STARTING SECONDARY SCHOOL

A guide for parents
They go from being one of the oldest children in school to one of the youngest. And then there’s the unfamiliar timetable, buildings and people to get used to.

This short guide is designed to help parents make the first few weeks of secondary school easier for their children and give you a heads up on the issues coming your way - from mobile phones to homework.

Read on for our tips, a handy checklist and to hear from parents who’ve been through the process recently.

Moving up into secondary school is a big milestone in your child’s life.
When you’re in uniform, it’s hard to express individuality. That’s is why the school bag at secondary is key.

Emma Dowie, whose son Charlie started secondary school last year says: “The school bag is important. You’ve got to get them the right bag for school. At Charlie’s school you need to have a rucksack and it has to be cool. One of my friend’s says at her children’s school it has to be a Jack Wills bag or a sporty rucksack. They’ve got to be happy with their bag. It just takes a bit of research to get it right.”

Secondary school is the point at which children in the UK suddenly get a lot of independence. One minute you are walking them to school everyday, the next minute they are heading to the bus with fare in hand. To help you ease the transition, here are some tips:

- Practice the journey to and from school together a couple of times until they’re confident they can do it without you.
- Find a friend for your child to share the walk or bus ride with. Whilst they are walking to school without you, they don’t need to be alone.
- Talk to your child about how they can protect themselves when they’re out, for example, staying with their friends in busy areas and knowing it’s ok to hand over their phone or money if someone threatens them.
- Talk through contingency plans too - like what to do if they miss the school bus.

IT’S ALL ABOUT...

**Encouraging independence (and keeping them safe at the same time)**

Most secondary schools are further away than primary schools, and this means an earlier start to the day. Encourage your child to get everything ready the night before so there are no panics in the morning or missed buses.

It’s also important to establish a good bedtime routine. The National Sleep Foundation says “Teens need about 8 to 10 hours of sleep each night to function best. Most teens do not get enough sleep — one study found that only 15% reported sleeping 8 1/2 hours on school nights.”

Jessica Stubbings, mum of Marcia (Year 7) says: “Marcia was really tired for the first couple of terms. She has to get up early to get organised in the morning. We encourage her to get plenty of sleep or at least go to bed at a good time. Recently she’s been trying out a meditation app like headspace for children to help her wind down at night.”

**Getting the bag right**

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**Setting up a good routine from the start**

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Getting the tech rules right

11 is the most common age to get a mobile phone and it’s also the time when children typically start using social media. It’s a good idea to set some rules of use upfront.

Consider making a mobile phone pact with your child including:
• to stick to agreed daily time limits
• to put the phone away on silent when asked
• to never provide any personal information (address, school, phone number) online
• to share the passwords to all their accounts with you
• to never share these with anyone else
• to not say anything rude or mean online
• to let you know if they receive messages or see content that makes me feel uncomfortable

A survey of 2,750 11- to 18-year-olds found one in 10 admitted checking their mobile phones for notifications at least 10 times a night. The poll was carried out by Digital Awareness UK and the Headmasters’ and Headmistresses’ Conference. The organisations warn night-time usage of mobiles means pupils are coming to school tired and unable to concentrate.

They recommend having a “digital detox” and putting mobile devices away for 90 minutes before lights-out or keeping them out of the bedroom.

Staying connected

The way secondary schools communicate is different to primary schools. It’s often a lot more formal and through email or via the children.

Jessica says: “If you have issues make sure you know who to communicate with. At primary school you’d just talk to the class teacher. At secondary school you need to know whether you should be talking to the form tutor, the subject teacher or the head of year.”

Joining the PTA is another way to get more involved with the school.
## Start of Term Checklist for Secondary School

### Preparation
- Make sure your child attends any school induction days
- Fill in all the school paperwork well before term starts to make things go as smoothly as possible for your child
- Practise the new school run so your child is confident getting there from day one
- Arrange to meet up with other new starters over the summer
- Master putting on that tricky new tie
- Establish a homework station in a quiet place
- Make a checklist of what your child needs to remember each day

### Equipment
- Get all the gear – school bag, uniform and PE kit
- Rally the stationery (schools often provide a list) and technology required (mobile? iPad?)
- Tuck a written list of family phone numbers into the school bag, in case the above-mentioned phone goes missing
- Attach a stretchy key fob to the school bag to make that locker key harder to lose
- Put some emergency money in a hidden bag pocket, just in case
- Stick the radio on and label everything in sight, starting with the most expensive items
“Charlie settled in really quickly. He just tagged along with his older brother Louie.”

“Where we live, learning how to cross the road to get the bus is a big deal. Most of the local parents practised the route five times with their children before the start of school. I still worry everyday. Children don’t seem to have so much experience walking around and crossing roads these days.”

“Making sure they have their bus pass and money ready is important. You need to make sure they can use their phone appropriately too. They have to turn them off in class but then they need to remember to turn them on again. We didn’t get a contract phone as we heard about some children accidently running up huge bills. Instead we started giving them pocket money each month and they take money out of that to top up their mobile phone.”

“You also have to think about things like: Do they have a frontdoor key? Are you going to be in when they get home? We have rules about what they are allowed to do when we are out.”

