

Transitioning to High School

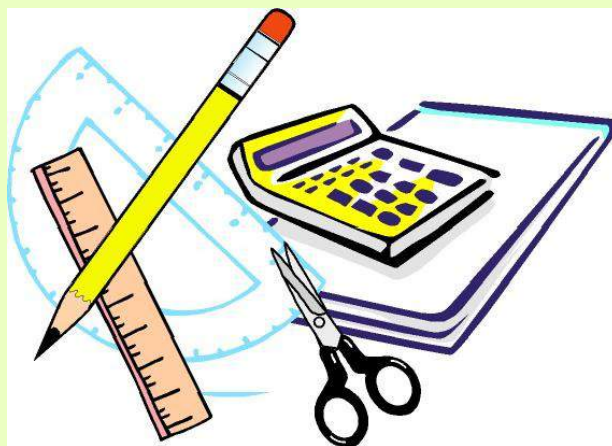
Jenny Atkinson is a transition to high school advisor and the bestselling author of 'High School Rocks: Make Starting High School An Awesome Experience'. She has 30 years' teaching experience and is the founder and presenter of the 'Get Set For High School' Program, a series of student workshops and parent talks that ease the transition from primary to high school.

For many children, leaving the familiarity of primary school and heading into the unknown world of high school can be like a roller coaster ride. New and exciting moments are mixed in with confusion, uncertainty and fears. As they head off to high school, children are also dealing with the emotional, physical and psychological changes that puberty brings, making this one of the most significant transitions they will experience.

If you're a parent who is worried about how your child will handle this move, don't despair. Outlined below are some practical suggestions for supporting your child that will make all the difference for a smooth transition.

Before Starting High School

- Worrying about the unknown is one of the biggest challenges children face prior to starting. Look through the school's website and visit the school for open days, performances and orientation days to help your child become more comfortable with their new surroundings.
- Looking over a map of the school can help reduce anxiety, as children often worry that they will get lost in a much bigger school. Let them know that the teachers will understand if it takes longer to get to class, especially in those first few weeks.
- Reassure your child that while there are some differences ahead, many things such as basic school rules and expectations of behaviour stay the same as primary school. Not everything changes.
- Highlight the aspects of high school you think your child will enjoy. For some this may be making lots of new friends, while others might like more interesting technology, science or art classes. Many children look forward to making a fresh start in high school.
- Encourage your child to be independent as it will help them handle their responsibilities in high school. Are you still doing things for your child that they can do for themselves? Now is a good time to start delegating some tasks.
- Help them develop a range of coping strategies to deal with problems that arise.
- Set up a plan for travelling to and from school, including a back-up plan for missed buses or trains. If they feel unsure, do a trial run together towards the end of Year 6 or during the school holidays.



The First Few Weeks of High School

- Maintain family routines at home as this offers stability at a time when they are coping with many changes.
- Make sure your child eats well and gets plenty of sleep as they may be quite tired in the first few weeks. Keep an eye on the balance between family life, homework and activities. If they are spending excessive amounts of time on homework activities, contact the year 7 co-ordinator to discuss.
- When children feel unsure during transition, they benefit from feeling connected with their family. Take time to do things together - it helps to keep the lines of communication open so they're more likely to share what's going on with their transition.
- Joining a club, sports team or interest group at school are great ways to make new friends.
- Developing their time management and organisation skills makes a difference in coping with the amount of homework. These are skills learned over time so you may need to offer ongoing support.
- Colour coding their books and timetable (one colour per subject) can help with organisation. Also have some matching coloured folders at home to store paperwork for each subject.
- Have them write all assignments, homework and events in their diary.
- Remind them to check their timetable each night so they can pack the items they need for the next day.
- Set regular times for homework and manage the distractions.

Who can help at school?

During transition, children are still learning about how high school works and sometimes what feels like a big problem, can often have a simple solution. The year 7

advisor/co-ordinator is your first point of contact in high school. Don't hesitate to contact them if you feel your son or daughter is not coping. Most schools also have school counsellors available for helping students and parents.



Golden Opportunity

Whilst this transition can be challenging, it's also a time when children are most open to learning new skills. They want to put their best foot forward and find solutions to challenges they are facing. This makes it a great time to help them develop positive attitudes to school-work and friendships, homework routines, perseverance, and skills in time management and organisation. Setting up routines to build upon these skills will prepare them well for later years in high school. It's a golden opportunity, so make the most of them being willing to adapt. It's also a great opportunity for you to connect with your child as you support them through this important transition.

A free fact sheet to help your child with the transition to high school is available for download at: www.sparkseducation.com.au

Copies of 'High School Rocks: Make Starting High School An Awesome Experience' (A Parent's Guide) can be purchased through the website.