

HELPING FAMILIES MOVE INTO **SECONDARY** SCHOOL
FOR PARENTS

CHILDREN'S WELLBEING AND
LEARNING AT HOME



Nurturing your child through transition





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Acknowledgement

The use of the words *parents* and *families* throughout this module refers to all types of home arrangements and parental figures, including carers and legal guardians, who care for and rear children.

Any images of people in this module do not indicate these people were in any way part of the project or are in agreement with any information contained in this module.

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1

INTRODUCTION

The excitement and anticipation of starting high school is easily mixed with fears about change.

The physical environment is different, the routines are different, the uniforms are different and most students will change from having a single classroom teacher to having a number of teachers.

One of the most intimidating things about starting high school is going from being leaders in primary school to starting again at the bottom. Going to a context of learning new routines and the expectation of starting all over again is bound to cause a certain amount of stress for most young people.

This is all part of the change journey of a child's life, particularly as they move to high school and continue their ongoing transition to adulthood.

Your attitude and how you handle times of change will influence how your child approaches, experiences and remembers change. Every child is different and has their own way of responding.

Through your nurturing role as a parent, you will know best how your child responds to change. You will have seen it through their transitions beyond the family, perhaps into day-care and/or pre-school and primary school, and through the inevitable changes of routine that take place in most families.

Starting high school is a significant event for all children and so understanding their disposition and putting in place good planning are key to making the transition as smooth as possible.

How you build their capacity to do increasingly complex tasks by encouraging independence through the higher primary school years sets them in the right direction to meet new challenges.

As at all stages, the important thing is to know your child, what they are capable of and how to get the best out of them. This module will assist you in knowing the right questions to ask and some of the reactions and emotions to expect. It will also direct you to resources which you will hopefully find helpful.

“*Through your nurturing role as a parent, you will know best how your child responds to change.*”



2 | WHAT YOU CAN DO AS A PARENT



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Your role as a parent in your child's education journey continues through high school. Indeed research shows parents are very welcome in their child's secondary school journey. Some actions you could take include:

- Get to know the school together by ensuring that you and your child attend any orientation opportunities that the school offers. These include orientation days for new students and also orientation opportunities for parents. These are opportunities to reassure your child that they will find their way very quickly. Many young people are nervous about getting lost in their first few days of high school.
- Continuing the development of a 'growth mindset' is essential and the transition process offers opportunities to rise to new challenges. As parents we should be ready to guide and offer support to our children through this process. Encourage them to ask questions, take reasonable risk, to be resilient and to keep trying. Success comes in different forms, we all learn from our mistakes and over time become more confident in our judgement.
- Helping our children to grow with the changes and challenges of moving into high school will also contribute positively to their mental health and wellbeing, essential ingredients to them achieving to their full potential.
- Many children will arrive at high school having achieved academic, social and other success in primary school. With some high schools streaming students according to their academic abilities, young people who have been 'top of the class' during their primary years may suddenly find themselves having to work a lot harder to achieve to their high expectations of themselves – perfectionists may feel particularly challenged in this new context.



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WHAT YOU CAN DO AS A PARENT CONT'D

- The cost of the transition from primary to secondary is significant for families. It could include costs for school fees, excursions, books, IT, various resources or uniforms. Being mindful of the costs, it is important that we ensure our children are prepared by having everything they need to participate fully in school life. Most schools provide resource lists well in advance of a new school year/term. Consider buying stationery items across a period of time to spread the cost. The use of layby may be suitable for more expensive items such as laptops, iPads or other IT requirements. Many schools also have websites or social media pages for second hand items such as books or uniforms which all assist in keeping these costs to a minimum.
- Be alert to your child's growing self-consciousness of their own appearance when buying uniforms.
- Importantly give your child a couple of weeks to settle in. What seems like a monumental issue in the first couple of days can disappear after a couple of weeks once your child becomes more comfortable in their new environment.
- If you are the parent of a child with additional needs, it is advisable to contact the school in advance to develop a plan to address your child's needs appropriately. Many secondary schools offer a specific orientation plan for students with special needs which will help to ensure smooth transitions.



