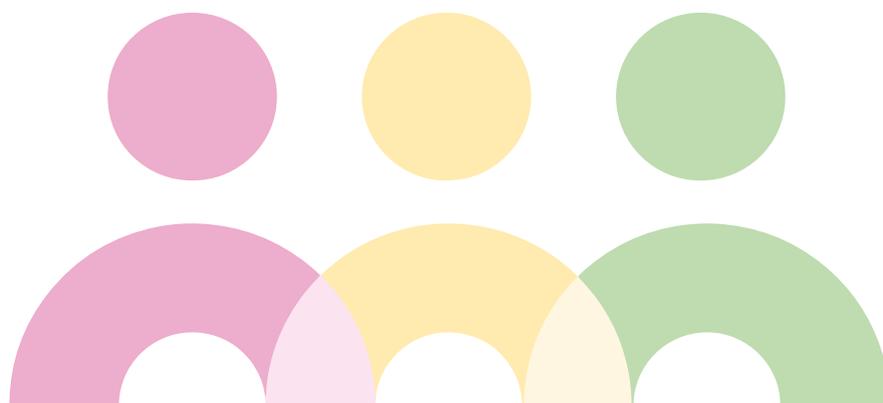
- feel less anxious about the move to secondary school
- open up discussions about potential worries
- help find solutions during periods of change.

This resource is suitable for pupils who are preparing to transition to secondary school, and pupils who have recently started Year 7. Although designed to be used in a school setting, the animation can also be used at home, and the materials can be adapted to guide the conversation with your child.

Mentally Healthy Schools



Our Mentally Healthy Schools site has compiled quality-assured resources aimed at supporting parents and carers with their children's transition through different school phases. You can find these resources [here](#).



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