

# The transition from primary to secondary school

Transition strategies must consider that for many children the move to secondary school coincides with puberty.

## The importance of a successful transition

A positive start to secondary school can have long-lasting benefits. Young people who experience a positive transition into their new school are more likely to:

- feel comfortable, relaxed and valued
- feel excited and motivated to learn
- have good relationships with others
- develop a sense of belonging within the school community.

This positive start can make a big difference to young people's school engagement, learning and wellbeing. For an introduction to transitions, see [Transitions in learning communities](#).

## Understanding behaviour

The move into secondary school is one of the most significant transitions in a child's education. It involves various changes, including:

- changes in the physical environment
- new rules and procedures
- changes in relationships with peers, teachers and family
- more structured learning, with a variety of teachers and different learning environments to get used to.

At around the same time as the move to secondary school, children experience biological and emotional changes as they go

through puberty anywhere between ages 8 to 14 or even later- it's completely normal for children and young people to go through puberty at different times.

The physical, social and emotional changes associated with puberty can have a strong effect on children and young people's relationships with friends, families and educators. This period of [adolescent development](#) is also related to emotions and behaviours that can lead to difficulties at school.

The timing of puberty at around the same time as the move to secondary school can make this a particularly demanding transition for some young people.

## Common feelings and concerns

Children can experience a range of emotions about the transition. They may feel excitement about the prospect of going to a new school, as well as nervousness about what lies ahead.

Children may also feel sad or angry about leaving their current school and the positive relationships they've established with educators and friends. Common concerns include:

- losing old friends and making new friends
- being bullied
- getting lost and getting to class on time
- remembering what books and other equipment is needed for each class
- following a timetable
- dealing with different educators

- homework.

Research suggests that some young people have greater concerns about the transitions. The good news is that these concerns tend to lessen in their first year at the new school.

### **Some children can find the transition overwhelming and need extra support**

Factors like changes in peer groups, teachers, expectations or routines can be challenging. Some signs that children may be experiencing difficulty include:

- withdrawal or difficulty participating in class discussions
- exhibiting low confidence or self-esteem
- increased avoidance of tasks
- having a short temper or behavioural outbursts
- difficulties with maintaining friendships
- being socially isolated.

## **Trusting and supportive relationships**

Strong relationships between children, their families and educators enhance the wellbeing of children.

Primary and secondary schools should aim to develop effective transition policies. A genuine sense of partnership between the schools can help build understanding of each environment and help transfer information about students and families from one school to another. Here are some key points to consider:

- Establish, train and support a team of key people to coordinate transition practices.
- Establish and maintain relationships with wider school community networks and families.
- Ensure policies and practices reflect, and include community diversity – promoting inclusive practices

### **How can primary schools support a smooth transition?**

Transition support and activities should start 12–24 months before students begin

secondary school, with primary and secondary schools communicating in a handover process.

Some effective strategies to help support the transition include the following:

- Primary school educators can prepare all children for the transition – beginning in the year or years before moving schools. Strategies include talking to students about secondary school, visits from secondary school staff and students, as well as visits to the new school.
- Teach students how to recognise their feelings and where to go if they feel they need help. Providing general problem-solving skills will help students during the transition, and beyond.
- Secondary school educators can help students settle into their new environment with orientation activities, such as study skills workshops, campus tours and identifying support resources, such as the student counsellor and year coordinator, in the secondary school.
- Educators can use the BETLS Observational Tool to observe and document behaviour to help identify students that may find the transition challenging and need additional support.. Research shows that primary school educators are well placed to identify which students are likely to encounter difficulties with the transition to secondary school.
- Educators can connect with families and communities – they have rich information about their child's needs, which can inform planning of programs and strategies for individual students. Giving families and community suggestions for how they can support and develop their child's social and emotional skills, coping and help-seeking strategies can also be helpful.

### **Be You Professional Learning**

Learn more about collaborating with families to support children and young people in the Family Partnerships domain.

Learn more about noticing and supporting

children and young people who might be experiencing mental health challenges in the Early Support domain.

- Supporting a young person with major transitions

### **Some students need extra support and personalised strategies during times of transition**

Some students may benefit from additional support and tailored strategies during transitions. By working with their strengths and the supportive networks around them, you can support students to help develop the resilience and skills to adapt to this period.

Additional and personalised supports may be required for some students, for example children who are homeless (or at risk of homelessness) or students living with a chronic illness or a disability.

### **Be You Professional Learning**

Learn more about inclusive practices that support children and young people with developmental delay or disability.

## **Bibliography**

Visit The transition from primary to secondary school for a list of references for this Fact Sheet.

## **External links**

Raising Children Network – Starting Secondary School

Student Wellbeing Hub – Podcast on the middle years

Reach out – transitions resources

- Resources for School
- Resources for young people

headspace - Parent resources

- Transitions from primary to secondary school
- Supporting a young person with major transitions
- Transitions from Primary to Secondary School

