

Family Pack - Transition to Secondary School in Australian Schools

Year 7 students arriving at secondary school will be entering into a totally new school culture. From day one, there will be many changes students need to get accustomed to.

These changes can be defined into three categories:

- Organisational changes.
- Academic changes; and
- Social and personal changes.

Organisational Changes

The secondary school is likely to be much bigger than the primary school and your child may feel a bit lost and insecure at first.

Students will have a number of different teachers and different classrooms, often spread across the larger campus. They will be required to carry around notes and books from class to class.

It is not unusual for your child to feel a bit lost and insecure at first.

Transition to Secondary School

- Organisational Changes
- Academic Changes
- Personal and Social Changes
- Stress and Anxiety
- Parents/ Caregiver Points

Main Changes between Primary and Secondary School

- Smaller school with a few buildings to a larger campus with many buildings.
- Staying in one classroom to moving to different classrooms throughout the day.
- The teacher being responsible for knowing your timetable and where you need to be each lesson, to being personally responsible for knowing your timetable and where you need to be each lesson.
- Having a small range of school facilities and equipment to having a bigger range of facilities and equipment e.g. gymnasium, science laboratories, drama centre, music rooms.
- Books and equipment kept in the classroom to books and equipment carried with you from class to class.
- Students have their own desk, tray or drawer to store their equipment to students using a locker or their bag to store their equipment during the day.

Rules, Expectations and Procedures

Students have shown they have very genuine concerns about the size of their new school with many students expressing that they were worried about getting lost or getting to class late.

Shelley said...

"My first day of secondary school was very overwhelming. My school seemed like quite possibly the biggest place I have ever been to. I was lost several times and always seemed to make my way back to the administration building because that was the only place that I remembered where it was! The staff were really nice and always pointed me back in the right direction. After a few weeks the school seemed to shrink and seemed much smaller. I found my way around quite easily! I thought it would take a lot longer!"

Students who were moving into Year 7 reported they were particularly concerned with rules, procedures, and organisation throughout the transition. It is important to remember that although Year 7 students may at times exhibit adolescent characteristics, these students need clearly explained rules and procedures to help them feel secure in their new environment.

Orientation Days

To help with the transition process, schools often organise an orientation day in Term Four for Year 6 students who are planning to attend the school in Year 7. Older students often assist with the orientation day. Usually on this day students are shown around the school and have general procedures and organisation within the school explained. Some orientation days also include entrance and scholarship exams.



Day One of Year 7

- In many schools, on the first day of the school year the Year 7's are the only students at the school. They are supported by older student leaders and student councillors helping them with timetables, diaries, what equipment to take to each class and other useful organisational tips through the day.
- On this day, the students meet and become familiar with their Year 7 Coordinator and their Home room teacher.

Student/Peer Support

The Student Support Program focuses on developing communication skills, self-confidence and self-esteem. It can benefit most primary and secondary students. Better communication between all sectors of the school community - students, their peers, younger students, older students, teachers and parents/caregivers is an important goal.

How does it work?

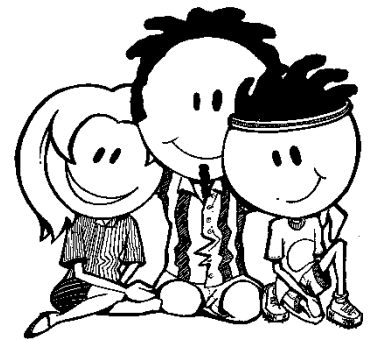
The Program usually includes a 'buddy program' where older students team up with younger students to offer them support. Improved self-awareness and self-esteem can help students resist peer group pressure that may be harmful to them.

Home Rooms

Home room teachers, generally, have daily contact with the students within their group and are the first port of call should a problem arise – a comforting thought for many parents. Some schools strongly encourage parents to meet or contact their child's home room teacher early in the year, either by phone or email. Home room teachers are an important link between the school and home.

Timetables

To keep track of all the lessons and classrooms, students are given weekly timetables with their subjects, times and room locations listed. They will be required to check their timetables each night to make sure they have the correct books, equipment and completed homework for the next day's classes. Reading and understanding timetables takes some getting used to, as does moving from room to room. Making sure your child is confident they know where they are going and what they need for the next day will help them to feel safer and more confident at school.



Being prepared

Students who have a good routine at home appear to settle into the routines of secondary school more smoothly. In the first few weeks of Year 7 students often become very tired from all the new challenges changes they encounter.

