

HELPING YOUR CHILD TO MANAGE THE MOVE FROM PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOL

Transition Guide for Parents



HeadStart South Tees works with all local schools to help children build confidence, resilience and good emotional health.

Moving from primary to secondary school can be an exciting and challenging time. Your child will be moving from a familiar and fairly small school where they are known and feel a real sense of belonging to a big and unfamiliar environment with new teachers and pupils. Even for the most confident children this a massive change!

This guide offers practical, actionable tips to help your child feel confident and settled in their new school. It focuses on reducing anxiety and fostering a smooth, positive transition for your whole family.

Tip One - talk about it.



Talk about starting secondary school with your child, encourage them to have open conversations with you and encourage them to voice any worries they have but also what they are excited about/looking forward to!

Schools often provide extra familiarisation days for vulnerable children – a chance to meet the SENCO and support staff and look around in a quieter environment.

If it's possible you could print a school map to look at with your child too or some school websites offer virtual tours.

Find out who the key staff in school are for your child - for example year manager, form tutor, pastoral lead. Schools prefer to hear about any concerns so they can act quickly if necessary. Your child will be learning new subjects in their new school which may also be a source of worry. Have a chat about these new topics and perhaps look on the internet to find a bit more about them.

Many children worry about the practicalities like how to navigate lunch times, managing PE, getting from one lesson to another. Find out as much as you can about lesson changes, how lunch times are arranged for each year group and what the arrangements are for getting ready for PE. The more information you can get the more you can discuss any concerns. Minimising unknowns from day one can help to minimise anxiety.

Tip three - ensure key information is shared with the secondary school.



This is really important for children with Special Educational Needs, health issues or anxiety. Check your child's primary school has shared relevant paperwork and spoken with the new school, so they are aware of your child's needs. . If you feel key information has not been shared contact the school directly – they are keen to know all relevant information about pupils.

You can also request a meeting with secondary staff yourself, to discuss support, particularly if your child has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Familiarise yourself with the school's Special Educational Needs policy (on the website) too.

Discuss additional transitional support for more vulnerable children – ask for the Year 7 timetable so your child knows what lessons they will have in advance.

Secondary teachers want to support your child but they don't know their needs if they are not told.

Tip four - be ready and prepare in advance.



Try to get organised over the summer rather than leaving it to the last minute, which can be stressful for parent and child.

A trip to buy uniform, get a haircut or choose new stationery is an opportunity to spend time together, chat and boost confidence too.

Secondary students often travel independently for the first time. Do some trial runs – with you, then perhaps solo or with a friend. Work out the first day plan. Your child may prefer to go with you to start, or to meet a friend on the way.

Encourage your child to develop good organisational habits. Get school bags ready the night before making sure all relevant books, stationery and sports kits needed for the school day are packed. This will also minimise any anxiety.

Tip five - encourage independence.



The demands of secondary school will feel greater so preparing your child will help build their skills and confidence. This can help them settle quicker.

It's tempting to do it all for them, we get it!
Encouraging them to organise themselves will boost self-esteem, confidence and resilience.

Practice during the summer holidays – could they arrange to meet friends? Do shopping errands? Or organise their bag for a day out? (be guided by what you feel is manageable for your child).

Once school starts, try developing independent organisation with post-it notes listing what's needed each day; boxes to store books and worksheets; an evening habit of checking their school planner and preparing uniform and bag.

Tip six – give it time and keep some reassuring routines.



Trusted old friends and habits are comforting, particularly in the exhausting early weeks, if a child doesn't know anyone, or if they are finding it hard to settle. Seeing primary classmates or enjoying familiar activities may be a welcome relief from the effort of starting a new school.

What are the comforting routines at home? Keep meal times, bed times and other household routines and boundaries the same. Do you have routines such as reading before bed together or plan something to look forward to at the weekend – a trip to the park, a movie night? Keep some comforting rituals and one on one time with you in place.

Too much change at once can feel overwhelming. So while it's great if they throw themselves into everything, don't worry if they don't. They need to adjust and relax. Resist the urge to ask them lots of questions but let them know you are interested in hearing about their day.

Tip seven - look after your own emotional health.



You can't pour from an empty cup - prioritise relaxation and self-care to ensure you are emotionally available and actively caring for your own mental health.

This models positive coping strategies for your child.

Parent peer support - connect with other parents who also have a child moving to secondary school. Shared experiences help to reduce anxiety and validate your feelings knowing you are not the only parent experiencing this.

Trust the process - transition takes time. If you are concerned communicate with the school (form tutor, head of year or SENCO) but try to accept early, minor issues are all part of the learning curve.

Be patient and compassionate with yourself as this is a significant change for you and your child.

Summary

Every child's transition experience is unique and there's no one size fits all approach. What matters most is being present and curious, listening and reassuring your child that whilst this is a big change it's also a positive one. With the right support, your child can thrive as they begin this new chapter in their educational journey.

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