

Tips for the Transition to High School

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Transitioning from middle school to high school can be difficult for a teenager. An unfamiliar building, new teachers, more students, and older teens can be intimidating. According to the University of California's ACCORD program, students who have difficult transitions to high school tend to have lower motivation, lower grades, and a higher drop-out rate. However, there are several things that you, and your teen, can do to make this transition easier and more successful.

Expect Mixed Emotions

Many teenagers are excited about entering high school, states research from the College of Brockport in New York. They look forward to having more freedom and growing up, as well as having more choices in the classes they take, activities they participate in and friends they have.

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However, there is also fear. Incoming freshmen worry about:

- Finding their way around a bigger building
- Being picked on by older students
- If they will be able to meet the higher expectations of their teachers

- If they will be able to handle all the responsibilities that come with being in high school

Having mixed emotions is normal. Facing unfamiliar situations can cause a variety of emotions in anyone. For teens, these feelings can be more intense. Expect them to be excited one minute and nervous the next. Encourage them to talk and make sure to listen. There are some things that you can do to help decrease some of your teen's anxiety before school even starts.

Visit the School Before Classes Begin

Most high schools will have a freshman orientation where freshmen can go to the school before school officially begins. U.S. News and World Report advises that you make sure that your child goes to this event. Doing a walk-through with her class schedule will assure her that the building isn't as confusing as she feared, her teachers aren't as horrible as she imagined, and some of her anxiety will abate.

Encourage Friendships With Older Kids

Although many parents fear their teens having older friends, research from Georgia College and State University and Florida State University shows that eighth-graders who have high school friends actually have smoother transitions to high school and get information about high school.

If you have an older child, your situation is ideal. If not, see if there is an older child in your neighborhood that may be willing to talk to your child. You may find that a conversation makes your child more relaxed about the thought of entering high school.

Encourage Relationships With Teachers

Although your teen may feel that building relationships with teachers is very uncool, a joint research project done by both college and elementary education experts in British Columbia shows that having a good relationship with teachers added to a smoother transition to high school. Teachers can provide support not only for academics, but they can also provide social support and advice.

Teachers are there every day and know a lot more about what happens in school than many students think. Teachers can be a great source of support to a freshman that just feels a little overwhelmed. Encourage your teen to build a relationship with a teacher or two, by talking to the teachers before or after class and going to those teachers if she has a problem or a question.

Encourage Involvement in Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities have a variety of benefits, as is shown in the same research by experts in British Columbia. Kids who are involved in extracurricular activities boast a slew of positive benefits including:

- Higher self-esteem
- Better academic performance
- Better behavior
- Better social relationships
- Less likely to drop out
- View adults more positively
- Have stronger ties to school

Basically, participation in extracurricular activities will foster relationships with teachers - since most coaches and club leaders are teachers - and increase attachment to the school. All the benefits of extracurricular activities will ease the transition to high school. Look at all the possible activities with your teen. Encourage her to find activities that she is interested in. Help her to figure out what she needs to do to join. Does she need to try out or just sign up? Make sure that she isn't joining too many activities at one time.

Get Involved and Stay Involved

There is nothing that you, as a parent, can do to help your child in school more than getting involved and staying involved in her schooling. According to the Palo Alto school district, this involves:

- Going to freshman orientation
- Meeting her teachers and finding out what their expectations are
- Checking the homework website every day to make sure that her homework is complete
- Finding out what services (e.g. counseling, tutoring, mentoring) are available at her school, in case if she ever needs them
- Going to parent-teacher conferences, even if she is doing well
- Talking to your child about school
- Showing enthusiasm for her accomplishments
- Attending her sporting or other extracurricular activity events

Most importantly, listen to your child and look for any signs of distress. Don't let things go. If you suspect something is wrong, talk to her.

Help Them Learn Time Management

With more activities and more homework, there may be more stress and more potential for error. Time management skills are vital in high school, but teens haven't learned these

skills yet. When it comes to time management, one size does not fit all. According to former epidemiologist and current high school teacher experts from Glencoe, help her find a system that works for her. Does she need one planner to write everything in or several planners to keep activities separate? Is she better with the calendar in her phone where she can set alarms to remind her of important events and deadlines? Teach her things like:

- Always plan extra time to complete homework, in case it takes longer than she thinks
- Do the hardest, or least enjoyed, activity first when she has the most energy and concentration
- Break large goals into smaller goals so that she doesn't get overwhelmed
- Study a little every day so that she doesn't wait until the last minute
- Reward herself for getting work done before play
- Have different folders or binders for each subject
- Get materials ready the night before so her mornings aren't rushed
- Get enough sleep

Have High Expectations

Research from Harvard University shows that if you expect your child to succeed, she is much more likely to do so. Parents who have high expectations, clearly communicate those expectations, and encourage their teen to meet those expectations tend to have teens that are more motivated and achieve more academically. They are also more likely to go to college and tend to have better problem-solving skills than their peers.

If you let your teen know that you believe she can get through this potentially difficult transition successfully, she will. If you let her know that you expect her to do well in school, she will. If you let her know that you expect her to go to college, she will.

High School Can Be a Wonderful Experience

Although the transition from middle school to high school can be rough, it doesn't need to be traumatic. With preparation and support, your teen can navigate the transition successfully and positively, strengthening her feelings about herself and her school. Once the transition is over, your teen may just find that high school is a wonder experience full of exciting, new opportunities.

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