

# PLANNING FOR TRANSITION IN SCHOOL



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Change, for better or for worse, is a fact of school life. At this time of year, students and their families are concentrating on the ending of the current year and anticipating a summer away from school. For many, the ending of the

school year is a good thing and not at all difficult. The summer is exciting and fun, and the image of next year, if it's playing in the imagination at all, is positive and feels like an opportunity for growth.



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But for many, change is not as easy. Moving from one grade to the next—to a new classroom and teacher, with a few new faces among peers, changed routines and expectations—is scary enough. For some, moving from preschool to kindergarten, from elementary to middle school, from middle school to senior high, or leaving school and beginning work can be overwhelming. Changes can bring with them fear and anxiety, reduced grades, demoralization or depression. It's important for all students, their families and teachers to pay close attention to transition. With planning and care, children and adolescents are less likely to be caught by surprise, and are more likely to experience the change as positive, fun, and as an opportunity for growth.

## Preschool to Kindergarten

The transition from preschool or home to kindergarten can be tough for both children and their parents. Becoming familiar with the school and its routines may be helpful. Parents and children can attend information meetings and open house days during the spring. Meeting teachers, other kids and their families, and soaking up the sights, sounds, and smells of the school can help. Parent and child can read the school newsletter together, attend a concert or play, or drop by a spring festival at the school. Talk about new activities the child will get to try, including arts and crafts, gym and music, speaking French, reading new books, learning about science and math, snack times and lunch, and singing O Canada. Over the summer, make a point of playing on the school grounds. It can help a child to learn his or her way around the play structures there, and to meet or play alongside some other children.

If you have concerns regarding your child's preparedness for kindergarten—and especially if your child's birthday falls late in the year—it may be helpful to ask a psychologist for an assessment of your child's readiness for kindergarten.

## Moving to a New School

It can be hard to leave a familiar school for some place new. Allow your child to talk as much as he wants about the friends and grown-ups, places and routines he'll miss about his old school. Take time to say goodbye properly to the old school, and to discuss some good things about the new one. Before the summer holidays, consider visiting the new

school's website and arrange for a visit. Ask about school routines and take a tour, to see classrooms, the gym, library, computer and music rooms, and lunchroom.

As soon as possible, arrange for you and your child to meet the teachers who will be working with him. Get excited about new activities coming up and attend a spring event at the school if possible. Over the summer, play on school grounds. Meet and play alongside other children from the new school.

## Growing up: Elementary to Middle School and High School

Expectations for personal accountability and self-motivation increase as students pass from elementary into middle school, and the

demands increase even more as

students move on to high school. The level of direct supervision decreases, and teachers expect students to complete work and stay organized more independently. Although many students seem to come into all of these new skills intuitively, others need explicit teaching during the transition from one level to the next.



Good communication between home and school is vital for identifying and addressing difficulties as they arise. Study strategies, time management, and organizational skills may need specific attention during the transition times, and teachers, guidance counsellors, tutors, and



psychologists can work to foster a child's development of these skills.

### **Children And Teens With Special Needs**

For children, teens, and adults with learning, emotional, or behavioural difficulties, transition can be especially hard. It can be tough to get used to wake-up and morning routines in September, paying attention in class for long periods again, or crowded hallways and noisy classrooms after a quiet summer. Children or teens with learning disabilities, significant anxiety, or students who, for whatever reason, find changes in routine to be distressful, need more assistance during transition times than others.

Plans can meet with their child's current teacher in the spring to review the year's progress. This year's teacher can probably make valuable suggestions for adjusting the IEP for next year.

### **High School to College or University**

Many young people aren't prepared for the transition from high

school to college or university, and this is especially true if part of the change is moving away from home for the first time. In any event, many teens aren't adequately prepared to manage time, energy, and money, and lack of insight into personal and academic strengths and weaknesses can quickly lead to trouble within the loose structure of college or university. Take a campus tour during the spring or early summer, and learn about the support services offered there. Writing tutorials, study skills training, and personal or academic counselling can all be helpful. Also, new students who get involved in campus activities the first few weeks of school find the adjustment easier.

Students with learning disabilities may need special documentation in order to receive accommodations in postsecondary institutions. Contact the disability services centre at your college or university as early as possible to find out what is required. If psychological assessment or consultation is needed, start the process well before the beginning of the first term, so that the transition from high school to the postsecondary setting can be as seamless as possible. □

