

How to manage the transition to high school

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Starting high school can be just as daunting as the first day of kindergarten. Photo: Getty

You probably remember your child's first day of primary school. Stepping into the classroom for the first time was full of uncertainty for your little one (and for you), and you would have spent lots of time and effort helping them make those steps. This next transition into high school may not seem like such a big deal – but think again.

"People expect that little kids will find a transition difficult, but there's an assumption that by high school they should be able to handle change," explains Jenny Atkinson from [Sparks Education](#) and author of *High School Rocks: Make Starting High School an Awesome Experience (A Parent's Guide)*. "They can handle it, to a degree, but there's a wide range of how kids cope."

The fact is that high school is remarkably different to primary school. "The number of challenges and changes that kids face when they start high school are often underestimated," says Atkinson. These changes include new expectations on them, leaving friends, heading into an unfamiliar environment and last – but certainly not least – this is all happening at the same time as puberty. It seems pretty big when you think of it like that, right?

You can see, then, why kids need help and support from their parents as they move from primary school into high school. "If they don't transition well, children are far more stressed than they need to be and this makes it difficult for them to manage changes or deal with the workload," Atkinson says. "There's research showing that kids who are stressed and overwhelmed are really disengaged in their learning."

So, how can you help your child make this change into high school?

Teach time management skills. One of the big challenges your child is about to face is an increase in workload. Atkinson says that in her research of 1,600 kids making the transition, she found that two-thirds struggle with the amount of homework. "If they can't master time management, they'll fall behind and their grades will be affected," says Atkinson. This can be stressful and create some unhappiness, too.

Focus on independence. In your aim to reduce the big changes your child will experience, it's a good idea to ease them into a more independent stage of their education. "Start working on helping your child be more independent and more confident in what they do," Atkinson suggests.

Get familiar with the high school. Making the high school as familiar as possible will lessen the scary thoughts of going into a new environment. "In Year Six and even Year Five, help them get to know the new school through open days, looking at the school website," says Atkinson. "They can then take on some ownership of the move, and understand that they're moving forward and away from primary school."

Talk through each unknown. "Kids can build up the unknowns in their mind," Atkinson explains, "and although some of those unknowns are little, it's big to them." Taking the time to explore each aspect of uncertainty can help break them down to more manageable changes.

Review other commitments. During high school there are more things competing for your child's time: school, homework, extracurricular activities, friendships and family time. It's a good idea to keep a close eye on all of this, and help your child find some balance. "In those first few weeks, they'll be very tired, so watch their bedtime, chat to the teacher, and adjust your child's schedule if you need to. If you need to cut out an activity for the first term while they adjust, then you can look at adding it back in term two."

Look at other resources. You'll find some more tips to help the transition from the [Victorian Education Department](#), [NSW Education](#), and the [Sparks Education Australia website](#).

Read more: <http://www.essentialkids.com.au/education/school/high-school/how-to-manage-the-transition-to-high-school-20151021-gkeg1l#ixzz41orIE5MP>