“And, I’ve never spent so much time at the lost property office. Charlie left his trumpet at the bus stop once. Luckily an old lady picked it up and called me as I’d left our number inside. He likes to take his scooter to school and has an iPhone but they aren’t really aware of how much things cost.”

“Charlie plays Rugby so he started school knowing a few friends in his class and I know a few of the parents. Louie was different as he’s not into sport. I don’t really know the mums in his class. The girls tend to be a bit more sociable organising sleepovers etc. You’ve just got to feel confident that your child will choose good friends.”

“Charlie joined Instagram this year, even though he’s too young really - but all his friends are on so he’d feel excluded if he didn’t. You have to police it. Everyday I ask him to show me who his friends are on there. Mostly he just posts silly pictures such as a photo of our cat drinking out of a glass. But I always tell him not to include any names or personal information.”

“Communication at the school is different to at primary school. You’ve got to check your emails all the time - the emphasis is on the parent to keep on top of this. We can email the form tutor and have to pay for everything online.”
Jessica Stubbings,
Mum of Marcia (Year 7) and Etta (Year 5),
Herstmonceux, Sussex

“The first day I organised for Marcia to walk with a friend. She was worried about how much money she needed for the bus and whether to get a weekly ticket but has got used to it now.”

“We get everything organised the evening before so the morning is as stress free as can be - she’s not missed the bus yet. We make sure all her lunch items are ready in one place in the fridge so she just has to put them in her lunchbox in the morning. And, for the first few weeks and months of term we tried to plan nice things to do at the weekends so it didn’t seem like everything is about school.”

“To help them settle in they had taster sessions in the summer and spent a whole day at the school. When they started they were each allocated a mentor from sixth form. They talk with them every week for 20 minutes about how they are getting on.”

“At Marcia’s school all the children have iPads (we pay a monthly amount for the iPad and all the apps). They have a homework app and we can check it if we want, but we haven’t as Marcia is very organised. If she doesn’t know what to do for the homework she says ‘I’ll just email the teacher’. But they aren’t going to answer emails over the weekend so we have to encourage her to think ahead.”

“As well as having an iPad, Marcia has a mobile phone too. It’s difficult to say she can’t have her iPad as she can say she needs it for her homework but we try to say not to use it for an hour before bedtime and to monitor her use in the day.”

“She is always looking at Instagram and some of her friends are on it at 10 or 11 O’clock at night. When we were young if there was an issue at school you could come home and forget about it - it’s not like that now. There have been some instances of nasty chat. We know Marcia’s passwords so she knows it’s not 100% private what she is doing on there.”

“Secondary school is so different in terms of the communication. Everything is done electronically so you have to really check your emails. For parents evening we have to go online to book our interviews. By the time we went on most of the slots were taken. You’ve got to rely on your children to tell you what to look out for. In some ways it’s better because it’s more formal. You don’t get lost letters. However, before people at the school gate would say ‘Are you going on that trip?’ At secondary school you don’t get that friendly reminder.”

One tip is when you are considering a school don’t just look at the subjects, ask how they use iPads, what systems they use for payment and communication, and the uniform policy.”

“Marcia’s school has cashless catering - the pupils use their thumbprints to pay and you can see what they bought to eat that day and set a spending limit.”

“They’ve just introduced a uniform policy at the school. No necklaces, no bracelets, no nail varnish and just one ring. If you haven’t got those rules it can get quite competitive and be hard to keep up.”

“Not knowing the parents is another thing. Try to invite the friends round. We did a sleepover for Marcia’s birthday. I put my mobile number on the invite to text me the RSVP so that I got theirs and we got to meet the parents when they dropped off their child. She was also invited to a sleepover with a family we didn’t know. The mum sent a photo of all the girls when they were having tea to let us know they were okay which was nice as they are still relatively young.”
USEFUL RESOURCES

Anti- Bullying Alliance

- advice on bullying for parents and teenagers
- what to do if you need to make a complaint at www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

Think campaign

- advice on teenagers making independent journeys at think.direct.gov.uk

NSPCC

- Be Share Aware campaign with O2 - with advice on e-safety
- Download a family agreement template at www.nspcc.org.uk

Digital Awareness UK

- Video series to help parents and children stay safe online
- Cyberbullying, digital footprint, identity and self esteem, relationships and self esteem, security and privacy, sexting at www.digitalawarenessuk.com
Many parents feel distanced from the school community when their child moves up into secondary. And with teenagers encountering all sorts of new freedoms, parents need to find reliable ways of communicating with each other.

Luckily for you, there’s a network where you can get all the contacts you need without needing to go through a mortified teenager.

Classlist is an award-winning online platform and mobile app designed to make life easier for parents. It’s great for helping you to talk to other parents in your child’s class, share lifts, check the homework – like a problem-solving network that’s specific to your child’s school.

It’s a one-stop site for:

- Messaging other parents
- Sharing lifts
- Organising social events
- Keeping tabs on teenage parties
- Selling items
- Rehoming lost property
- Making friends

Classlist is free to use and completely secure. It’s also being used by more than 800 schools and tens of thousands of parents nationwide.

Try the UK’s most popular app for school parent-to-parent communication today.

Sign up your class for free at www.classlist.com

Available on the App Store and Google Play.
Dan used Classlist to find his son more playmates for big school.

Join the network where families can make friends before starting a new school.