

**Transition and parents/carers**

Transition from primary school to high school presents a challenge to young people and parents/carers alike. It is a time when the development of a young person is important. It may bring difficulties due to the conflict of physical capability and socially allowed independence, and many behavioural/emotional changes at this time are due to brain changes as opposed to hormonal issues. This period of neurological development means that young people are vulnerable to changes in their behaviour- positively and negatively.

**A change in neuro structure can lead to:**

* **Increased irritability** – anhedonia (no pleasure in anything) and risk taking behaviour
* **Reward processing** – young people are motivated by rewards and praise, rather than the risk of a consequence.
* **Different decision making capacity** – more able to reflect on similar situations they have experienced before
* **Synaptic pruning** results in a loss of paths – these pathways are within the brain and link emotions and thoughts. If a child witnesses trauma on a regular basis this path will be very strong, as opposed to a child who is praised regularly where this pathway would be strong.

**There are 2 types of transition:**

**Discontinuous** – this is a sudden change where there has been no opportunity for planning.

**Focal** – this is where change can be planned and is the only change going on within a young person’s life.

Ideally the transition to high school should be a **FOCAL** change so that the young person feels secure in the other areas of their lives, such as at home.



**A positive transition can lead to:**

* Increased friendships
* Positive self-esteem
* School motivated
* School interested
* Confidence building
* Adaptation to new routines
* Academic success at own level.

**A less positive transition can lead to:**

* Depression
* Eating disorders
* Substance misuse
* Risky/anti-social behaviour
* Reduced academic achievement
* School refusal

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| What is important to the young person? | What may worry a young person? |
| If new people are involved “will I be liked?”  Having friends and siblings at a different school or in another class  The distance from school to home  What facilities/provisions the school has | Leaving friends and teachers  Bullying  Making new friends  Getting lost  Amount of homework  Older and bigger children  The school being bigger |

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| Physical symptoms of anxiety | Emotional symptoms of anxiety |
| Sweating  Chest pain  Pacing  Hand wringing  Headaches  Stomach issues  Trouble breathing  Insomnia  Self-harm  OCD behaviours – checking doors, washing hands | Overthinking  Memory loss  Need for control  Avoidance  Irritability  Needing lots of reassurance  Constant worry  Panic attacks  Problems concentrating  Fear of being alone |

Worry and anxiety are normal emotions and most young people will experience these to some degree when moving schools.

If the worries are a big change for the young person, if they last for longer than a few weeks and if they impact the young person doing normal day to day things then advice should be sought.

**Strategies to help a worried young person:**

* **Distraction** – this differs for each young person, it could be reading, watching something of interest, colouring, going for a walk, ringing someone for a chat
* **Worry box** – this can be an empty tissue box; a young person could write their worries and then post the worry into the box. For some young people they would feel it has gone once it has been posted, other young people may want an adult to read the worries and discuss them
* **Times for worry** – set aside a time each day when the young person can talk about anything they are worried about
* **Breathing exercises** – these can be found on apps such as Calm or Headspace and often include breathing in and out for certain counts
* **Mindfulness** – this is beneficial for any young person; it can include listening to music or guided stories. Again the apps Calm and Headspace have lots of mindfulness activities
* **Exercise** – the endorphins released are good for raising the mood and reducing anxiety
* **Preparation** – talk the young person through the first few days, what to expect, how they will travel etc.
* **Reassurance** – be positive about the change and spend time reassuring the young person the change is good and they have lots of resources to help them through this period.

**How you can help young people during transition:**

**Sharing information about change with the young person** – talk about other changes the young person has experienced and the positive things attached to them, talk about a change that you have experienced and about how some anxiety is normal. Think about how you feel about the change and try not to put your worries on the child

**Organise/attend visits** – wherever possible attend any open evenings or events put on at the secondary school. This gives the young person chance to familiarise themselves with the building and layout and also to recognize some of the teaching staff. You may be able to view virtual tours on the website.

**Meet the new teachers** – introduce the young person and find some common ground so they have someone they have already started to build a relationship with. This may be available on the website where some teaches have recorded introductions

**Allow time to discuss worries** – allocate some time to sit down with the young person and talk through any worries that the

**Arrange transport** – young people worry about how they will get to and from school. If they are to be going on a bus try the route with them beforehand and point out recognizable buildings along the way so they have something to focus on when they are on their own. Purchase bus passes in advance so that the young person can feel organized and not worry about getting this sorted.

**Encourage child to pack things/have a checklist** – independence in young people should be encouraged even prior to the transition. This includes the young person writing out the days of the week and having listed what they need to take on each day so that this can be used as a checklist. In year 6 young people can be encouraged to pack their own things for school or for trips or days out.

**Consider the young person’s self-esteem** – a confident young person will adapt quicker to transition so consider if there may be some work to do on your child’s self-esteem, there are some ideas available to you if required.