

EDUCATION

Supporting Students Experiencing Transition At School

September traditionally marks the beginning of a new school year. Long, lazy summer days with family, friends and travelling, becomes careful planning and anticipation of change and new beginnings. For some students this might be their first year going to school, or just simply the start of a new year group or senior school. For others, it could be the fresh start at a new school. Whatever transition your child might be facing, your support is key.

Starting At A New School

Starting at a new school can be daunting, even for the most confident learner. Students may feel quite unsure about establishing themselves in a new peer group and environment. Combining this challenge with getting used to new routines and new teachers takes a great deal of energy and can sometimes take longer than expected.

Parents could help by talking with their children ahead of the new school year about all the positive and exciting things to look forward to, but also be realistic and reassuring about the fact that it will take time to settle and feel a sense of normality. Staying in touch with old friends reminds students that they have been successful in establishing relationships in the past and therefore, will be able to do it again. Younger children might enjoy a scrapbook or memory box of established friends. Reassuring young children about everything that will stay the same during a transition, could also offer some comfort.

Parents could encourage children to draw pictures or write a list of what they are looking forward to and what they may feel concerned about. Parents and children could then think of ways to tackle the areas of concern together. Acknowledging feelings as valid and real and reassuring that the parent and child are in this together, is often far more comforting than just

a simple assurance that “you’ll be fine”.

International schools are generally well placed to support students and families through transitions. School counsellors usually meet with new students in groups or individually, giving them the opportunity to meet other new students and share experiences. It is also helpful when students understand that changes, and especially international transitions, impact all family members differently and that things usually normalise over time. A parent could further be proactive by setting up play dates or signing children up for sport and extra-curricular activities where they could meet other students and build new friendships.

Every school should make students feel welcome and build a sense of community in the first weeks of school. In Early Childhood and Lower School, schools can follow a Responsive Classroom approach in all classrooms. This means that teachers give much attention to students feeling safe and comfortable in the group, doing team building activities and encouraging every student to have a voice. Students start their day with Morning Meeting and special attention is given to new students integrating. Social events such “Newcomer Picnics” and the popular “Ice Cream Social” organised by some PSOs, are all ways the community reaches out and include new families.

Moving Between Year Groups

Learning patterns evolve as students move between year groups, particularly between lower and higher levels, to include a greater emphasis on independent learning and responsibility. Parents are well positioned to help students prepare for their next step at school, which can be an anxious moment for many.

Initially, it may prove beneficial for parents to

monitor their child’s developing organisational skills. As they become more independent however, their confidence and motivation levels will increase along with their productivity.

It will be important for parents to make time to connect with their children. Activities such as outdoor games, enjoying a book or magazine together or going for a family walk, are all ways to reassure children of the constant support and belonging they have within the family unit. In our highly technological world, taking time away from electronics and investing in relationships is more important than ever before.

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Anneke Theron, ACS Cobham’s Lower School Counsellor

At ACS International Schools there are dedicated counsellors for each year group, who support new students and families as they settle into the school community. The school offers Parent Transition Workshops twice a year for new and leaving families and dedicated staff are available for both students and parents to lend support and help navigate through the first few weeks of school.

Parents and teachers play a vital role in helping students find their feet in a new class or a school community. Ultimately, a smooth transition is all about helping students realise their full potential and ensuring they continue to enjoy learning. If you’d like to meet ACS counsellors, the schools will be hosting a series of open days this fall. To register, visit www.acs-schools.com/opendays.

