



MOVING UP

**Helping your child
make a smooth transition
to Secondary School**

brought to you by Dadtalk and the Family Matters Institute

Some teenagers take to Secondary School like a duck to water, but others can take a while to settle in (even members of the same family!)
Whichever way your son or daughter feels – or anywhere in between – this guide is for you.



Moving up to secondary school is one of life's defining moments for your children. It can be exhilarating, frightening and overwhelming – and as you know your son or daughter best, you're the ideal person to help prepare them for some of the changes they'll encounter:

- Adjusting to a much bigger building, perhaps in a completely different location
- Travelling independently on a bus or train for the first time
- Mixing with a much larger and wider range of children and teachers
- Making new groups of friends
- Experiencing more challenging and diverse curriculum demands
- Choosing between a wealth of new and exciting extra-curricular activities
- Attending lessons led by a range of subject specialists in different classrooms
- Taking responsibility for organising themselves and their equipment as well as finding out, remembering and passing on information

No wonder they might need a bit of extra support from Dad and Mum as they prepare for and adjust to their new situation!



Parents' open day/evening

Attend the new parents' open day or evening with your child. Be really positive about what you see and hear – and if you have any concerns, voice them to your partner and/or the staff in private. Take your time, talk to the teachers and students, look at the displays and venture into the music rooms and ICT suites. Plan some questions to ask, especially about how the school helps new pupils to settle in.

Questions to ask at parents' evening

- What facilities does the school have for sport/music/IT?
 - Which activities are held before/after school or at lunchtimes?
 - What selection of meals is available and how much do they cost?
 - What size are the classes for each subject?
 - Which activities or equipment are available during break time and how are they supervised?
 - What measures does the school adopt to help new starters?
 - How, when and who do you contact if there's any problems?
 - What's the school policy on mobile phones?
 - How does the school stretch and challenge children's learning?
- How does the school deal with bullying, discipline disruptive pupils, and encourage kids who don't want to learn or find learning difficult?
 - How can parents get involved with school life – and in what ways does the school help Mums & Dads help their child?
 - What transport provision is available for your child?
 - How is your child's progress reviewed and what measures are used to keep you informed?
 - Does the school offer advice about careers/training/further education?
 - What sort of trips does the school run?



Build their self confidence

Encourage responsibility - At big school, you won't be there to remind them to hand in their homework or bring home their PE kit. What's more they have to organise themselves to move to the right class at the right time with the right stuff.

Head Teacher Lorraine Dougall believes parents can help children prepare for this. "One of the biggest changes at secondary school is that they have to learn very quickly to look after their own belongings and take responsibility for their learning by coming prepared with the right equipment, as well as adjusting to a whole new environment. Parents can really help by encouraging children to take responsibility for their belongings during their last term in primary school, and by packing their own bag for sleepovers, days out or trips during the summer holidays in the weeks before they start."

Offer reassurance - They may be moody, bad tempered or tearful; or seem laid back and relaxed but are actually hiding their worries. It's an anxious time for you all, but don't show them your fears. Keep it positive. Reassure them that the school will make their move as smooth as possible. Explain that staff will be sympathetic to newcomers and older students will probably be on hand to show them where the loos are, what to do for lunch and where to put their PE kit.

Remind them that everyone else in their year group is in the same position. Reinforce the positive aspects of the school and the wonderful opportunities that are in store for them.

Help them make friends - Talk about making friends in a fun way by acting out some scenarios on how they might introduce themselves to other kids and start new friendships. Encourage them to be friendly, be themselves, act natural and make an effort to chat to others. Explain the benefits of joining clubs and teams to meet new people.

Make time for them - They may be growing up, but it doesn't mean your kids don't need your support or want your involvement in their lives - even though they may not show it! Try to set aside some quality time simply to be with them, whether it's taking them out for a meal to celebrate their first day or a fun activity like a bike ride or boat trip. If they don't want to talk about school, just keep it chilled and show them that you're there for them.

Visit www.netmums.com or www.dadtalk.co.uk for more advice on staying connected & sign up to receive Daily Tips from DadTalk (relevant to both Mums & Dads).



Run the school run

Get well acquainted with the route and timetable for their journey to school, so they don't get lost, or wait on the wrong platform or bus stop – and you're not chasing the bus or train to another stop as your child has failed to get off.

