



The move to secondary school

What children worry about across Year 7, four things that help in the first half-term, and the first sentences to use. From the counsellors of Kensington Square Therapy.

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- 2 What she is likely to be worried about
 - 3 Four things that help in the first half-term
 - 4 What to say
 - 5 Where to go further
-

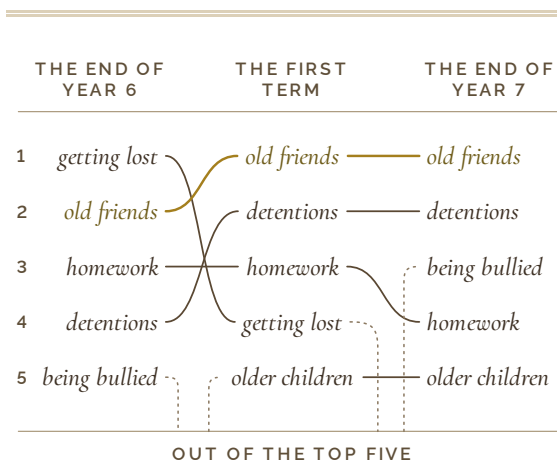
FOR THE PASTORAL LEAD

Print one copy for each family, or show pages two to four on the screen. Every page can be read without joining anything. Nothing here names your school or your staff; add those yourself, and the name of your designated safeguarding lead.

What she is likely to be worried about

When researchers followed about two thousand children through the move, they asked both the children and their parents what worried them. Parents worried more about their child making new friends. The children worried most about losing their old ones.

FIGURE



Ranks, not amounts.

Overall, worry fell as the year went on.

HOW TO READ IT

Three columns, left to right: *the end of Year 6, the first term of Year 7, and the end of Year 7.*

Each column lists the five worries rated highest at that point, the biggest at the top. The numbers 1 to 5 on the left are the ranks.

— A line joins the same worry from one column to the next, so you can follow it up or down.

— The gold line follows *old friends*, the worry about losing them, from second to first.

..... A dotted line means a worry has left the top five, or come back into it, as *being bullied* does.

These are ranks, not amounts: they show which worries mattered most, not how worried children were.

What they worried about, and when. Which worries about two thousand children in South-East England rated highest, just before the move and twice during Year 7, in 2012 and 2013. Losing old friends rises to the top as term begins and stays there. Being bullied drops out of the five in the first term and comes back into it by the end of the year. Overall, worry fell as the year went on.

After the STARS study, Frances Rice and colleagues, report to the Nuffield Foundation (2015).

Four things that help in the first half-term

Each is a quick tip in the library, with the lines it gives a parent to try.

The Question at the School Gate

In the first weeks at a new school, children are often too tired to answer questions at the gate.

- 👤 Give her food and an hour before the first question.
 - 👤 Ask something small and particular: "Which lesson felt longest?"
 - 👤 Give her a chance to miss her old friends as well as make new ones.
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The PE Kit Left on the Bus

Pack the bag together for a few weeks, then hand the job to her on a date you've set.

- 👤 For the first few weeks only, pack the bag together from a timetable on the fridge.
 - 👤 Tell her the date the job becomes hers, and keep to it.
 - 👤 After that, let the small consequence happen rather than driving the kit in; medicines are always checked by an adult.
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The Friend of the First Fortnight

Many September friendships loosen by half-term, and usually neither child has done anything wrong.

- 👤 Help her find one club, team or activity by half-term, chosen by her.
 - 👤 Keep the Saturday with the old friend going while the new ones form.
 - 👤 Don't ring another parent to arrange a friendship.
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Say What You Have Noticed

When you ring the school, describe what you've seen, with dates, so staff know what to look for.

- 👤 Before you ring, write down what you've noticed, with dates.
 - 👤 Describe what you've seen, not what you've concluded, then ask what they're seeing.
 - 👤 Start with the form tutor, and go to the head of year if it's wider or isn't improving.
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What to say

Parents most often get stuck on the first sentence. Each of these comes from a quick tip in the library.

AFTER SCHOOL

“Which lesson felt longest?” “Where did you sit at lunch?”

Ask after she has eaten and had an hour to herself. A child who can't answer “How was it?” can usually answer that.

From The Question at the School Gate

THE FRIEND SHE HAS STOPPED MENTIONING

“I’ve noticed you haven’t mentioned X for a while. I wonder if something’s changed there.”

Say it in the car, and don’t expect an answer.

From When the Best Friend Drifts

WHEN A TEACHER IS THE PROBLEM

“I hear you. That sounds hard. Tell me a bit more.”

Take her seriously without taking sides, and listen for the specific thing.

From When the Teacher Is the Problem

TO THE SCHOOL

“She has come home without eating her lunch most days for three weeks, and has asked twice if she can stay at home.”

Say what you’ve noticed, and leave out what you’ve concluded. Then ask what they’re seeing.

From Say What You Have Noticed

Where to go further

Place2Be, Helping your child prepare for Secondary or High School

From Place2Be's Parenting Smart series: what is different, when to check in, what to watch in friendships and online, and when to talk to the school.

Anna Freud, Supporting children's transition to secondary school

A short, printable booklet written with clinicians and teachers: the signs that a move has gone well, and four practical headings for the months either side of it.

The Parent Book, The Move to Secondary School

The full chapter at theparentbook.com, with the research behind this pack, the first half-term week by week, and when to talk to the school.

There's no set timetable for settling in, and most worries ease as the year goes on. If a child is still dreading school after the first half-term, is not eating or sleeping, or has stopped mentioning anyone by name, talk to her form tutor or head of year, and to your GP if she is not eating or sleeping.

If you are worried about a child's safety, speak to the school's designated safeguarding lead that day.

If you or your child is in immediate danger: Call 999, or go to your nearest A&E. 24/7.