

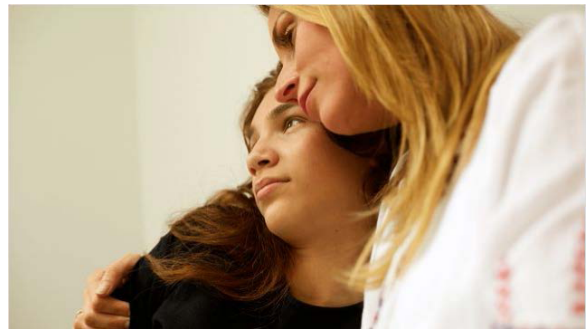
Starting and Adjusting to Secondary School

Starting secondary school can be a daunting time for your not so little one.

With so many changes on the horizon, it's vital that children are prepared as much as possible to **feel comfortable with the uncomfortable**.

So how can you do this?

If your child becomes a little anxious in new or unexpected situations, the best thing you can do is discuss the event either before (if you can pre-empt them) or after the situation has occurred if not. Remember to remind your child that not all new or unexpected situations may create an instant sense of negativity, so many in life may create an instant sense of positivity.



You may find the strategies below useful when preparing them for these unexpected events or reflecting upon how to cope with ones in the future.*

For example

Children can be taught that unexpected situations in life, where an instant sense of negativity occurs, can range from a 1 in intensity (a pair of socks weren't where you thought you had left them) **to a 3** (you planned to make a Victoria sponge cake at school but forgot to pack the eggs) **to a 5** (one of your closest friends is moving to a new school) **to a 7** (your favourite teacher is retiring) **to a 9** (house falls down) **to a 10** (global pandemic/close bereavement)**

You could work with your child to develop your own intensity examples too.

Now, this is not an exercise in focusing on the negative, what it can be is a teaching tool, to **show your children that they have survived all these unexpected situations**, with a range of intensities, no matter how worrying or upsetting they were at the time.

Many children do not have the confidence to back themselves and their ability to remain calm and rational when unexpected or new situations occur. This is a universal truth, but you can work to change this for your own child, and then perhaps they can change this for another child along the way.

In a situation where your child becomes anxious, ask them to touch, hold or look at something to keep them grounded, a pen, their collar, a sandwich etc, to remind them that they are Bob, Samantha, Aysha, Michael, etc and that they are living in the moment. Ask them to take a deep breath and count backwards from 5-1, E-A or their top five chocolate bars (feel free to amend as you wish). Then, ask them to grade the moment from a 1 in intensity to a 10; because they already know they can handle a 10, they've done it, which means that no matter how tough it seems, they will get through it. If the moment has passed, encourage them to talk about how they felt in the moment and if they think they would like to handle it differently next time, talk to them about how they think they could do this using the method above.

If they are anxious about starting secondary school and the changes this will bring, perhaps you could also read them this:

Life in high school is a little bit like paddling down a river in a canoe, with a suitcase (and a dog/cat if you like). The course isn't always clear,

but there is a clear destination. It's also important to remember that there will be more people on the sidelines cheering you on the way than there were in primary school (the older you get, the more people you meet, plus there are more staff in high schools). Some of those who are cheering you on (parents/siblings/carers/Great Aunt Mabel/teachers/all school staff /your friends) may be there for every minute of your journey, or just 95%, or some may be there for a little less and some extra ones may come to support along the way.

They are there because they know **you can make it through the bumpy parts and the beautiful parts**, where you have the best days and learn so much and generally feel like you have confetti in your pockets and when you have laughed with genuine glee. The suitcase you pack will be partly full when you begin high school (if it was full, we wouldn't need to take the trip down the high school river in the first place). You will add many wonderful things to your suitcase on the way, knowledge, skills and memories and you may even take the odd thing out (this is okay, it is your suitcase after all).

Please note, **there may be some moments in school when you feel anxious**, this may happen when one of the spectators changes, or the route you thought you were taking is changed, or if one of your spectators becomes a little grumpy for a while, or they don't respond the way you expected to something. When this happens, this may feel like a small worm is dancing in your stomach. If you feel this, it is good, it means your body and mind are alive and that you are going to learn another skill to add to your suitcase. If we never had challenging situations in our lives, we would not learn the skills we need to make us wonderful, confident and capable adults. **Remember, we can only control our own actions and not those of others.**

Another important thing to remember is that everyone is different, totally unique. We are a little bit like lollies, or blades of grass or packets of chips. This is a good thing too (life would be so boring if we were all the same) and it means that you will meet some amazing people, who you like and admire and definitely some who like the same things as you. You may meet some people who are a little different to you, they may not think in a similar way and may like different things to you. This is okay too. Remember, we cannot control the actions of others, just our own.

High school itself is like a box of chocolates or a multi pack of snacks. There may be some parts



that you are keener on than others. It is also like completing a level on a computer game, it can be challenging and there may be another one to complete soon after. With school, each year is a challenge to be completed that you may not feel like completing just yet, or a challenge you cannot wait to begin.

But, remember this, at times, **you will laugh harder than you have ever laughed before in high school, you may even cry harder than you ever have before**, because the next 4-6 years will have mostly ups, but will have some downs. Just like life itself.

But, if you remember to embrace change, let it into your life and into your suitcase, you will not go wrong. **Also, remember that you are just as important as any of the other rowers on the river.** If a big, soggy leaf blows into your canoe (1 on the intensity scale) or a bird flies in and you don't like birds (this is a 3) then you can handle it. Or if the favourite cat you have brought with you decides to swim instead of ride in the canoe with you (this a 5) take a breath, count back from 5, or E, or Crunchie, ground yourself and tell yourself that you have got this, because you have.

You are not defined by what happens to you, or what someone thinks or says, you are defined by how you move forward.

So go and show them what you are made of. Your spectators are so lucky to watch how you develop and grow and help you along your journey.

*For children with a diagnosed additional learning need, the methods below may not be as effective over just a short period but can certainly be implemented regularly if your child responds to them well.

**Please remind your child that 8-10 intensity situations are very rare in life... even though number 9 did happen to the first two little pigs due to some poor structural choices.

For more information and guidance around supporting children with anxiety and/or the transition to high school, please visit the following:

<https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2021/09/mental-health-resources-for-children-parents-carers-and-school-staff/>

<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/resources/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/ztv3p4j>

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/anxiety/>