

Supporting Children with Transition to High School



A guide for parents and carers

We have reached the point where your children are preparing to move to high school. It's likely that this time of change will be accompanied by lots of different feelings for you and your child. This leaflet will give you some ideas about how you can support them to manage any difficult feelings that may come up.

Try and balance negative thoughts by asking;

What are you looking forward to about high school?



All emotions are welcome.

Normalise and accept how your child is feeling. Whether it's that they're feeling fine, excited, scared, anxious or that they haven't given it too much thought, that's okay.

Remember, these mixed emotions are normal and not entirely due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

No feeling is static, remember we can move from one feeling to another on a weekly, daily or hourly basis. It can even be from one moment to the next.

Communicating.



Explore feelings with your child in a way that suits them. Not all children are 'talkers' and if alternative ways of communicating suit them better then be flexible and go with it. This might include; drawing, writing it down or communicating via messenger.

Your child might not want to talk to you about their fears and worries, in which case help them figure out who else they can go to, by encouraging them to think about who is in their team. Their team ideally will include a combination of family, close adults, friends and professionals working with them.

If you know an identified member of staff (for example year leader or pastoral lead) at the high school, remind your child that they will be available to support them. Check out the high school website to see who this might be.

Keep worry time limited- if your child is anxious they might have a tendency to always focus on the problem- do not let the problem take over.

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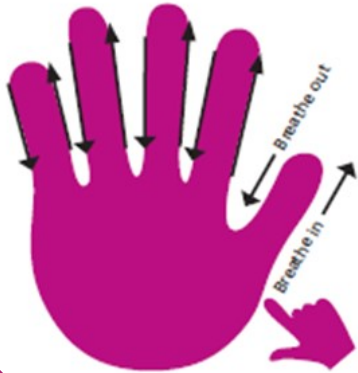


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Breathing techniques

Practising breathing techniques helps to reduce the physical symptoms of anxiety. By doing this we regulate the physical response and calm our body and brain down. Examples of how to practise breathing techniques include:

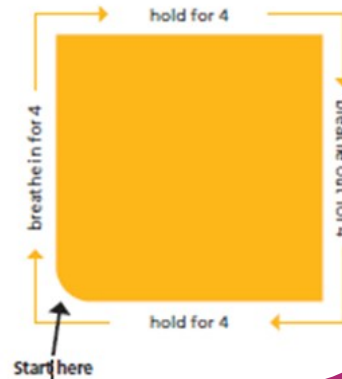
5 Finger breathing



Star breathing



Rectangle breathing



Encourage your child to say to themselves;

“I can do this!”

It might be the push they need to get through initial moments of fear or panic.



Practice problem solving.

Young people are good at this, but don't necessarily apply problem solving to managing fears and worries. Common worries include;

- What if I get lost?
- What if I forget my planner?
- What if I get detention?
- What if my bus is late?
- What if I can't do my homework?
- What if I don't make any friends?

When we have these '*What if*' thoughts we quite often think of the worst case scenario. It's unlikely that they worst case scenario will always happen, so get your child to think about other, more likely possible outcomes in their '*what if*' situation.

Instead of repeatedly saying- "Don't worry" or "everything will be fine" practice problem solving and try saying things like "*If ... happens, what could you do?*" or "*Let's think of some ways you could handle that situation*" or "*who could you ask for help to solve that problem?*"



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Explore what your child *can control* in the situation.
Don't just focus on things they are unable to change.

Look after the basics. Nobody copes well when they are tired, hungry or need a break.