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WHAT YOU CAN DO WITH YOUR CHILD



Following are some reflection notes to prepare for high schools:

- Many young people will attend a high school that is further away from home than their local primary school so it is a good idea to think about the journey. If your child will be taking public transport, do a trial run during the holidays to familiarise you both with timing, fare costs/cards and whether or not more than one form of transport is required.
- Talk about what to do if they miss a bus or a connection particularly if you are not in a position to pick them up. It is also a good opportunity to talk about public transport etiquette, e.g. offering your seat to an adult, particularly an elderly person, a pregnant lady or a mum/dad with small children. It is also important if they are using headphones to ensure they are not too loud. And remind them to be observant to ensure they don't miss their stop!
- Make acquaintance with some older children who attend the high school (children of friends) or children from your child's primary school who are attending the same high school.
- Help your child get acquainted with classmates they may meet at orientation days. There is nothing like a familiar face on the first day to help with the jitters they will most likely feel. Acknowledge that it may be a little scary the first day but reassure your child that you and the school staff will be there to help.
- Have them try on their uniform a few weeks in advance of school starting. If the new uniform includes pieces they are not familiar with, such as a tie, take the time to ensure they are competent with putting it on. Your child may be expected to wear formal uniform to school on some days and sports uniform on other days.



3

WHAT YOU CAN DO WITH YOUR CHILD CONT'D

- Reinforce your child's responsibility for their belongings. Ask your child to label their belongings such as their hats, clothing, calculators and laptops. This is also a good time to chat about consequences of consistently losing pieces of uniform and may include contributions from pocket money to replace lost items or additional chores to help pay for new items.

Once your child commences their journey at high school there are many things that you as their parent can do to help them succeed. These include the following tips from *People for Education* (reference below):

- Help your child's success by talking about school, having high, realistic expectations and building positive attitudes
- Attending parent-teacher meetings is a vital part of the bridge between home and school. These meetings give us as parents the opportunity to share information about our children and their goals, learn about their progress and it also gives the opportunity for teachers to provide concrete strategies to support student learning at home.

- Reports help parents understand their children's progress at school. It is important to focus as much on the learning skills and work habits as on the marks. This information about learning skills and work habits helps to identify areas where parents can have an influence. Reports also offer the opportunity to initiate conversations between parents and young people about school in general.
- While we know through research that attending school events such as sports days, concerts and the like may not directly lead to academic achievement, parents' attendance at them shows children that their parents think school is important and importantly for children, demonstrates parents' engagement in their children's education.

The following link to *People for Education: Doing what matters most - How parents can help their children succeed at school*, further expands on the above points.

<https://peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Doing-What-Matters-Most-how-parents-can-help-their-children-succeed-at-school-2011.pdf>



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4 | IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE



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Many researchers emphasise how family and parenting influence a child's mental health. Effective parenting practices and positive parent-child relationships are very important as young people transition into secondary school.

“Parents and families are children's first teachers and they continue to help their children to learn and thrive throughout the school years. Parents as partners with school in supporting children's learning can have a significant and long lasting positive impact.”

Research shows benefits of parental engagement include:

- *improved academic outcomes*
- *greater engagement in learning*
- *children can be more likely to enjoy learning and be motivated to do well*
- *children can have better relationships with other children, improved behaviour and greater confidence*

- *enhanced relationships with others in the school community*
- *the development of effective partnerships — where families and schools can work together to address issues that may be impacting on children's wellbeing and achievement”.*

The above information is taken from the *Progressing Parental Engagement Project*, resources for parents – public school life. ACT Government, Education - this resource is available at:

<https://www.education.act.gov.au/public-school-life/resources-for-parents/progressing-parental-engagement-project>

The Australian Government's *Learning Potential* free app and website provide information on topics about how to respond to the many impacts that secondary school has on students. Please refer to section 5 for links to this information.



4 | IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE CONT'D

The following information on transition to secondary school is taken from the Te Tari Arotake Matauranga Education Review Office (2016) and is available at:

<https://www.ero.govt.nz/publications/evaluation-at-a-glance-transitions-from-primary-to-secondary-school/6-transition-from-primary-to-secondary-school/>

“The transition to secondary school often coincides with important social, emotional and physiological changes in the lives of adolescents” and parents’ and teachers’ understanding of these changes can enhance parental confidence and also enhance the confidence of young people.

