

## Supporting Your Child Through the Move to Year 7

The transition from primary to secondary school is a big one — for children and their families alike. It's full of unknowns, changes, and emotions that can feel exciting one moment and overwhelming the next. If your child is feeling wobbly, you're not alone — and there's a lot you can do to gently support them.

This guide shares ten practical ways to help your child feel more prepared and less anxious about the move to Year 7. Some ideas are quick wins, others will take time — and not every strategy will suit every child. That's okay. You know your child best. Use what helps, skip what doesn't, and come back to it if things change.

There's no "right way" to do this. Your calm, caring presence is the most important tool you have. Let's help you both feel a little more ready — one small step at a time.

### At a Glance: 10 Ways to Support the Move to Secondary School

1. **Keep the routine steady** – Stick to familiar daily rhythms to create a sense of safety.
2. **Talk little and often** – Short, low-pressure chats help build connection & confidence.
3. **Name the unknowns** – Identifying what's uncertain makes it feel more manageable.
4. **Visit (or visualise) the school** – Familiarity with the space reduces anxiety.
5. **Practise the journey** – Trial runs build independence and calm first-day nerves.
6. **Create a survival kit** – Pack small essentials and comforts to feel prepared.
7. **Focus on one skill at a time** – Break the transition into bite-sized, achievable steps.
8. **Offer gentle reassurance** – Normalise nerves and remind them they're not alone.
9. **Celebrate the end of primary** – Marking the end makes space for a new beginning.
10. **Show they're not alone** – Build a clear picture of their support network.

Over the next few pages we'll dive into each of these ideas.

## 1. Keep the Routine Steady

*Predictability brings calm. Even if everything's changing, some things can stay the same.*

When children feel uncertain or anxious, their brains crave something solid to cling to — and nothing is more reassuring than the familiar rhythm of everyday life. Sticking to a consistent routine helps reduce stress, ease transitions, and support sleep and wellbeing. This is especially important in the run-up to secondary school, when so much feels uncertain and out of their control.

### What helps:

- Maintain regular bedtimes, wake-ups, and mealtimes — especially in the final weeks of term and the summer holidays.
- Start gradually shifting timings if the new school day starts earlier (try 10–15 minutes earlier every few days).
- Use visual cues: a simple morning checklist on the fridge, a bedtime routine card, or a family whiteboard.

### What to say:

“There’s a lot changing soon, so we’re going to keep our mornings and evenings steady. That way, your brain has one less thing to worry about.”

### Watch out for:

Overloading the routine with *new* expectations (“let’s get into the habit of packed lunches, uniform checks, and equipment checks...”). Keep it simple, calm, and consistent.

## 2. Talk Little and Often

*Big chats can feel overwhelming. Short, low-pressure conversations work best.*

When a child is feeling wobbly or unsure, they may shut down or lash out — especially if they’re met with a long, earnest adult monologue about “being brave” or “how it’s going to be fine.” Smaller, more casual conversations tend to land better. You’re not aiming for a perfect talk — you’re just creating lots of little windows for your child to think aloud, ask questions, or share a worry.

### What helps:

- Use transitional moments like driving, dog walks, cooking or folding laundry — activities that lower pressure and remove eye contact.
- Ask one open-ended question: “What’s one thing you’re wondering about secondary?” or “Is there anything you’re feeling unsure about today?”
- Be okay with silence or shrugs. You’ve opened the door. That’s enough for now.

### What to say:

“You don’t have to talk if you don’t want to — but I’m always happy to listen. Even if it’s something small or silly.”

**Watch out for:**

Jumping into problem-solving mode too quickly. Your child may just want to name a worry, not fix it. Try reflecting back: “That does sound tricky,” or “That would make me nervous too.”

**3. Name the Unknowns**

*Much of the anxiety is about not knowing what to expect.*

Children (and adults!) often feel anxious not because something is definitely going to go wrong, but because they don’t *know* what’s going to happen. Transitioning to secondary school is packed with unknowns — from where to line up, to how strict the teachers are, to whether anyone will sit with them at lunch. When we write down or talk about the things we don’t yet know, they stop feeling like invisible monsters under the bed.