Tips for organisation at home each day include:

- Regular meal and bed times;
- Organising school uniform and equipment the night before;
- Pack bag night before;
- Checking timetable and referring to school diary for classes the night before;
- Keeping room tidy and organised.

Money and possessions at school

Other issues which will need addressing in the near future are food, money and possessions at school. School canteens are much bigger than the primary version with a larger variety of goods on offer. Suddenly, the parent has much less control of the eating choices their child makes and what they spend their money on. Students taking money and possessions to school may also risk having other students taking them or threatening them for their possessions.

Alyce said...

"I remember on the first day at secondary school I was too scared to go to the canteen because there were so many people there, so I got my older brother to get my lunch for me. Now I don't even notice the crowd, it is just part of school. I guess if I didn't have a brother at school I would have just stayed hungry until I got the courage up to give it a go myself."

Academic changes

Students will have a number of different teachers and classrooms. Set class periods on subjects may also be longer in duration than in primary school. Balance between home and school is important in supporting your child's academic endeavours. By taking an active, supportive role in teenager's academic achievements, both parents and teachers can broaden the student's horizons, increase their self-esteem, and provide a foundation for the upcoming stage of higher education.

Primary School

One Teacher most of the week

Teachers decide what subject you study

Everyone does the same subjects in the class

Some homework every week

Secondary School

8 - 10 teachers during the week

Students and their parents may choose some extra subjects you study.

Students choose extra-curricular activities and options

Some homework every night including weekends.
Students expected to study not just do set homework

New Subjects

In Year 7, students will be introduced to subjects they haven't experienced before, and other subjects may have a different approach and emphasis from primary school learning. They will also be expected to be more independent and self-reliant than in primary school.

Students tend to report lower levels of concern about the academic content during transition. They generally feel reasonably comfortable that the content areas will be familiar to them and that the teachers will guide them through new subjects.

Many students moving from primary to secondary school rate having more extra-curricular classes as one of the positive and most exciting aspects of the change.

Core Subjects

All Year 7 students will study core subjects such as English, Mathematics and Science.

New teachers

In secondary school, students usually have eight or more teachers as well as a Student/Year Coordinator. One of the main areas of academic change is having different teachers for each subject. Students will be exposed to different teaching methods, expectations and experiences as they move from one teacher to the next throughout the day. It's common for new Year 7's to feel concerned that their individual needs and interests might get lost in the crowd - it's important to let them know that there are people available to help them. It is also important to reassure them that it is ok to ask questions.

At the start of the year, teachers may not even know all the students' names (some teachers may have 200 or more students) and it will take some time for them to get to know the students as well as the primary school teachers did.

Homework and study skills

In primary school, the class teacher would assign all the weekly homework. In secondary school, subject teachers will assign homework for their particular subject – this can often result in a heavy load for the week. Parents and students need to let the teachers know if they are feeling overloaded or overwhelmed with all of the homework. Students will find that they have homework over the weekend and are expected to study as well as do assigned homework tasks. This study might be in the form of reading from class books, re-reading lesson notes, or students may be asked to research topics.

Personal and Social

Main Personal and Social Changes between Primary and Secondary School

- Being one of the biggest and oldest at a small school to being one of the youngest and smallest students at a big school.
- Knowing most of the people in your primary school to meeting many new people (not just other Year 7's).
- Being in a class with other students they have known for years to being in classes with only a few, if any students they know from primary school.
- Having the same friends to having to make new friends to having to make new friends.
- Staying with the same social group in class throughout the day to being part of several different class social groups as they move from class to class throughout the day.
- Students tend to live locally in the same neighbourhood to students coming from a wider area and not all live in the local neighbourhood.
- Students from similar ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds to students from wider variety of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds

New friends

Making new friends is perhaps one of the most important tasks for Year 7 students. Some students may transition to schools where they know no people, or they may only know children from their old primary school. Their friends may be going to different schools or be in different classes so they may need to make new friends. Additionally, in primary school, students usually have a relatively stable group of friends with whom they play. When a student goes to secondary school, their group formation often changes. This can be a particularly unsettling time for students as they re-establish their social network.

Fitting in is extremely important to Year 7 students. It is a good idea for parents/caregivers to be available to listen if students want to talk about their new school experiences. It is also important for parents/caregivers to re-assure children who are taking a while to 'find their place' in the school and their new set of friends - it can sometimes take time.

Peer influence

Making new friends and the desire to fit in can sometimes put pressure on students to do things so they can be liked or be one of the 'crowd'. Making children aware of the fact that they don't have to do everything their peers do, is an important way of ensuring the friendships they make are genuine and positive and not based on pressure or conformity. Be available to help them plan strategies for doing what suits them.