If they're using a school bus, travel the route and follow the stops. On the way back, point out landmarks to look for when they need to get off.

With public transport, do a dummy run with them but let your child take responsibility for finding the platform or bus bay, buying tickets, using the timetable, following the route and locating the exit. You could ask an older child who uses the route to accompany them on the first day.

Establish a few sensible rules about staying safe while travelling. Check they have both parents' phone numbers along with any other emergency contacts such as grandparents or childminders. These should be written down as well as in their mobile.

Make sure they know how, and when, to dial 999 and are aware of road safety issues.



The first day dawns

A great idea prior to the big day is to do a 'dress rehearsal' for the first day. This will help you both see how long it takes to get ready, and you'll know what time they'll need to get up for their first day.

Early in the evening on the night before, get your son or daughter to lay out their uniform and check their school bag. Prompt them to think about what needs to go in it (pencil case, books, bus pass, dinner money, PE kit) and any other preparations they need to make (mobile phone on charge, water bottle in the fridge, packed lunch prepared). Decide what time they need to set their alarm, and of course ensure they have an early night.

In the morning, encourage them to get themselves up and ready. Give them a healthy, balanced breakfast and reassure them again. Take a photo for the album and make sure they set off promptly.

Be there to greet them when they arrive back and ask them all about their day. If there are tears or moans, give them a hug and try to keep it positive. Ask them what's the best thing about their new school. Make time to just hang out with them, kick a football, make dinner together - most of all, allow time for them to talk, and for you to listen.



Find out more about the school

Build on what you've seen and heard at the open day to ensure you and your kids are up to speed.

Visit the school's website - Look at the range of activities that go on together with your child, the news for parents and any testimonials from pupils. Read the latest Ofsted report at www.ofsted.gov.uk. This gives an overall assessment of the school's performance on achievements and standards, pupils' development and wellbeing, quality of teaching and learning, leadership and management. The school is judged as Outstanding, Good, Satisfactory or Inadequate and by reading the report you can find out where the school excels, and which aspects need improvement. If you have any concerns, you can contact the school to find out how the recommendations are being addressed. There's a parent's guide to Ofsted reports at www.dadtalk.co.uk

Revisit the school - Look out for public events like a school fete or concert that you could attend to help your child get acquainted with the surroundings.

Talk to other students - Hook up with an existing student – perhaps an older sibling of one of their mates or a pupil they know in the year above them – and give them time alone to have a chat.

Re-read the info - Go through the brochures, welcome booklets or maps you received at the open day with your child at home. Make sure they're well acquainted with the school rules so they don't break them unwittingly.

Check their equipment - Ensure they've got everything they need. Order uniform in plenty of time, get them to try it on and double check the dress code for the autumn term. To help prevent traumas over lost property, make sure it's all named.

Inform the school - Let the school know in advance if your child has learning difficulties, health or behavioural problems. Your son/daughter's primary school will have already done this, but it is good practise if you also communicate with the secondary school directly. Suggest strategies that help them if they become upset or anxious and make the school aware of any medical conditions or special dietary needs.

While they're finding their feet

Show an interest - your interest makes the difference to their learning. Some children fit in really quickly to new school but others take longer to adjust to the demands and challenges of their new environment. Keep talking to your son or daughter about how they're getting on. Try asking specific questions:

- "Who have you made friends with so far?"
- "What are you studying in geography?"
- "What's it like doing science in a laboratory?"
- "Have you joined any new clubs?"

Photocopy their timetable, so you know what's going on each day and really listen when they open up about their schooling and ask questions to find out more. Make an effort to remember some of the facts, subjects or names they've mentioned. Help support any burgeoning friendships by inviting new friends over for a meal or activity one evening or weekend.

Help where you can - Involve yourself in the school by reading parent information in their school diary, signing their homework or practice book, responding to letters brought home, attending parent evenings, and encouraging a set time and place for them to study at home. What they learn at home is just as important as their school education. And keep

building on that sense of responsibility. Assistant Head Teacher Jeremy Stowe recommends: "Get them to look at their timetable every evening and pack their bags ready for the next day with the right books and equipment.

A golden rule with homework is to aim to do it the night it's set, not the night before it's due in. That will avoid a crisis when it all starts building up."

If you can, support school events, help run extra-curricular activities or join the parents' forum or PTA, perhaps look into running for School Governor. Your enthusiasm may just rub off!

