

How to Make the Transition from Middle School to High School

(link to www.bridges.com, for site ID and password see page 21 of the student agenda book or ask a counselor or the media specialist)

Introduction

The move to high school is a big step in a student's life. For many, it's an exciting time and a welcome step toward greater independence. But for others, the transition to high school can be filled with uncertainty and anxiety.

Many students wonder, will I fit in, will I succeed, will I want to go back for day two?

Vince Lee is a 19-year-old student. He found the transition to high school rough.

"After finishing [middle school], I was excited and concerned at the same time," he says. "I looked forward to more freedom, choices and friends.... However, the academic part kicked in and terrified me. The school was larger, and the classrooms were hard to find. The teachers were stricter, failing grades were given, and class hours were longer. Overall, it was a huge jump compared to the days in [middle school]."

Any big change can be scary. But, moving on to high school is a part of growing up. Millions upon millions have gone before... and survived! So what can be done to make the high school experience a terrific one? Look to students who have successfully made the transition.

Successful Transitions

Sean, age 17, started high school two years ago. He says he wishes he had learned to study harder before entering high school, but still he found the transition easy, overall. He has stuck with the same group of friends from middle school.

"Don't be overwhelmed by the new social experience, and stick with the books," he advises.

Sean's friend Chris says you can't miss a lot of classes in high school. Also, you have to take more responsibility for your actions. He's glad his parents taught him discipline before he started high school.

The Role of Parents

Turning to parents for support is key, according to Jeanne Hightower. She's a guidance counselor in Nebraska. She's been in the education field for nearly two decades, and she's served as a guidance counselor for the past five years.

"The most telling aspect of a student transitioning from middle to high school is the role of the parent/child relationship," she says. "Most students are excited about a new beginning and seem ready for the challenge. Parents want to take a very active role in their student's life -- rightly so -- but to the extent of not giving a little more responsibility to the child for their education."

If children come home with complaints about a teacher or a rule, it's not effective for parents to jump in and call the school, says Hightower. Instead, parents should help their children increase their personal problem-solving skills.

"As a counselor and parent I try to help both freshmen and parents understand how to take the responsibility as needed," says Hightower. "I spend much of my time helping parents give students more "rope" to take more and more upon themselves for their decisions and consequences."

Preparing for the Transition

Hightower's school offers a mentoring program to incoming students. Throughout the year, high school students act as role models and mentors to ninth grade students. The new students can ask questions, discuss issues and learn about high school from the older, more experienced students.

Before the new school year starts, many high schools offer an orientation day or evening to incoming students and parents. During these sessions, students and parents learn about the school and what to expect. They may also take a tour of the school building. Often students receive their class schedules and can walk around the school to find their classrooms.

High school counselors or administrators may also visit middle schools, to answer questions and help alleviate fears.

Tammy Hillard teaches at a middle school. Her middle school students visit their new school before transferring in the fall. She says that many of her students feel anxious about the high school workload, bullying, and not having an adult to talk to.

"We tell them that we've been preparing them throughout [middle school] by gradually increasing workloads to high school level," says Hillard. "And we remind them that they'll know lots of kids from our school once they hit high school, so there will be familiar faces. And finally, we let them know they can always come back to visit us. They don't have to feel totally cut off."

The Big Day

What happens on the big day? Jeanne Hightower gives a brief rundown of the events that take place at her school.

"On the first day of school, ninth graders attend in the morning and follow their schedule. They meet their teachers, get books, check out their locker and attend an assembly hosted by the student council. This assembly showcases all the clubs and sports available in the school."

You're Ready for High School

High school is a time for students to develop skills that will serve them throughout their lives. During high school, students will absorb new information and ideas about the world. They'll learn more about themselves, select a career path and make friendships that could last the rest of their lives.

Looking back, high school survivor Vince Lee offers this advice to middle school students: Learn to manage your time and study harder. Don't be nervous, but do get ready for more responsibility.