- Anxious children often forget to eat or don't feel hungry and don't get enough sleep. They may need you to remind them to prioritise these basics.
- Remember healthy foods help our brain to function in a way that will enhance learning. Ideally your child should have breakfast to help kick-start their brain and give them more energy for the challenges of the day.
- Encourage some form of daily exercise if possible. Exercise helps our happy hormones (endorphins) to work effectively which will help balance out difficult feelings.
- Get into a good daily routine, the more predictable and easier to process the better. Children work best when they know where they stand. Even though your child might see starting high school as a time to have more independence, remember you make the rules so keep it fair but consistent.
- Children need time to relax and it is likely that starting high school will give them the opportunity to explore a number of different interests. Embrace and encourage this, but bear in mind that taking on too many extra-curricular activities could become overwhelming as the pressures of high school increase.
- Using a timetable to manage homework can be a helpful way of striking the balance between extra learning, staying connected with you and having fun.
- Have a regular bedtime routine, and think about a positive sleeping environment. Turn off devices at least one hour before bed and use this time to practice self-care. This needs to be maintained as your child needs 9.5 hours sleep per night.



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Last minute preparations.

Here are some things you may want to try in the final weeks and days before school starts.

- Start your child on what will be their normal school day routine - waking up and going to bed times.
- Have more conversations about what they are looking forward to.
- Ask your child to help plan school lunches for the first week if they are taking a packed lunch or look at the school website for lunch menus.
- Create a list of school essentials together, maybe make a checklist to make sure they have everything they need.
- Teach and practice problem solving and role play any scenarios that might be troubling your child.
- Practice the journey to school a couple of times;
- If your child is walking, remind them of road safety and familiarise them with the route to school. Encourage them to make plans to meet friends to walk together if possible.
- If they will be dropped off at school, discuss where the drop off and pick up point will be so you have mutual understanding.
- If they are using public transport plan for any restrictions due to Covid-19 and help them be comfortable with handling money and reading bus timetables.

During the early days.

- Together with your child, pack up the schoolbag the night before and talk positively about school.
- Make yourself as available as possible.
- Think about how you are going to manage your own feelings, remember you are your child's anchor at this time of change and unfamiliarity. Dealing with any of your anxieties as well as their own is extra pressure.
- Make a first week planner with some activities to look forward to together after the school days have finished. Try and have structured evenings that might include dinner time together and talking time.
- Be interested in knowing how it's going and if a problem arises ask them how they would like you to help. Resist the temptation to do everything for them.
- Communicate with the school staff team if any problems arise and if your child is feeling particularly anxious. Remember, it will take time for staff to get to know every new-starter, so help them out if needed.



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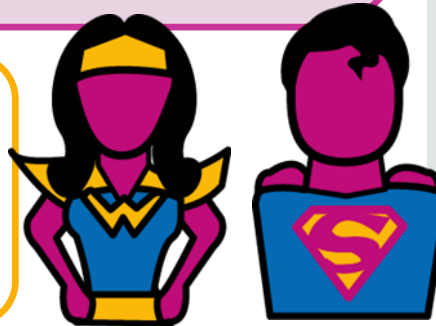
Where to get more advice.

Take a look at the Young Minds website (www.youngminds.org.uk) and search for the 'Find Your Feet' activities to look at together.

Help your child to develop a self-care kit. There are over 90 suggestions on the Anna Freud Website (<https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/self-care/>) which you may want to look at together or encourage your child to look at themselves.

Check out your child's new high school website. High Schools across the district have added some great resources onto their websites to help your child feel welcome and more familiar with the staff, school expectations and layout of the school grounds.

Encourage your child to think about a time they **have managed a change** before and what **coping strategies** they used last time.



Looking after you.

- Although it's healthy to show your child how you feel, remember it's really important that you try and stay calm if they are experiencing distress.
- You are their anchor and will be one of the things that remain constant and familiar during this time of change.
- Children mirror the coping strategies that you use, so demonstrate healthy coping strategies and remember the more confidence and comfort you display the more your child will understand there is no reason to be afraid.
- Remember, it's okay if you don't know the answer to a question. Be honest and seek advice from elsewhere.
- Think about who is in your own team of support and allow yourself some time to practice self care.

This is the next chapter in your child's life. Plan it, conquer it & enjoy it together!