



Family Matters

Making Family Life Easier

Transitioning to Secondary School

The teenage years are full of many transitions and changes and in the coming weeks many young people will be making one of the most important transitions of their young life; that of moving from primary to secondary school. Traditionally, this important time, symbolised the transition from childhood to adulthood, as young people left behind the safety and security of primary school to embark on an adventure into the unfamiliar and unknown territory of secondary school.

In the transition to secondary school workshops which I run with 6th class students, the children will talk about experiencing a mix of emotions about starting secondary school. They say there are many things they are looking forward to, topping the list here is getting a locker, as well as having some concerns around starting a new school (for some the worry of not getting a locker!!). Their main worries however are the following:

- The size of the school and getting lost; as well as now being the youngest in the school
- The different subjects and the amount of homework they will have in each of them as well as the dreaded Friday homework
- Understanding their timetable and the rules of the school
- Studying and exams

In addition to these practical concerns, the children also worry about social issues such as friendships, social groupings and bullying, which I will talk about next week.

As parents, how can you help make this transition as smooth as possible for your child?

In the coming weeks, reassurance that any concerns they have about rules, homework, journals and subjects will all be addressed by teachers in that first week. In many secondary schools, first year students return to school a day earlier to give them the opportunity to orientate themselves to their new environment.

On that first week back, remember they will be tired and possibly a little moody as they get to grips with a longer day and a greater workload, so giving them a little space when they get home can be helpful. Making sure they understand their timetable and helping them organise their books and other materials that they need, the night before can also be beneficial in these first few days, as well as helping them to draw up a homework timetable as this can help avoid the last minute panic of realising that they had homework due that they haven't even started yet.

Finally, it is important to remember that young people tend to settle quite quickly into secondary school, with the majority of students having settled in nicely by the end of the first week. For some it takes a little longer, however by the end of September, they will have found their feet.



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However the issues that most concern them and which they can often continue to struggle with in the early years of secondary school are the social ones. These include issues such as changes in their friendships, the social hierarchy and groupings that exist within the school and about being bullied.

Although many young people will transfer with their friends from a primary to a secondary school in their catchment area, others move to schools outside their area and have to come to terms with a new social environment. For these students they often experience feelings of sadness and fear around the possibility of losing the friends they had in primary school. Acknowledging these feelings and talking to them about friendships can be helpful at this time. Letting them know that there are still ways of staying in touch with old friends, especially in this digital age of social networking, as well as talking about secondary school as a new and exciting place with lots of new people to make friends with, can be reassuring.

Another common experience for many young people, in particular girls, is dealing with changing friendships. Many start secondary school and are relieved and delighted to learn that they are in the same classes as their BFF. They have been friends since junior infants and have shared so much with each other and now they begin the journey of secondary school together. However this excitement can often be short-lived and as the weeks go by, they notice that their friend is now spending a lot of time with other girls in the class, she is not calling her as much and she has developed a whole different style overnight. When she tries to talk to her friend, she is told that there is nothing wrong. This can be a very painful and confusing time for a young person as they feel betrayed, hurt and alone. As a parent you can support your child by being there for them, giving them a hug as well as listening to and validating how they feel. Understanding their experience can help you help them come up with ways of dealing with this changing friendship.

This first year is an important time for parents to check in with their children and the school about how they are doing. Never assume that because they say nothing about school, that everything is okay. Stay connected and involved.

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