

INSIGHTS

Goodbye primary school, hello secondary school



The end of primary school is a significant milestone in children's lives. They've spent half their lives in primary school, in many cases in the same school, which is significant.

Developmentally they've come a long way from those skinny little kids who lined up for class on the first day holding a parent's or carer's hand. Now entering puberty, most are taller than their mothers and the only people they'll hold hands with are 'special friends', but not in public. Those displays of affection will come later in the secondary school years.

Changing from primary to secondary brings a mixture of emotions in kids such as excitement, apprehension, pride and, in many cases, sadness about leaving friends and familiar surrounds behind.

Parents often go through the same range of emotions as children at this time so we need to acknowledge those feelings in ourselves, just as we should in our children.

Looking back

This is a time for kids to celebrate their achievements; show appreciation to their teachers and enjoy the friendships that they've formed. Here are three ideas:

1. Let's celebrate

Primary school graduation ceremonies play an important part in the primary school life, as they mark the end of an era and the start of a new part of their lives. We need to be careful that the meaning doesn't become lost as graduations become increasingly lavish, even to the point where some students are transported to their graduation in a stretch limo. *Keep them simple and keep them close to the school's values.*

2. Show gratitude

As a former teacher I know how much a simple thank you can mean from students at the end of the year. So make sure your kids take the time to thank their final year teacher and as well as seek out to thank other teachers who contributed to their education over their primary school journey. *Gratitude costs nothing but has a great impact.*

3. Enjoy friendships

Encourage your kids to be open and friendly at this time of the year, and steer clear of cliques and fellow students who want to exclude others from their groups. The end of primary school can be tricky to navigate, particularly when early maturers stick together and ostracise certain classmates. *This is the time for friendly behaviour and inclusiveness.*

Looking ahead

When primary school is finished and the holidays are coming to an end it's time to focus on the new experiences of secondary school. Some kids take secondary school in their stride but it is natural to experience some difficulty.

If your eldest is starting, then secondary school will be a relatively new experience for you too. It will take some time for you to adjust to the school's culture and communication methods.

Your attitude as a parent can help your child quickly adjust. Here are three ideas for you to help kids make a smooth adjustment:

1. Promote friendships

The quicker kids form new friendships the sooner they'll feel comfortable in their secondary school surroundings. Encourage your young person to be open to forming friendships with all sorts of kids; to be accepting of others who may be different to them; to take social risks by joining in activities even though they may feel uncomfortable; and to be friendly, approachable and positive!

2. Be ready to listen

Patience and understanding in the early weeks is essential. Brush up on your listening skills as you help your young person adjust. Talk to your young person about change and reassure them that it's normal to feel unsure or nervous in new circumstances. Let them know that many difficulties they face will be temporary.

3. Keep your attitude positive

Confidence is catching so make sure you see this transition time as an exciting challenge that your child can handle rather than an event to be feared. Ask them about the new subjects or interesting activities they are doing, and try to shift their focus to the positive aspects of school. Discuss settling in issues with the appropriate person such as a year level coordinator, but give your young person time to handle them on their own before seeking help.



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Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.