

12 things to know when your child starts high school

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Think you're out of the woods now that your kids are finished primary school? Think again.



Where did all the years go?

My baby is no longer a baby.

My god, it's a jungle out there.

These are all things you will say to yourself when you realise that your first child is about to start high school. And just when you've come to terms with it, other people will say things like:

Oh my god, really?

NO!?

You must feel really old.

Some people will just gasp in shock as if something terrible is about to happen to you. Rest assured, something terrible is not about to happen to you, but you will need to:

- Let go a little
- Be alert but not alarmed
- Be prepared to play Bad Cop ... a lot.

Because once your child starts high school, you can no longer control the choices they make. You can only guide them (and watch them like a hawk, including occasionally spying on them.)

So, with that in mind, what do you need to know about high school? I'm glad you asked. Here's some stuff that might be useful.

1. The unknown is scary, so get as much information as you can

Orientation days go a long way to demystifying the world of high school. And schools really turn it on: there are cake stalls and band performances and uniform parades and art rooms and science labs. So get around to as many as you can, if only for the excellent homemade cakes. It's also important to remember that there is no definitive 'best' school. There is only the right school for your child. The most expensive prep schools can be entirely the wrong kinds of schools for some kids. So choose based on *your* child and what they're into (art, sport, drama), rather than where the Packers and Murdochs are sending *their* kids.

2. Mean girls, it's a thing

Teenagers can be appalling. Girls torture each other psychologically and boys punch each other. It just is what it is. There's a sort of assumption that the older your child gets, the more you can let go the parenting reins a little, but in some ways, you need to be as on the ball and 'at the ready' as you were during the toddler years.

Keep an eye on your child's moods and behaviour and watch for signs that they may be having a hard time socially. The thing about teenagers is: they won't always tell you what's going on, so you need to be vigilant (and sometimes a little bit 007.)

3. "Go back to bed, it's too early!" now becomes, "Get up, it's late!"

Remember the early years, when your toddler would try to start the day at 4am? Relish that memory, because now instead of saying, "It's too early!" You'll now be banging on the bedroom door yelling, "Get up! It's late!" Teenagers are generally a bit slothful, plus, they often claim to be "ill" when they are just tired. How do you know when they're faking? I couldn't tell you. But here's three things you *can* try to combat the teen tiredness routine:

- Make sure they go to bed at a reasonable hour.
- Don't let them take smart phones and tablets into bed with them.

- Set up some sort of morning routine: e.g. making them breakfast at the same time every morning is a good start.

4. They will lose ... just about everything

Diaries, sports uniforms, calculators, permission notes that need to be signed TODAY! You name it, your teen will lose it. There's a certain cruel expectation that once kids are in high school, they are able to be responsible for their own things. But somehow human development and hormones combine in a perfect storm during the teen years and the result is: a brain as scrambled as a pensioner with dementia. You will not believe how many personal belongings, school must-haves and locker keys your child is capable of just blithely dropping down a manhole.

5. Don't be afraid to embarrass your child by ringing other parents to check on social outings

Unlike primary school, where you will probably run into Jayden's mum at school drop off, all of a sudden your child will be organising their own social life and you won't know who the parents are. This can represent something of a "should I be the embarrassing overbearing mum" dilemma when your child asks if he can go to "a party at Evan's house on Saturday." ALWAYS call the parents. Who gives a toss if your teen is "so embarrassed"? These are the years when your job is to be embarrassing. Teenagers are dense, they do dumb things and sneak around. Trust me, Evan's mum will be glad you called.



Oh, so you'll be out of town that weekend? How interesting ... Image: iStock

6. Uniform constraints will get a bit more serious

And this will combine conveniently with a sudden adolescent need to express individuality in an eccentric way: another perfect storm scenario. This is a particularly big change when going from state schools to private schools - the kid who was running around in tracksuit pants and sneakers at lunch, is now all trussed up in a tie, "slacks" and school shoes. Depending on your child's personality, this may not wash with them (and again, I will refer you to the idea of choosing the right school for your child).

7. Social media: it's just what they do

Remember ye olde fashioned telephonic communication? The "extension" in Mum and Dad's room where you would huddle all night talking to your best friend? ("You see her every day, what more is there to talk about?" Your mother would ask, exasperated.)

Well now, your teen will be on social media ... aaaaall night: scrolling through Instagram, opening Snapchats, or they'll be on some obscure messaging app that you didn't even know existed. This is their version of being on the phone all night.

So, you can't really ban them from social media, but you can:

- Set limits
- Educate yourself (know how social media works: i.e. start using it if you don't already.)

You can also make sure you know their passcode (no passcode, no phone) so that at any time you can pick it up and look at what they've been doing. Screw their need for "privacy" – it's the wild west out there in social media land.

8. With regards to homework, yes they do have some and no, they're not doing it

Got any homework?

Nope.

Assignments?

Nope.

Tests you should be studying for?

Nope.



High school kids always have homework. And if they don't have homework, they've got some assignment they should have started on THREE WEEKS AGO! Until you experience the late night jig of anxiety that goes something like this ...

"Oh my god I've got an assignment due tomorrow and the printer's out of ink!"

... you will not realise how gullible you have been.

"Assignment? What assignment? You've been sitting on the couch every night swearing blind that you have no assignments or homework ... oh, I see what's been going on here."

We call this moment: enlightenment.

9. Different teaching styles: it's a numbers game

And the numbers just got a whole lot bigger. The more teachers you have, the more chances you are going to find different teaching styles. This is possibly the most frustrating thing about high school – there's so many teachers to keep track of and unlike primary school, you can't develop a nice personal relationship with each teacher. Again, it comes down to teaching your child to manage their own study habits and knowing when to step in.

10. High school speech nights and parent/teacher conferences are bigger than Ben Hur

Remember those cosy little parent/teacher meetings you had with your child's primary school teacher? How you had her undivided attention for 15 minutes and she seemed to really know and understand your child? Well strap in, because those days are gone. High school parent/teacher nights are like a cattle call. You will get shunted from one teacher to the next and you won't even have heard of half of them. Some of them may not even remember who your child is.

Similarly, high school speech nights are a whole new ball game of parent torture – there's more kids, more subjects, more sports awards, more bands and dance troupes – in short there's more ways for the school to torture parents by shutting them in a hall and making them watch stuff.

11. No more after-school care ... yay or yikes?

Yes, they're too old for after-school care now, but are they old enough to be left to their own devices in the hours between when school finishes and when you make it home from work? This is the dilemma that high school brings. On the one hand, you'll be saving a motza on after-school care fees, on the other ... where do they go and what do they do between 3pm and 5pm if you work full-time?

If you are lucky (or unlucky), the travel time between school and home will take care of a portion of this unsupervised time. Then what?

You may want to start thinking about more flexible working hours, so you can at least be home or you could arrange some extra curricular activities (the kind they can travel to by themselves) to occupy them.

School holidays also present the same dilemma.

12. High school and the costs: a whole new ball game

Whether you go public or private, the costs of school somehow ramp up once you move to high school. There's just more ... stuff! Uniforms, sports uniforms, sports activities, more extravagant excursions and camps, co-curricular programs and don't forget the Academy Award-sized fiasco that is now the school formal. It all adds up. As always it pays to be prepared for these sorts of things.

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We are here to help if you have any questions or concerns about your child's transition.

Please make contact via School Reception 9735 4022