“When students change class within or between schools, they must adjust to new surroundings, become familiar with new teachers and peers, learn new ways of working, and make sense of the rules and routines that operate in their classes (Sanders et al, 2005). While students are

navigating the formal school environment, they are also adjusting to the social changes that happen when changing schools and classes.

Why the Primary to Secondary Transition matters.

Students need to make positive adjustments to their new school and classes so that their wellbeing is maintained and their learning is coherent and continuous. McGee et al (2003) found that there was a strong correlation between the extent to which students experienced difficulty following transition and their likelihood of dropping out from education. Other research indicates that poor transitions impact on students’ wellbeing and on their achievement in the future (West et al, 2008). Where students experience multiple transitions because of transience, there are identifiable negative impacts on their achievement.”



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5 | SOME IDEAS AND RESOURCES

Even with the best of preparation, your child may still experience normal human set-backs. How will you know when their reactions are usual run-of-the-mill problems or something more serious?

The websites listed below have various advice including about emotional responses for cues. Don't hesitate to speak with teachers to find out about your child's behaviour in class.

Remember the most powerful message you can give your child about their new experience is your example. How you self-talk, or show anxiety or worry about them will impact their approach and reactions to school. By staying calm and supportive, you will help your child in the best possible way to adjust to their new routines and surroundings.

Following are some links to information you might find useful.

KidsHealth / For Parents - 10 Ways to Help Your Teen Succeed in High School.
<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/school-help-teens.html>



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Headspace resources for parents and educators.

<https://headspace.org.au/>

The Australian Parenting website – Starting secondary school.

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/school-education/school-choosing-starting-moving/starting-secondary-school>

The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne has a wide variety of education support for the families of children with health conditions. This information is available at:

https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Health_conditions_chronic_illness_and_school/

Progressing Parental Engagement School Fact Sheet Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian families. ACT Government – Education and Training.

https://www.education.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/807432/150897-Engaging-with-Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Families.pdf

Student Transition and Resilience Training: A Year 6 – 7 Resource by Andrew Fuller, Clinical Psychologist © 2016, Department of Education and Training, Victoria.

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/transition/startresource.pdf>

Australian Government - Learning Potential

[Learning Potential](#) is a free app and website for parents, families, and carers packed with useful tips and inspiring ways parents can be more involved in their child's learning. It is designed to help parents be part of their child's learning and make the most of the time they spend together, from the high chair to high school. Visit the [Learning Potential](#) website, or download the app for free from the App Store or Google Play. (Department of Education & Training).



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WHAT SOME PARENTS SAY



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The following quotes are taken from interviews conducted as part of the Re-Energising Parent Engagement in Australian Primary and Secondary Schools Project.

“I suppose I see my role as a parent is supporting the whole process of education, so I’m not so concerned about trying to get involved with the content, I don’t feel like I need to know what they’re doing in maths ... it’s more about getting the lifestyle balance things, making sure they’ve got good coping skills, keeping an eye on just general mental health, and being involved with the school, I guess not so much from that content point of view, but just more around that whole community and wanting to have an input in making that as supportive and inclusive as possible.”

(Parent, metropolitan secondary school, Queensland).

... “As with many parents, I am always encouraged by a school’s emphasis on wellbeing as well as academic outcomes ... one of my children in particular really only engages in learning when she feels she

has a relationship with her teacher. As a parent I feel it is part of my role to help her develop relationships with all her teachers (not just the ones she likes!) However I can only do this once I have met the teacher.”

(Parent, metropolitan secondary school, Western Australia).

“Practice at home for certain things if they’re doing orals, support with homework, guidance to help them choose their time wisely, help to get on to particular internet resources, I mean, there’s so much.”

(Parent, metropolitan secondary school, Queensland).

