

# Ensuring a trouble-free transition between grades

By SUZANNE KENNEDY

Transitioning from one grade to the next can be an exciting time, but it can also cause a little stress. Most of these transitions are normal and natural. It's exciting to find out which teacher you will have and which friends are in your class, which usually outweighs any nervousness.

If you do have a child who is unusually anxious, try finding out as much as you can about the teachers for that grade level and take your child to meet them before the current school year is over. Let them see the classrooms and hear about some of the fun projects they'll be doing.

Probably the hardest transition (for both parents and kids) is going from elementary to middle school. New buildings, lockers, room changes, and an influx of new students all present unique challenges and opportunities for nerves to rear their ugly heads. Add to that the hormonal changes and so-



cial/emotional growth and you've got the trifecta of stress-causing situations. One of the toughest changes is that of increased responsibility. That Friday folder isn't coming home anymore. It's all on

the student now. Assignments are coming from a bunch of different directions and a student can very easily begin to feel overwhelmed and out of control.

When I taught school, I thought I should be able to trust my students to handle it all. After all, they were old enough to babysit. You know, keep other people alive. Then I had kids of my own.

Teach your child how to use a planner. Check it every night. You can use it to communicate with teachers. Your student should write assignments, test dates, appointments, and projects in it. If there isn't homework in a class, write that down. Show them how to check items off or move them to the next day.

If teachers set up group texts or apps like BuzzMob, Collaborize Classroom, or Remind 101, be sure to sign up and check in regularly. You will feel way more "in the know."

If your students falter a bit with academics, let them. This will be the last time they can make mistakes without it affecting the rest of their lives. I'll let you in on a little secret – middle school grades don't count. What does count is learning how to get back on track, coming back from a missed assignment or a failed test, and being responsible for completing missed work. Those life skills are valuable far beyond school.



## Strategies

The transition from middle to high school is tough academically and socially. Yes, you've worked a locker before, but grades count now. Classes are harder and parents are hardly part of the school picture at all anymore. It is much easier to start with good grades and keep them up than to have to fight your way back from a bad grade. The good news is that there should be enough students now for every young person to be able to find his or her own group. At that age, not much is more important than having someone to sit with at lunch.

At all ages, joining clubs or activities can help a child or young adult feel more connected to the community around them. It builds self-esteem, promotes friendship, and helps a student learn some time management skills.

Overall, the more positive you act, the easier it will be. Kids feed off of your anxiousness. Let them be in charge of whatever is feasible, maybe pick out a couple of outfits and some school supplies. Talk about social skills: how to make friends, how to enter a conversation, how to look confident. Before you know it, they'll be once again embarrassed of you in front of their friends and rushing off to make fun of you behind your back.

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