

Context:

Starting secondary school is a major milestone for young people - and their parents or carers. It's natural to feel proud, excited, and anxious as your young person begins this new chapter. The transition brings fresh routines, unfamiliar settings, new teachers, and more independence. Your young person may swing between eagerness and nervousness, which is completely normal. Many children feel uncertain but hide it. Reassure them that these feelings are common and shared by their peers. Your support can boost their confidence and well-being. Even small acts (like listening without judgment/celebrating little wins) can help them feel secure as they adjust.

What's going on for them

At this age, children begin exploring identity and independence while still needing emotional security. The move to secondary school can feel overwhelming - they face a larger environment, multiple teachers and subjects, and more complex social dynamics. Practical worries like getting lost or managing homework are common, as are concerns about fitting in or making friends. Some children embrace the change, while others feel anxious. Keep communication open and encourage them to share thoughts without pressure. Remind them it's okay not to have everything figured out, and reassure them of your support throughout this transition.

Helping at home:

You can help your child feel more confident about starting secondary school by building familiar routines, such as packing their bag, organising their uniform, or practising the school journey. These small steps reduce stress and help them feel more prepared. Create relaxed opportunities for conversation, like during meals or walks, where they feel safe to share their thoughts. If they're nervous, focus on listening rather than rushing to fix things - being heard can be incredibly reassuring. Encourage a balanced outlook: talk positively about the exciting opportunities ahead, but also let them know it's okay to feel unsure. Establish steady routines for sleep, meals, and downtime to provide emotional security. Involve them in planning, such as choosing stationery, setting up a workspace, or setting small goals. Your calm, consistent support will be a steady anchor as they adjust.

External support:

The following services may be useful if you feel that you need support;

- The tutor, Pastoral Manager or Head of Year
- YoungMinds: www.youngminds.org.uk
- BBC Bitesize: Starting Secondary School: www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize
- Place2Be: www.place2be.org.uk

Mental Health Support

Leaflet 11



Supporting your young person's move from primary school to secondary school

Being organised:

Helping your young person develop strong organisational habits early on can make the transition to secondary school smoother and boost their confidence.

Start by encouraging them to pack their school bag the night before, using their timetable to check for essentials like PE kits, books, or homework. Establish a consistent homework routine and create a quiet, distraction-free study space (this doesn't need to be elaborate, just somewhere they can focus). Visual tools such as colour-coded folders, planners, wall calendars, or simple apps can help them track assignments and key dates. A weekly planner is especially useful for managing homework, revision, and extracurricular activities.

Setting up a 'school stuff' zone at home (by the door or in their room) can help keep essentials organised and reduce morning stress. Checklists for daily or weekly tasks can foster independence and give them a sense of control. Most importantly, praise their efforts regularly.

Organisation is a skill that takes time to build, and your calm, consistent encouragement plays a vital role in helping them feel capable, confident, and ready for the challenges ahead.

Key worries:

It's completely normal for children to feel nervous about starting secondary school. This is a big step, and they're facing many changes all at once.

Common concerns include getting lost, making new friends, remembering what to bring, managing homework, and adjusting to a new routine. Some may also worry about travelling independently, fitting in, or interacting with older students. Your child might be asking themselves:

- Will I make new friends?
- What if I get lost?
- What if the work is too hard? What are the older pupils like?
- What happens if I get something wrong?

Reassure them that these worries are very common - many other students will be thinking the same things, even if they don't say it. Let them know it's okay to feel unsure and that schools are well-prepared to support new students. Talk through their concerns gently and openly. Role-play scenarios like asking for help or starting a conversation. Most importantly, remind them that it's okay to make mistakes, ask for help, and take time to settle in. Your calm support will help them feel more confident and ready to embrace this new chapter.

General support:

Helping your young person build confidence and friendships is a key part of a smooth transition to secondary school. The social side can feel just as daunting as the academic changes, so offer reassurance that it's okay to take things one step at a time. Encourage them to get involved in clubs, sports teams, or lunchtime activities, as these are great ways to meet new people with shared interests. Let them know that forming close friendships doesn't happen overnight - it's perfectly normal to feel unsure or shy at first. Remind them that everyone is in the same boat and likely feeling similar nerves.

Celebrate small acts of bravery, like starting a conversation or asking a teacher for help. These moments help build their confidence and show them they're capable of navigating new social situations. You can also support them at home by talking about what makes a good friend and even practising conversations or social scenarios through gentle role-play.

Above all, keep communication open and remind your young person that you're there to listen without judgment. Your encouragement and steady support can help them feel more secure and capable as they begin this new chapter.