

For parents and carers: Introduction to preparing to start secondary school



Getting Started

If your child is in Grade 5 or 6 now is a good time to think about preparing to start secondary school. For children who are part of the Program for Students with Disabilities a Year 6-7 review and application for funding takes place in Grade 6. If you're not sure if your child has had an application submitted ask your child's primary school.

For most children, starting secondary school can be exciting, challenging and even stressful but there's more to think about if your child is autistic. This is because transitioning involves three areas that autistic children find challenging - socialisation, communication and behaviour.

Changes due to Coronavirus

The restrictions to reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) have caused a lot of changes at primary and secondary schools.

Preparing to start secondary school may be different to what you had planned for your child. You and your child may not have been able to go to events like Open Days at secondary schools or meet with teachers and other students in person.

That's OK. Instead many schools are offering virtual Open Days, video meetings and other ways to welcome new students to their secondary school.

Ask your child's teacher and your child's secondary school about what's available. Then talk with your child about which opportunities they can use to get ready for secondary school.

Choose a secondary school

You'll need to choose a school and check the procedure for enrolling your child. The Victorian Department of Education and Training website has information about starting secondary school. Applications for government secondary schools are due in Term 2 of Grade 6, usually in May.

Offers are made in August each year. Contact Catholic and Independent schools for details of their enrolment procedures and timelines, which may be earlier.

Starting secondary school

Starting secondary school often means a lot of changes to a student's daily routine. These can include new subjects, new teachers, new uniform, new shoes, new rules, and meeting new people.

Another challenge can be the organisational skills needed to get to the right classroom on time with the right books. The good news is that the transition to secondary school can be made easier for autistic children by taking the time to plan.

Puberty

Most children are also going through puberty at the time they start secondary school. During puberty your child might find it hard to understand why their body is changing. It's a good idea to talk with your child about puberty and autism.

Build on past successes

You might like to think about what has worked for your child during past transitions. This can be good information to include in a plan for how your child will transition to secondary school. Your primary school may have already started a formal plan to support this change for your child. This plan is called a transition plan. If you are not sure whether a transition plan has been started for your child, you can ask your child's teacher.

Tips for creating a transition plan

In creating a transition plan it's important that the following people are involved:

- Your child. Read more in [Preparing to start secondary school for autistic students](#).
- Your child's therapists, Grade 6 teacher and support staff at primary school.
- Staff and teachers at your child's secondary school.

The overall aim of your child's transition plan is for your child to feel connected, protected and respected at secondary school.

Checklist for speaking to your child's secondary school

This checklist is a starting point for things to think about and discuss with your child's secondary school in the lead up to transition. It's not a complete list and you may need to add to it.

Learning

- ☐ What personalised learning and support plans are there for autistic students.
- ☐ When Student Support Group meetings are held.
- ☐ The subjects that your child will study and expectations around classwork, homework, tests and assignments.
- ☐ Learning strategies that have worked well for your child at primary school.

Communicating with school

- ☐ Setting up communication between school and home, for example, student diary, online systems for attendance and homework.
- ☐ Sharing information with the school, for example, what your child likes, their strengths, how they calm themselves.

Routines and Rules

- ☐ Helping your child with new school routines, for example, using a locker, changing classrooms for different subjects.
- ☐ School rules around the use of mobile phones, computers and iPads.
- ☐ School rules about school uniform, school bags and food.



Knowing where to go

- ☐ Visits to the secondary school, for example, orientation days, tours, visits.
- ☐ Getting around school, for example where are the toilets, home room, quiet space etc.?
- ☐ Can the school provide a map?

What if...?

- ☐ Situations where your child might need support. Work out a plan for who they can seek help from, for example, if your child feels sick at school.

New people and new activities

- ☐ Meeting new class members.
- ☐ Lunchtime activities, for example, clubs, available spaces.
- ☐ Upcoming camps and excursions.

Travel

You may like to include details around travelling to and from school in your transition plan. This is important if your child will be travelling to secondary school by themselves.

Reviewing your transition plan

Term 1 of Year 7 is a good time to review your child's transition plan, with your child and with the school. You could consider questions such as;

- Is your child comfortable using lockers?
- Does your child know how to get around school?
- Is the communication between work and school working well?

Transition to secondary school forum

Amaze runs a Transition to Secondary School forum. Forums are advertised on the Amaze website, our Facebook page and in eSpectrum, our e- newsletter.

Information sheets

You might also be interested in these information sheets:

[For parents and carers: Preparing to start secondary school](#)

[Timeline and checklist of steps to create a transition plan](#)

[Preparing to start secondary school for autistic students](#)

[For primary teachers: Supporting autistic students' transition to secondary school](#)

[For secondary teachers: Supporting autistic students' transition to secondary school](#)

[Puberty and Autism](#)

Amaze © 2020

Permission is granted for the content of this information sheet to be reproduced in its entirety, provided Amaze is acknowledged as the source. Content is provided for educational and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional.