

# TIPS FOR STARTING HIGH SCHOOL



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**Jenny Atkinson is the founder of Sparks Education, the parent and student resource that covers all you need to know about getting set for high school. We asked her to share her tips for easing the high school transition, and we think you're going to love what she has to say!**

What makes you the most nervous about starting high school? The amount of homework? Leaving your friends from primary school? Getting lost, or being late to class?

Believe it or not – you're not alone. Jenny offers a workshop that helps kids get prepped for high school, and she always starts off by asking students what they're most nervous about. The amount of homework, leaving friends and getting lost or being late to class are some of the most common answers, along with unfriendly older students, not fitting in, having different teachers, not knowing how to do assignments, being compared to an older brother or sister and failing subjects or not being smart enough. If you're nervous about it, chances are Jenny has heard it.



“Children often worry about what they don’t understand, and then exaggerate these worries in their mind,” says Jenny. “We give them the facts and explain things in a way that’s easy to understand and remember, and offer some practical strategies to support them, too. It helps to debunk the myths they hear about high school, which can cause a lot of concern for students.”

Jenny has researched more than 1600 students to create her program, and she’s continually exploring what makes this high school transition so nerve-wracking. She’s learned that setting expectations *before* starting high school is one of the best ways to manage your nerves.

“Don’t pressure yourself by thinking you have to know how to do everything at once,” Jenny says. “You will need to learn new ways of doing things – and lots of them are fun! – and your teachers, parents and other students will show you the way. Teachers in particular will understand if you’re late to class because you’re still finding your way, or if you need help with their locker.”

Before you start high school, Jenny suggests doing the following:

1. Set up a home study area, a quiet place where you can do your homework without distractions. Stock it with stationery items, computer, your books, and add some quotes, pics and a few of your favourite things to personalise it so the space feels like your own.
2. Visit your school’s website! They’ll have photos and information about the school that can help you to become more familiar with the school. You’ll see photos of sports days and fun activities, as well as what the school environment, playground and classrooms look like.
3. Buy all the items on your school book list, label them and cover your exercise books to protect them. Consider colour-coding the books, choosing one colour per subject, and use a coloured label with the subject name on the spine. This will save you so much time by making it easy to find your books quickly in your locker and at home.

Similarly, you can prepare yourself to stay in close contact with your primary school friends, too. Most importantly, make the effort. Whether it’s a phone call or a message on social media, there are plenty of ways to stay in touch if you’re both at different schools. If you haven’t heard from someone in a while, reach out to them – they may just be busy and coping with their own high school transition, too.

“I know plenty of girls who just see their friends during the school holidays and they still get along well,” says Jenny. “But also understand that friendships do change, especially if you’re not spending all day with someone like you did in primary school. It’s a natural part of life!”

Remember that some friends are with us for a long time but other friendships we’ll enjoy for a shorter time – it might seem like the end of the world at the time, but it’s all to make way for new friendships that we make in high school.

Also know that your high school teachers put in a lot of effort to help new students get to know one another, so you can start making friends from the start. Whether it's a peer-support program where you get an older student as a mentor or 'buddy', a year-level coordinator you can ask questions or a school activity or camp, you will be given so many opportunities to bond with your classmates.



When you start high school, be diligent about recording **everything** – homework, events or activities, items to bring to school with you – in your diary. Check it at homework time and tick things off as they're completed. You'll be amazed at how good it feels to have everything ticked off your 'to do' list!

"Manage your time by working out what are the most important things you need to do that day, then get them done early before the time fillers we often get distracted by," says Jenny.

If you're feeling overwhelmed by the workload, go to your teachers and/or your mum and dad – there are plenty of ways they can help you manage this. If you're doing a long or difficult task, take a few short (emphasis on 'short', though!) breaks to clear your mind and take the pressure off.

But the most important thing of all? Be kind! Both to the people you meet and to yourself (especially to yourself!). Try talking kindly to yourself as if you were giving advice to a friend, especially on those days when things don't go according to plan.

"I see girls put so much pressure on themselves to get things right that they forget to be kind to themselves," says Jenny. "Children in primary school often hear, 'you won't get away with that in high school!', so it helps when we debunk that myth. If we don't, they are reluctant to ask for help when they need it."

Remember that it takes time to adjust to everything in high school. Take it one day at a time, ask for help if you need it and know that, before too long, you'll feel like you belong there, have friends and know your way around."

Don't forget, there's a lot to look forward to, too! You'll be able to make new friends, try new subjects and sports, learn new things, make your own decisions and maybe even have your own laptop.

See the worksheet below for more advice about starting high school, and head to [www.sparkseducation.com.au](http://www.sparkseducation.com.au)

to learn more about Jenny and the 'Get Set for High School' program.

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