Abundance of activities - Head Teacher Tim Smith advises: "Try to encourage your child to attend some extra-curricular activities at lunchtimes, after or before school, to help them make new friends and become integrated into school life, and develop their interests and skill sets."



Be positive - Your child never grows out of your guidance and support, and you can help them settle in by giving encouragement and being positive. Encourage them to share any problems they're having, remembering your job is to listen and support more than to talk.

If they only have negative things to say about the school, ask specifically what they do like. Ask what they miss most about their old school, or what's the scariest part of their new school, and then work on ways together to overcome these hurdles and improve the situation.

It's not what you know, it's the fact that you care that matters. Talking through issues and concerns with your son or daughter helps build their confidence and supports them to cope with any worries. Don't make it a big issue, but keep the communication channels open and talk about school with them little and often. Be patient and understanding. If they're moody or irritable, look for ways to boost their self-esteem and praise them for every small achievement. That way they'll know that in the midst of all this upheaval, you're totally on their side.

Dads count - More and more research is being carried out into the part that Dads play in their children's educational development, and these are some of the findings that indicate why a father's interest and involvement is so important.

- Low paternal interest in children's education has a stronger negative impact on children's lack of qualifications than contact with the police, poverty, family type, social class, housing tenure and child's personality. (Blanden, 2006)
- English fathers' involvement with their children (at ages 7 and 11) correlates with better national examination performance at age 16. (Lewis et al, 1982)
- Fathers exert greater influence than mothers on boys' educational choices. (Dryler, 1998)
- It is thought that insecure attachment between sons and fathers has an effect on both anxiety and depression especially during teenage years. During adolescence, a positive and unique association with a supportive involved father with a sense of identity, will affect their happiness, attachment, self-esteem and their own perceptions of self-competence. Overall life satisfaction is also uniquely associated with high quality father involvement during childhood. (Videon, 2005 and Lees, 2006)

True Stories

Keeping in touch...

"Our daughter moved to a with only two others from her class. She missed her friends, but we encouraged her to arrange swimming trips at the weekend and to invite people round. Email is a lifesaver too. She now has plenty of friends at her new school and still keeps in touch with her old mates."

Prepare to be surprised...

"We were all uptight when our daughter moved to big school. She's always hated change and there'd been lots of tears before she settled into her primary school. Plus we usually had to bring her back home early from sleepovers as she'd got herself in a real state. But to everyone's surprise she absolutely loved it and settled in really quickly. She seemed to thrive in the anonymity that the bigger classes brought along."

Walking the dog...

"My son was a bit worried about walking to his new school. He was afraid of getting lost and wanted to know alternative routes if some older boys were hanging around. So he started joining me on my evening dog-walk and we tried and tested all the various routes, pointing out different street names and landmarks. It also brought us closer together and gave us an opportunity to chat about all sorts of things."

Different children...

"My two children couldn't have been more different in their approach to starting school. My son is a very laid back lad and it didn't cross his mind to be nervous because he was excited to be leaving a school he had grown out of and having the chance to meet new people as he was going from a very small school to a huge one. However, my daughter was very nervous as she always is about new things. However, it's surprising how quickly she made friends and found her way around."

Be creative...

"When my daughter attended the induction day she was given a class list and we found 4 girls in our area who she thought were nice, so I rang their mums and they all came round for the morning. This helped her to settle in and stopped the pre-term panic!"

Join the club...

"When our son started, he didn't settle in as well as expected and was having problems making friends in his class. We really encouraged him to join a range of lunchtime and after-school clubs and although he still has days when he's by himself at breaktimes or lunchtimes, through his karate and other activities he's made different friends and has other things to look forward to."

FAQs

My child is experiencing real problems in settling into their new school. What can I do to help?

Try to encourage them to open up to you about what the problems are. Arrange to have a chat with their head of year or teacher and outline the problems. They may be able to help, and even shed some light on some of the issues. You could also find out what pastoral care is on offer at the school and ensure your son or daughter is getting all the help and support they need.

Our son's been turned down for his first choice of school. What course of action is open to us?

It can be very upsetting for you and your child if you don't get the school place you want, but several courses of action are open to you.

The Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) offers a freephone advice line tel: 0808 800 5793 or a downloadable booklet from www.ace-ed.org.uk. You can ask to go on the waiting list for the school(s) you want, or consider alternative schools not on your original list and can appeal to attend your preferred school.

