

Transitioning From Junior School to Senior School

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INTRODUCTION

Many students lack the tools to navigate spaces successfully. Of particular concern to us is the ability to navigate the transition from a junior school environment to a senior school environment. This is particularly prominent in students who do not have siblings or parents who have prior experience of navigating these transitions. The incidence and impact of this is more consequential in poorer communities. Having an understanding of the tools required to successfully transition from junior school to high school, including social and academic tools, will increase the likelihood that students stay in school and graduate matric.

Making the leap with a few friends

It is important to develop new friendships as soon as possible as this helps build self-esteem and develops confidence. Find ways to encourage new friendships. This will help to focus energies on school and school work and encourage a healthy regard and positive attitude to subject content. In addition, the knowledge of your child having friends at school helps parents be less concerned about their children's wellbeing in the school environment.

Helping with planning and organization

Many students experience a jump in subject content from Grade 7 to Grade

8, which can cause anxiety as they try to catch up. Ensuring curriculum continuity can ease the anxiety. To do this, try to familiarise students with content that is part of the Grade 8 curriculum. The most recent Grade 8 curriculum can be found on the Education Department website.¹ Where possible, introduce content from Grade 8 subjects to Grade 7 students, to build familiarity. Simple introduction of new terms with explanations will help ease anxiety when first encountering these terms in Grade 8.

As the expectations regarding responsibility for completion of homework, and time-management due to workload, increase, it is important to help students learn good organizational skills² as early as possible. There are a number of tools available. Present them with a few options so that they can trial using these and find out which ones work best for them.

Getting to know the school space

Children who felt they had a lot of help from their new high school to settle in were more likely to have a successful transition. This included having orientation weeks where students were helped around the school, rules were relaxed, and procedures put in place to help students adapt. School visits, open days, and sharing information in booklets with junior schools helped students transition more effectively.

¹[https://www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/CurriculumAssessmentPolicyStatements\(CAPS\)/CAPSSenior/tabid/573/Default.aspx](https://www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/CurriculumAssessmentPolicyStatements(CAPS)/CAPSSenior/tabid/573/Default.aspx)

²<https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/learning-at-home/teaching-organizational-skills/tools-and-tips-to-help-your-teen-get-organized>

Be aware of these initiatives in surrounding schools that your Grade 7 students are likely to apply to and enable them to participate in these as much as possible. If the school has a website, this information should be readily available. Make this content accessible to your Grade 7 students.

If you know of any students who are currently in Grade 8 at the schools of interest, invite them to speak to your Grade 7 students and to answer any questions that these students may have. When they arrive at the school, they will at least know one older student. This also applies to any teachers from the senior schools, so consider inviting them to speak to the Grade 7 students.

Identifying clubs and interest groups

Extra-curricular activities offered by the schools may invite participation of students in activities that they already enjoy, giving them the opportunity to meet other students and build friendships outside of the classroom. Encourage them to learn about the activities on offer at the high schools so that they know what they can look forward to when they enter this new environment.

Building self-awareness of stress triggers

The challenge of successfully integrating into high school can be hindered by the onset of anxiety brought about by stress-inducing encounters. Helping students understand what triggers this is a valuable life-lesson as well as a transition aid.

These challenges may be exacerbated if students have unique needs such as physical or sensory impairments,

learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or a mental health condition such as anxiety or depression. Help your students to understand and build resilience to cope with these.

CONCLUSION

The risk of an unsuccessful transition could lead to a change in attitude and perception of a subject and ultimately disengagement from the subject matter, eg a loss of interest in science subjects, and disinterest in school. As far as possible, encourage students to explore and find the information that they need in advance, gently guiding them as they do, as this will help build confidence and self-reliance.

Inclusive Education South Africa has further information on how to prepare a child for a new schooling environment.³

¹[https://www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/CurriculumAssessmentPolicyStatements\(CAPS\)/CAPSSenior/tabid/573/Default.aspx](https://www.education.gov.za/Curriculum/CurriculumAssessmentPolicyStatements(CAPS)/CAPSSenior/tabid/573/Default.aspx)

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