“Some parents feel they are not considered in the transition process, they have an interview the year prior to secondary, the student has transition days and parents are forgotten in the process. Regular informal meetings not necessarily one on one and not the 5 minute speed meeting should be promoted so that parents who want to be engaged have a platform to start.”

(Parent, regional secondary school, New South Wales).

“Okay, so, one of the teachers is probably the nicest person in the whole world and so when – because one of my boys suffers very badly with anxiety, so I just went up to him and he’s gone, right, I’ll keep an eye on him and just took him under his wing so there were no problems ... So I see myself and my husband as first educators, starting with the preparation for school, teach the value and importance of learning, and provide an environment for learning to take place. And support our children through the process. I guess the goal for them would be to be life learners.”

(Parent, metropolitan secondary school, Queensland).



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WHAT SOME PRINCIPALS SAY

The following quotes are taken from interviews conducted as part of the Re-Energising Parent Engagement in Australian Primary and Secondary Schools Project.

“So the boys would go through a number of transition activities, ‘get to know you’ activities that our house leaders and the student leaders would take the boys through and at the same time the parents are taken to two forums. One is on transiting your son from primary school to secondary school and the second one is communications that happen at the college. So we try to unpack both of those scenarios so that the parents feel comfortable in the new setting.”

(Principal, metropolitan secondary school, Victoria).

“I suppose, we’ve got families who very much identify with the values of the school and so they’ve chosen our school because they believe that it matches their family’s values and that’s a good starting point to begin from - and I suppose any school that articulates it’s values really would mean that parents are knowing what they’re getting before they come and have made definitive choices about that prior. So, I suppose that’s one enabler to parent engagement - that there’s a shared set of values.”

(Principal, metropolitan secondary school, Queensland).



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WHAT SOME RESEARCHERS SAY

Transition and change in the contexts of home and school involve a wide spectrum of learning and wellbeing issues in the lives of young people and their families.

"This suggests that children's persistence was the most important temperament factor associated with child- and parent-reported difficulties. Children rated by their parents as having low levels of persistence were more likely to be reported by their parents as having difficulties with the transition to secondary school. The ability to work towards the completion of a task and not give up easily has been identified as a key non-cognitive skill that is linked to both school achievement (Mokrova, O'Brien, Calkins, Leerkes, & Marcovitch, 2013) and labour market outcomes (Heckman, Stixrud, & Urzua, 2006)."

(Maguire and Yu, 2014).

Retrieved from *Transition to secondary school*, Ch. 5 of The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children Annual statistical report 2014, by Maguire, B. and Yu, M., Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2014 – available at:

<https://growingupinaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/asr2014.pdf>

"Transitioning to Year 7 and further on into secondary education can certainly be a challenge for many young people, but they are more resilient than some researchers give them credit for, and there has to be a place in transitioning programs and activities for expressing and exploiting the joy, positive hopes, anticipations, aspirations,

excitement and even dreams also felt, versus a focus on discontinuity, alienation and insecurity. Despite anxieties about what might happen on the first day - finding their classroom, using the toilets, getting the right bus home and the like - students also report a degree of excitement and expectation about moving on from being a primary school student, even when that experience has been positive."

Retrieved from Crump, S. and Slee, R., *School transitions for vulnerable young people - Re-engaging students through local initiatives*, 2015, The Victoria Institute. Article available at:

https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/school/principals/transition/SchoolTransitionsFor-VulnerableYoungPeople_Report.pdf

"While often useful as a means of initially connecting with most parents, arguably the more dynamic approaches to induction and transition extended further to build a stronger, more holistic two-way partnership. Examples noted by several principals included:

- *Provision of other community services and programs through the school so that families are used to the school setting and supported beyond the domains of education*
- *Friendship groups and 'buddy' systems in which families receive guidance and mutual support from other families, and*
- *In a small number of cases, staff home visits."*

(Stafford, Barker & Ladewig, 2018).



9 | SOME USEFUL BOOKS ON PARENT ENGAGEMENT

[Please click here to peruse a list of useful books on parent engagement](#)

10 | REFERENCES

Stafford, N. Barker, B. & Ladewig, C. (2018). *Parent Engagement: Analysis of qualitative research with principals and parents*. Unpublished report.

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