

The Primary to High School Transition

Can you remember when you started secondary school? If you were like me you probably felt a mixture of sadness, excitement and anxiety. I was sad because leaving primary school signified the end of a terrific era. But I was excited by the prospect of secondary school and the new experiences on offer.

Above all, I was anxious about leaving primary school, where I knew everybody and everything that mattered, to enter a new social and physical environment. It had taken seven years to reach the top of the pecking order, only to be dumped unceremoniously to the bottom of the pile.

If your child has just begun secondary school, reflect on how you felt in the same situation. This will provide a good starting point in your effort to help him or her cope with this potentially unsettling time. You will also need to be patient and understanding over the coming months and brush up on your listening skills as you help your child adjust to life in a new school.

Secondary school is a new experience that places different demands on children. Being at the bottom of the pecking order where you are unsure of the rules of the playground is just one adjustment to make. Changing classrooms for each subject, reading a timetable, altering eating habits and carrying books around is difficult enough without the added task of making new friends.

Some kids take these new experiences in their stride, but it is natural to have some difficulty making the transition from primary to secondary school.

Most secondary schools go to great lengths to ensure that the is as smooth as possible, beginning with familiarisation programs and school visits for Year 6 children. These programs can really make a difference but here are some practical suggestions that parents can use to help make the transition to secondary education happy and successful.

Be prepared: The transition process is much easier when kids are prepared for secondary school. Having the correct books and uniform is important on the first day. Blending in rather than standing apart is their main aim in the early days. Rehearse the route, particularly if public transport is being used. If your child doesn't have a sibling at the school, try to pair him or her up with a friend if they walk or use public transport on the first day.

Be supportive: Talk to you child about change and reassure him or her that it is normal to feel unsure and anxious in new circumstances. Some kids may brush you off with a "she'll be right" attitude but don't be fooled by the bravado. Most will be feeling fairly unsure of themselves. Share some of your own memories of starting secondary school - but steer clear of any horror first day stories. It can be reassuring for a child to know that you went through a similar experience and survived. Show confidence in their ability to cope. Confidence is catching.

Communicate with the school: Contact the year-level co-ordinator if you have problems about how he or she is settling. If it is your eldest who is starting, then secondary school will be relatively new for you too. It will take time for you to adjust to

the school's culture and communication methods. You can learn a lot about the school by talking with your child and encouraging him or her to share their experiences.

The primary school child: As the end of the year approaches some children at primary school become anxious about the next academic year. Sometimes they don't even talk to their parents about their concerns which usually focus around friends and teachers. Quite often the playground can be filled with rumours and whispers!!

Please be aware of this and support your child and school by affirming the fact that the professional staff have given class placement over 40 hours of consideration and have the welfare of every child at heart.

Taken from the *Aranda Primary School* newsletter. Written by *Jeanine Catton*, Aranda PS Principal.