

A big move!:

Leaving secondary school is a major life transition. Whether your young person is heading to sixth form, college, an apprenticeship, or another pathway, it can feel like stepping into the unknown. Alongside excitement and pride, they may also experience anxiety, uncertainty, or sadness about leaving behind familiar routines and friendships.

This stage of life is full of discovery. Young people are exploring who they are and what matters to them, often while feeling pressure to make the 'right' decisions about their future. They may be eager for independence but still need reassurance and a sense of safety. Starting something new can bring fears of not fitting in or falling behind, even as they look forward to new freedoms.

Your support continues to matter more than ever. Being available to listen, offering encouragement, and helping them keep perspective can make a real difference as they navigate this next chapter. Transitions take time, and it's okay not to have all the answers right away. Reassure your teen that exploring different options, changing direction, or taking time to figure things out is part of the journey. Remind them that growth often comes from trying, adjusting, and learning along the way.

Warning signs:

It's normal to feel unsettled initially. With this being said, if your teen seems persistently unhappy, it may be time to seek extra support. Look out for;

- Withdrawal from friends or family
- Avoiding college, training, or work placements
- Ongoing low mood, tearfulness, or signs of anxiety
- Talking about quitting or feeling stuck

If you're concerned, start with a gentle conversation. Then consider reaching out to their college, apprenticeship coordinator or careers adviser. Early support can make all the difference.

Where to get help:

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

- National Careers Service: www.nationalcareers.service.gov.uk
- Youth Employment UK: www.youthemployment.org.uk
- The Mix: www.themix.org.uk
- UCAS post-16 choices: www.ucas.com/further-education
- Apprenticeships: www.apprenticeships.gov.uk

Local college or apprenticeship provider support teams can also help.

Mental Health Support

Leaflet 13



Supporting your teen with their move from Year 11 to post-16 education or training

What's new?:

Moving on from school means adapting to new systems, expectations, and social circles. Whether it's college, sixth form, or a training programme, the structure is often more self-directed and unfamiliar. Many young people will be managing:

- New travel routes and routines
- Less structured learning environments
- A wider mix of peers
- Independent study and deadlines
- Financial choices like lunch, transport, or equipment

For those starting apprenticeships or work-based training, the shift can be even greater, with workplace expectations and real-world responsibilities. It's a lot to take in, so support at home makes a big difference.

Emotions:

Even when teens are excited about the next step, it's normal for them to feel anxious or low at times. They might miss familiar routines or feel overwhelmed by new environments.

Reassure them that:

- It's okay not to love it straight away
- Wobbles don't mean they've made the wrong choice
- Everyone adjusts at their own pace

Reaching out:

Keep communication open and non-judgmental. A gentle comment like 'you don't seem quite yourself - want to talk?' can invite conversation without pressure.

Being independent:

Now's the time to shift from managing things for them to supporting them in doing it themselves. This builds their confidence and prepares them for adult life. You can help by:

- Encouraging them to set their own alarms, make appointments, or email tutors
- Helping them use planners, phone calendars, or apps to track deadlines and shifts
- Supporting problem-solving without always jumping in with solutions

Let them know you trust them to handle things, but that you're still there when needed. Think of it as coaching from the sidelines, rather than steering the ship.

Even though your teen is becoming more independent, your encouragement, interest, and belief in them remain hugely important. Transitions aren't always smooth but with your support, your teen will be ready to take on this next chapter of life.

The transition:

This transition isn't just about academics or work - it's emotional, social, and practical. You can help your teen by:

- Practising routines ahead of time (for example, journeys, timetables, getting up on time) to build confidence and reduce first-day stress
- Helping them organise key documents, supplies, or clothing so they feel prepared and capable
- Talking about budgeting and managing money, including how to plan for daily expenses or save for larger needs
- Celebrating small milestones like finishing the first week, making a new friend, or passing a module to build motivation
- Checking in regularly (but without hovering) to show you care while respecting their growing independence

It might also be helpful to try asking open, non-judgemental questions like:

- 'How are you finding the people on your course?'
- 'Is there anything that feels trickier than you expected?'
- 'What's been the most surprising part of starting this new chapter?'

Even if your young person doesn't share much, knowing you're there and interested can be a powerful source of reassurance for them.