**What helps:**

- Sit down together and make two lists: “Things I Know” and “Things I Don’t Know Yet.” Stick it on the fridge and add to it over time.
- Reassure them that not knowing is *normal* — and often temporary.
- Help them find out one or two answers at a time, without pressure to fix everything.

**What to say:**

“It makes sense to feel worried when you don’t know what to expect. Let’s see what we can figure out together — and if we don’t have all the answers, that’s okay too.”

**Watch out for:**

Accidentally dismissing their concerns (“Don’t worry, it’ll be fine!”) or piling on too much information all at once. Your job isn’t to download the entire school handbook into their brain — it’s to gently help them feel more in control.

**4. Visit (or Visualise) the New School**

*The more familiar it feels, the less overwhelming it becomes.*

For many children, the physical space of secondary school feels huge and unknown — and that alone can trigger anxiety. Even if a formal visit isn’t possible, helping your child build a mental picture of the layout, routines, and key places can ease a lot of the worry. Familiarity doesn’t remove all the nerves, but it reduces the fear of the unknown.

**What helps:**

- Visit the school in person if you can, even just to walk around the outside. Note things like bike racks, gates, entrances.
- Look at photos, maps or videos on the school’s website together. Pause to talk about what you notice.
- Draw a simple map together of what a typical day might look like, marking “where I’ll go” at each point (even if it’s a guess).

- Role-play common situations lightly: *“Let’s imagine it’s breaktime and you want to find the loo. What might you do?”*

**What to say:**

“Let’s find out as much as we can, so your brain doesn’t have to guess what everything will be like.”

**Watch out for:**

Overloading them with too many details at once. You’re aiming for curiosity, not a lecture. Don’t worry if you don’t know everything — modelling uncertainty (“I’m not sure either — let’s see if we can find out”) is powerful in itself.

## 5. Practice the Journey

*Worrying about how to get there (and back!) is really common.*

For many children, especially those who are neurodivergent or anxious, the journey to school can feel as daunting as the school day itself. Practising it in advance builds confidence and gives you a chance to spot challenges before they happen. Even one or two trial runs can make the real thing feel less scary — especially if you treat it as a calm, no-pressure adventure.

**What helps:**

- Do the school run at the same time of day they’ll travel — include steps like packing a bag, waiting at the bus stop, locking a bike.
- Let them take the lead where possible — “Which way now?” — and talk through options if something goes wrong.
- Discuss safe people and places en route (e.g. a shop to wait in if needed, or a friend’s parent who lives nearby).

**What to say:**

“The goal isn’t to get it perfect — it’s to practise so it feels a bit more familiar. Every time we do it, your brain learns it’s okay.”

**Watch out for:**

Turning it into a test (“You need to remember every step!”). Stay light and collaborative — and give permission to get things wrong. That’s part of the point.

## 6. Create a ‘First Week’ Survival Kit

*Little comforts can make a big difference.*

Starting secondary school can feel like entering a new world — and having a few familiar tools or comforts on hand can be grounding. A personalised “survival kit” helps your child feel prepared and reassured. It can also give them a sense of control when everything else feels new. Include practical essentials and small items that feel comforting or confidence-boosting.

**What helps:**

- Pack it together so they feel involved. Include things like: timetable, water bottle, fidget toy, tissues, sweets or mints, locker key, snack, spare socks, lip balm.
- Add a quiet comfort from home — a soft cloth, favourite pen, keyring, or a small written note from you tucked in a side pocket.
- Make sure they know they don't have to use everything — just having it *there* can be enough.

**What to say:**

"This is your just-in-case kit. You might not need half of it, but knowing it's there can make things feel a bit easier."

**Watch out for:**

Overpacking or making it a performance. It's not about being *ready for anything*, it's about helping them feel quietly equipped and cared for.

