

Tackling School Transitions

Starting at a new school is always challenging. Whether entering kindergarten, middle school, or high school, new schools present new experiences and opportunities, but can also present anxieties and difficulties. As parents, we want our children's transitions to be as smooth as possible, and while we can't be in class, there are many ways to support and prepare your kids as they navigate their academic careers.

Elementary School:

Kindergarten is often more frightening for parents reluctant to let their little fledglings out of the nest than for the children themselves. Children can sense anxiety, so the key lies in being excited and in making both you and your child as comfortable and prepared as possible.

Take a trip to the school before the academic year gets underway. Meet the teacher together and tour the building, finding the cafeteria, playground, and of course your child's new classroom so he/she feels oriented and comfortable arriving on the first day.

Obtain a copy of your child's classroom roster over the summer and get in touch with several other parents. Make plans to meet up in a public park or playground so your children can meet in a casual environment. Your child can make friends and practice important sharing and cooperation skills under your supervision. Having friends in the class will help your child to be excited for school, and seeing even a few familiar faces can reduce first day anxieties significantly.

Make preparing for school a great experience for your child by letting them pick out school supplies and a new outfit for their first day. Prepare his/her favorite lunch and have a favorite snack ready when he/she gets home.

Middle School:

Middle school is a big change from elementary school; the building is much bigger, and instead of a single classroom, children graduate to lockers and several classrooms and teachers. Children are given more responsibilities and more opportunities to succeed or fail.

Organization is important to your child's success. Get your child a planner and show him/her how to record homework assignments and activities. Make a space at home for your child to organize books and papers neatly. Make sure to obtain a copy of the syllabus for each class, and stay informed on quiz and test schedules.

Head off problems as quickly as possible. If you notice any changes in your child's behavior or slips in grades, do not ignore them or wait for them to improve. Talk to your child frankly and make appointments with his/her teachers regarding any concerns with academic performance.

High School:

High school brings yet more responsibilities and choices for your child. A larger school and a larger student body can be overwhelming. Most schools offer an orientation program for incoming freshman to get familiar with the campus and their classrooms.

Discuss the importance of high school with your teen. He/she needs to be aware that now their choices can and will affect their futures. GPAs are cumulative and even a few bad grades freshman year can affect their choice of colleges.

Be a good listener. The best way to stay involved in your teen's life is to be as supportive and non-judgmental as possible. This doesn't mean you should condone bad behavior, but sincerely listening to your child's point of view can help you determine how to keep or get him/her back on track.