Body image and changes

Your child is going to be in a school with older and more physically developed students. This may be unsettling for new students, especially compared to the previous year when he or she was the oldest in the school. Don't forget that your child is about to enter or has already begun puberty.

There are many issues that parents will need to help their teenage child address, such as body changes, and how these changes will affect the student both physically and socially (especially during sport and gym); and the effect hormones will have (ie: acne, voice changes and growth spurts), as well as being aware of personal hygiene and the regular use of deodorants. Be sensitive to your adolescent's new experiences and be supportive when they encounter changes or crises.

Stress and Anxiety

What are they worried about?

Students going into Year 7 often report increased levels of stress related to safety concerns in the school.

Heather said...

"I am really nervous about high school because there's going to be a lot older people and other teens and I don't know if I will fit in."

Maria said...

"I am worried that I won't know the teachers well enough to ask for help if I need it." - Maria

Signs of stress

It is not uncommon for new secondary school student to feel:

- Lost and confused.
- Missing old school and old friends.
- Lonely and unhappy (until new friends are made).
- Worried that they will not be able to cope with the new demands.
- Worried that they will not "fit in".
- Worried that they will not live up to parental expectations.

Your teenager may show his/her stress in the following ways:

- Being irritable and short tempered.
- Being disagreeable or not wanting to talk.
- Changing behaviour such as silliness or rebelling.
- Stomach pains, head aches or not wanting to go to school.

If these symptoms persist beyond the first few weeks of school, parents should speak to their school and try to address the source of the stress to their teenager. The bottom line though, is that most students adapt very well, and learn to appreciate the newfound independence that secondary school has to offer.

How can parents help?

Parents can help ease their child's transition pains (and their own) by being open and understanding. Here is some other tips/information that parents can use to help their child adjust to the new secondary school setting:

- Help your child set up a homework routine that helps them to manage homework and still have time for relaxation and friends.
- Be a good and supportive listener but try not to give advice too quickly. Problems that young people solve for themselves help to build confidence.
- Encourage your child to join school activities. This is a great way to make new friends.
- Be patient with your "more than usual" irritable adolescent for the first few weeks.
- Get involved in the P&C or other parent organisations and go to school functions.
- AND IMPORTANTLY: Do not forget that despite their age, adolescents still need affection, love and support from their parents or caregivers.

10 Tips to help prepare students for secondary school.

1. **Be interested and enthusiastic about their move to secondary school.**

Your encouragement will help your child to make a successful transition to secondary school. Listen to their experiences and expectations. Find out as much as you can about your child's new school and be enthusiastic and encouraging about the school.

2. **Attend the secondary school orientation day.**

If your child will be entering secondary school in the following year, then keep a look out for open days and orientation days which the school will be holding. These days are designed to help parents and their children prepare for starting secondary school. Being there will help you understand your child's experiences better.

Also keep a look out for other events at your child's prospective school which may help him or her learn about what secondary school is like.

3. **Make sure travel arrangements to and from school are organised.**

Organise travel passes or travel arrangements well before school begins. This will help settle some of the concern about independent travel. Talk about back-up travel arrangements, for example, what to do if a bus or train doesn't come.

4. **Discuss the changes every student will experience.**

Emphasise that many people feel apprehensive about changing from a small primary school to a larger secondary school, and that there will be people to help them adjust. Take time to read and discuss the transition information together.

5. **Organise your child's uniform well before the first day of school.**

Having the new uniform organised and correct will help your child start to feel a sense of belonging to the school.

6. **Learn about school routines and timetables.**

Talking to students already enrolled at the school can be useful in finding out information about things such as sporting venues used by the school and school finishing times. The school will provide information before it is needed.

7. **Help your child to develop good study habits.**

Try to provide them with somewhere private and quiet to study. Help your child to set aside a particular time to study. Work out a daily timetable that incorporates all your child's needs and interests. Regularly viewed TV programs, club activities and sport should all be part of the timetable. Ultimately, they will need to manage their own study and they can guide you in what is helpful for them.

8. **Practise organisational skills.**

In the first few weeks of secondary school, you might want to check with your child that they have the right books for the following day. You will quickly encourage a good habit.

9. **Discuss emergency and safety issues.**

Talk about these issues simple and calmly - including crossing roads or taking essential medication. Allow your child to contribute their views. Find out who the staff are at the school who can help them if needed on particular issues such as medication.

10. **Let your child know that you trust them and that they can trust you.**

Keep communication open about all your child's experiences and make sure they know you are always available if things go wrong.