## 7. Focus on One Skill at a Time

*It's tempting to prep everything — but one thing at a time is less stressful.*

The list of new things to learn in secondary school is long: new buildings, new teachers, new ways of organising yourself... Trying to tackle it all at once can quickly become overwhelming. Focusing on one skill at a time helps build confidence without triggering shutdown. When your child feels a small success, they're more likely to keep trying.

**What helps:**

- Choose one mini-goal per week or day: learning the uniform routine, packing their bag independently, using their timetable.
- Turn the goal into a game: "*Let's see if you can pack your PE kit without help all week.*"
- Celebrate small wins out loud: "*You remembered your locker code today — that's brilliant.*"

**What to say:**

"You don't need to be brilliant at everything straight away. Every new thing you learn is a win."

**Watch out for:**

Unintentionally making your child feel like a project. Offer support — not performance pressure — and allow them to go at their own pace. It's okay if progress is patchy.

## 8. Offer Reassurance (Gently and Often)

*It's not about solving their feelings — it's about helping them feel safe.*

Even the most confident child can wobble in the face of big change. Some will show you their worry directly, others might mask it — or express it as frustration, silence, or clinginess.

Your steady reassurance helps soothe their nervous system and reminds them they're not alone, even when you can't fix the thing they're worried about.

**What helps:**

- Let them know it's okay to feel mixed emotions: excitement, nerves, sadness — all normal.
- Say things more than once, even if they seem fine: *"I know this is a big change. I'm here for you every step of the way."*
- Normalise the wobbles with phrases like: *"It's okay if you're not sure yet. Most people feel like that at first."*

**What to say:**

"You don't need to be ready — you just need to know that you'll be supported, whatever comes up."

**Watch out for:**

Jumping straight to "You'll be fine!" — even if you mean well. It can feel dismissive. Reflect back what they're feeling first, then reassure them that you'll figure things out together.

## **9. Celebrate the End of Primary**

*Ending well helps with new beginnings.*

Moving on is easier when we've had time to honour what we're leaving behind. Your child might not show it, but they may feel grief, uncertainty, or a strange sense of loss as primary school ends — even if they're excited about what's next. Helping them reflect on the good parts (and the hard bits too) can make it easier to transition emotionally into secondary.

**What helps:**

- Look at old photos together, visit a favourite playground, or write a thank-you note to a teacher.
- Make a simple memory book or time capsule: "Here's me, age 11. My favourite food is... I'm proud of..."
- Talk about what they've achieved and how they've grown.

**What to say:**

"You've done so much here — and it's okay to miss it, even if you're ready for the next step."

**Watch out for:**

Over-focusing on "the next exciting chapter" without giving space to say goodbye. Both things can be true — and it helps to say so.

## 10. Let Them Know They're Not Alone

*Knowing who's in their corner makes all the difference.*

One of the most powerful things you can do is remind your child that they have a team. That even when everything feels new and scary, they're not facing it alone. Children — especially those who are anxious or neurodivergent — often feel pressure to manage things by themselves. But they don't have to. And the more we remind them of that, the braver they'll feel.

### What helps:

- Make a "Who's on my team?" poster with names of trusted adults at school and home (teachers, parents, lunch staff, cousins, pets).
- Revisit it often — add people when new connections are made.
- Role-play or write scripts for asking for help: *"Excuse me, I'm feeling a bit lost — can you help me find the science lab?"*

### What to say:

*"You've got people in your corner. You don't have to figure it all out on your own."*

### Watch out for:

Accidentally reinforcing independence as the goal above all else. Interdependence — knowing when and how to ask for help — is the real skill we want to nurture.

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Transitions aren't meant to be perfect — they're meant to be supported. However your child feels right now, the most powerful message you can give is: *You don't have to do this alone.*

By focusing on steady routines, small skills, and gentle conversations, you're building a foundation of safety and confidence they can carry with them. And if things wobble along the way — that's not failure. That's normal. What matters is that they know you're there, ready to listen, guide, and cheer them on.

Whether you're reading this at the end of Year 6, during the summer holidays, or halfway through Year 7 — it's never too late to support the transition.

You're doing more than enough. And your child is lucky to have you in their corner.

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