

# Preparing to start secondary school for autistic students in Grade 6



## Your feelings

If you're in Grade 6 you might feel a range of feelings about starting secondary school next year. For example, you may be excited, worried, happy, unsure or all of these. Or you might feel different but not know why. It's normal to have these feelings and it's important to talk about them with your family, friends and teachers.

### Changes in 2020 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. You 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.

Talk with your parent, carer or teacher about which opportunities you can use to get ready for secondary school.

## Your team

Starting secondary school means leaving your primary school. Starting secondary school will give you the opportunity to learn different subjects, meet different students and teachers and try different sports. Preparing to start secondary school is a team effort and you're an important part of the team. The other people in the team are your parents or carers, your Grade 6 teacher and the Year Level Coordinator from the secondary school.

There may be other members of the team too, for example, the Education Support staff from the primary and secondary schools and any health professionals (speech pathologist, psychologist, occupational therapist) that have helped you. If some of these words are new you can read more about what they mean in the section on *Words for secondary school* below.

The job of this team is to make a plan to prepare you for starting secondary school. Usually this team will meet during the year to work out what you may need to learn and how you will learn it before you start secondary school. For example, many autistic students find going to a new place difficult so the plan may include visiting the secondary school in Term 4 to help you get used to it.

## Your plan

When you're making a plan to do something new, it can help to get advice from students who've already done the thing you're about to do. They can tell you what helped them prepare for secondary school and give you ideas about what might help you.



That's why we talked to some autistic secondary students. We asked them some questions. Their answers are in the bullet list below each question.

**What advice would you give an autistic student who was preparing for Year 7 for next year (during the coronavirus pandemic)?**

- Do a virtual tour of the school, meet secondary teachers and staff on video calls.
- Visit the school if you can.
- Email your worries and questions to the school.
- Get to know your secondary teachers. They can help you.

**Jack, Year 12 student:**

***“Do a virtual tour of the school, meet secondary teachers and staff on video calls”***

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**What do you think would help autistic students who are preparing to go to secondary school?**

- Seeing the classrooms at secondary school.
- Practising taking books to different classes at primary school.
- Having an autistic secondary student as a mentor.
- Meeting teachers of different subjects (Maths, Science, English, PE etc).
- Meeting the School Counsellor, Year Level Coordinator and Education Support staff that you'll be working with.
- Talking with the secondary school about your needs.

**Ben, Year 10 student:**

***“Meeting your Year 7 homeroom teacher”***

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**What advice would you give an autistic student who was preparing for Year 7 after the coronavirus pandemic?**

- Do a tour of the school.
- Find out where the lockers, homeroom, classrooms etc. are that you'll be in for Year 7.
- Go to orientation day to meet other students.
- There'll be other students who don't know anyone.
- Meet homeroom teacher, subject teachers, school counsellor, year coordinator, learning support staff and principal.
- Ask how the school helps autistic students.
- Ask for help if you need it.
- Make a connection with one or more teachers so that you have someone to go to when you need help.

**Bella, Year 9 student:**

***“If you can, go to school before the start of Term 1 to choose a locker, meet the teachers and take your books in”***

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## Words for Secondary School

At secondary school, students and teachers use words that are different to the words at primary school. For example;

**Education Support staff** are the team who provide learning support to students at primary and secondary school. Each school has its own Education Support staff.

**Homeroom** is the classroom where you start the school day with a group of students from your year level. Your homeroom teacher marks your name on the roll to show that you're at school. Often this homeroom time is for around 15 minutes and the homeroom teacher will read out daily notices about what's happening at school that day.

**Lockers** are small cupboards where students keep their school bag, lunch and textbooks. They are either locked with a key or a padlock to keep the contents safe.

**Periods** are amounts of time for lessons that happen during the school day. They are often numbered, for example, period 1 is the first lesson of the day. A double period is two lessons.

**School Counsellor** is a person who provides information and help to students in areas such as personal problems and learning difficulties. At some schools they are called Student Counsellors.

**School Psychologist** is a health expert who can help students learn at school, get along with others, manage their disability and manage their feelings. Some schools have a school psychologist.

**Textbooks** are books that you use for each subject at secondary school. Textbooks can be printed or electronic (downloaded onto a computer). You'll usually need to get new textbooks each year at secondary school.

**Year Level Coordinator** is a teacher who is in charge of keeping students healthy and safe at secondary school. The role may have a different name, for example Wellbeing Coordinator. The Year Level Coordinator for Year 7 is often in charge of the orientation day and other activities for Grade 6 students who will be starting Year 7.

You can suggest to your team that you add learning these new words to your plan.

Now that you've read this information, print it and find a highlighter, a pencil or a pen and highlight or circle any of the ideas that you think will help you. Take it to the next meeting with your teachers and parents or carers and talk about some of the ideas. Do you want to add them to your plan for preparing to start secondary school?

If you feel worried about preparing to start secondary school talk to your parent, carer, a trusted friend, or a counsellor about your worries and what you can do to manage them. You could make a list or draw your worries, and then brainstorm ideas to help manage them.

Thanks for reading. We wish you all the best as you prepare to start secondary school.

## Resources

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

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

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

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

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

[AllPlay Learn](#) has inclusive education resources for primary and secondary students with disability. All Play Learn was developed by Deakin University and the Department of Education and Training, Victoria. For example:

Video: [What will change at secondary school and what will stay the same](#) (5:43)

Poster: [Locker checklist](#)

Information: [Getting to your locker](#)

For more information about autism go to [www.amaze.org.au](http://www.amaze.org.au)

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