We've just found out that our daughter's being bullied at her new school but we don't know what to do for the best.

Finding out that your child is being bullied is stressful and upsetting, and you'll probably be feeling angry, confused and even guilty. Try not to over-react and storm into her school demanding that action is taken. Write down what your child says is happening and arrange to meet with your daughter's teacher and express your concerns. Keep a diary of any future incidents and contact the school again if the problem appears to be unresolved.

On a positive note, help strengthen any friendships by inviting friends over regularly. There's lots more advice and information at www.bullying.co.uk and www.kidscape.org.uk.



Homework seems to have increased massively at secondary school and it's becoming a real issue in our home. What's the answer?

Homework is meant to be a positive learning experience that encourages pupils to build on what they've learned at school and gives parents the opportunity to be involved in their children's education. However, at the end of a busy day – for both child and parent – battles over homework can seem like the final straw.

As a parent your role is to encourage them to think about how they can best fit their homework into their busy lifestyle and ensure that they have a quiet spot where they can concentrate uninterrupted. Try to encourage your children to take responsibility for managing their workload and visit the DadTalk website for more tips: www.dadtalk.co.uk

If your child is becoming overwhelmed with the amount of homework and particularly if they have conditions such as dyslexia, health problems or issues at home that are impacting on their ability to complete their work, do talk to their teacher or head of year and work out an appropriate course of action.

My daughter's having problems making friends at her new school. How can I help?

One of the biggest hang-ups children often have is meeting new people. Reassure your daughter that everyone feels nervous about starting new friendships, but the best ways to make friends are to show an interest in other people, ask them questions, share information and be yourself. Smile, be kind and friendly and offer to help or ask to join in.

Make it fun and do some role play with her to show how she can start up a conversation. Encouraging her to take part in different clubs and activities is another good place to start. Plan an activity that she can invite someone along to and when she does strike up a friendship, ask them to tea or for a sleepover.

Visit www.netmums.com/olderchild for more tips on making friends.

Our son's really nervous about travelling on the bus with older children. How can we alleviate his fears?

Travelling independently to school is a big change for your child, but the bus journey can become an exciting and fun part of the school day. Do travel the route with him before the first day and make sure he knows where to get on and off. Try to find out who else in his year will be travelling on his bus route. Encourage him to sit near the front of the bus in sight of the driver at first – the rowdy kids are bound to sit upstairs or at the back!

www.dadtalk.co.uk

DadTalk is a social networking site for any man in a fathering role.

DadTalk provides a place for dads to talk and share the journey of fatherhood; the highs, lows, and downright funny moments - from last nights' football to helping kids with homework and anything in between.

You'll get no-nonsense advice from trained moderators, free legal and financial advice, news, articles, videos and podcasts.

With the option to sign up to thought-provoking Daily Tips, DadTalk aims to increase fun and communication for all.

DadTalk encourages Dads that they DO matter, and CAN aspire to pass on a better future to their kids. For more information, visit www.dadtalk.co.uk

Dadtalk is part of the Family Matters Institute portfolio of services.

www.netmums.com

Netmums is a local parenting network for Mums offering a wealth of information on both a national and local level. There are details of all kinds of local resources for older children, from cafes and local places to go, to summer holiday drama groups and sports clubs. In just a few clicks you can chat with other Mums in the Coffee House, and there's access to advice and support too.

You can 'talk' online directly to experts on schools (including experts from ACE), special needs, health concerns, dealing with teenagers, money worries and anything else that is going on for you as a family. For more information, visit www.netmums.com

www.ace-ed.org.uk

Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)

The Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) is a national charity that provides advice and information to parents and carers on a wide range of school-based issues including exclusion, admissions, special education needs, bullying and attendance.

ACE is passionate about education and the difference that education can make to the lives of children and young people. For more information, visit www.ace-ed.org.uk

Other Useful Websites

There's more information for parents at www.parentlineplus.org.uk

www.bbc.co.uk/parenting

www.direct.gov.uk/curriculum

And some useful tips for kids at www.bbc.co.uk/schools/studentlife/schoolissues/newschool/first_day_nerves.shtml

For help with homework, go to:

www.direct.gov.uk/homeworksupport

www.bbc.co.uk/schools

www.channel4learning.com



“**DAD
TALK**”
...talking all things Dad



Family Matters Institute



netmums.com