Practical ideas to help with the transition

and changes associated with...

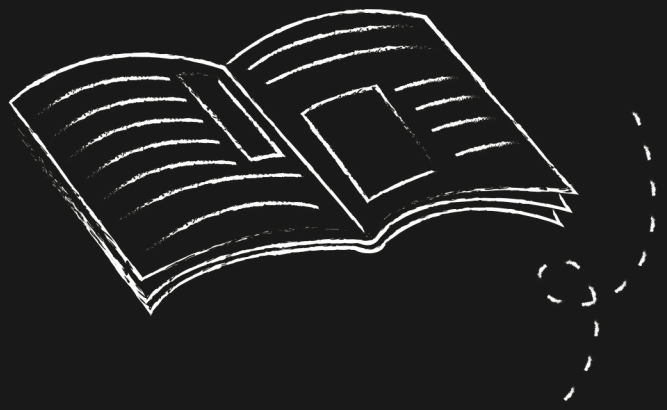
>> Moving to Secondary School >>

For parents who have children with additional needs in years 4 to 6 in mainstream school

Moving to Secondary School 2024

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Choosing a school and good sources of information about schools



For families who a have child in years 4 or 5 it can be helpful to do some research on your local secondary schools before your child starts in year 6.

Generally, for those applying through normal admission routes, applications for secondary school places open in the September your child starts in Year 6 and close in late October. If your child has an EHCP you may be asked even earlier to name your choice of secondary school.

If your decision is not clear cut, starting your search in the September of Year 6 may not feel like enough time to look properly at a selection of schools and speak to the relevant people, so starting earlier can be helpful.

On the next page are some questions that are worth considering when deciding which school will be best suited to your child. If you already know which school your child is going to, it is worth checking you know the answers to the questions below, in case there is something you need to check before they start.

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Questions to consider when choosing a school:

Which is my catchment school?
Have you looked at the admissions criteria for each school? This can help you judge how likely it is your child will get a place. Even if your child has an EHCP the local authority will want you to consider your catchment school first. If you want your child to go elsewhere, can you give reasons as to why you feel the catchment school is not suitable and another school is?

How big is the school?
Think about not only the number of pupils and class sizes, but the size of the school grounds and how easily your child will be able to navigate and get from class to class. Could their be any accessibility issues?

What subjects do they offer, and what extra curricular activities do they have?
Will there be opportunities for your child to build on their strengths, skills and interests? Are there a mix of practical or vocational subjects as well as academic ones?

How much homework is set?
Is this done online and are there support resources to help? Does the school have opportunities to complete homework whilst at school or get extra support with homework tasks?

How does the school provide extra support to those with special educational needs?
How is this done within a lesson? What types of intervention groups do they run? Is there support during lunch and break times? Do they have a place to go, or someone to talk to if your child is feeling overwhelmed?



Which staff are part of the inclusion or SEND team at the school?
Which members of staff will be supporting your child or coordinating the support? Who can you speak to about any concerns?

What training and experience do the staff have?
Does this match up to supporting your child's specific needs? Are they willing to undertake more training if not? What specialists are they able to consult with for strategies and support?

How does the school manage behaviour and deal with bullying incidents? Does the behaviour policy take in the need for flexibility when children have additional needs? How is bullying dealt with and what pastoral support is there?

What reasonable adjustments are the school able to make?
Are they willing to apply this to their practice and policies to fully support your child's needs?

What are the transport options for my child to get to and from school?
If it is not in walking distance, do the school provide access to private coach services, or is public transport the only option? If your child has an EHCP will they meet the transport criteria?

Will my child know anyone at the school when they start?
It is important to think about the potential peer group your child will have. Already knowing others attending the school can be a positive but not always. Will there be positive role models and supportive friends who can provide help or advice during the school day?

If they will only know a couple of people, or no-one at all, are there any opportunities to meet others before school starts, or clubs that can encourage friendships with children who share their interests?

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4 >> Good sources of information about schools

When it comes to looking at schools, parents often describe getting a gut feeling when going to visit. If you are unable to visit, or you need specific answers or feedback, then it is worth looking at a range of sources. By doing so you can build a picture of what school life might be like for your child.

School website

Secondary school websites have a wealth of information available online. Some even include videos or virtual tours of the school grounds. Most will have staff lists, curriculum and club information, access to their school policies and SEN School Offer. They will also have lists of uniform and equipment needed.

School staff

Many members of staff are happy to answer parents' questions in person or over the phone. However it is often more beneficial to do things over email. It means that your questions can go directly to the person best placed to answer it, and it gives them the time to respond fully without either of you feeling rushed. It can be helpful for future reference too, as you can look back at emails should you need to.

Ofsted

Ofsted reports can give a good overall view of different aspects of the school, particularly things like school management and the general behaviour of pupils. However, it is important to read through the report rather than go purely on the overall school rating. A "Good" school does not necessarily mean good for children with SEN! It is also worth noting that as valuable as Ofsted reports are, inspections offer just a snapshot of what the school was like on the days they were there.

Ofsted parent view

As part of their inspection Ofsted also invite parents to give feedback on their views of the school. This can give you some valuable insights on how the school communicates with parents and overall satisfaction. However, again, we would not suggest using this as your only source of information - as there will be an element of bias. People are often more inclined to complete feedback if they have had either a really good experience, or a really bad one - so you may only be seeing information from the two ends of the experience spectrum!

Parents with a child currently at the school

Being able to speak directly to another parent about their experiences can be helpful. At SNAP we are often



surprised by the wide range of experiences different families can have at the same school, so it is worth trying to get a couple of different views. It can also be helpful if they have a child who is similar to yours. Schools can change dramatically when there is a change in staff - particularly senior leadership staff - so bear this in mind if hearing the views of people whose children attended the school several years ago.

Exam league tables and Government performance statistics

Exam league tables might be meaningful and important to some families and of no importance to others. However, even if you don't particularly care about exam results it may still provide a few insights. Schools who perform consistently 'well above average' in exams often have a strong academic focus and this can sometimes come with an element of pressure to achieve - but this may be an environment that your child will thrive and make good progress in. Schools who are consistently performing 'well below average' or have recently dropped in their positioning may also be under high pressure to raise attainment.

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Strengths and challenges

Any support with change and transition needs to be targeted and purposeful for your child as an individual. One child might be fantastic at being organised but struggle in social situations, and another child might be the complete opposite.

By thinking about both your child's strengths and challenges first, it can help you to focus and prioritise next steps.

You may be able to do this just from knowing your child, but it is always helpful to speak with them about what they feel they are good at in school and what they might need some help with, as you might be surprised by the answers!

Talking about what we find difficult isn't always an easy topic, so focus on strengths, and comment on things you have noticed they are good at.

When talking about difficulties make sure to give example of how there are lots of things that you still need help with even as an adult. You may prefer to talk about it in terms of aspects of school that they enjoy or dislike.

Navigating the school day

Next, think about the types of things your child will need to do to navigate a school day. Think about things that are already a strength for your child and also things that they will need some extra support with. This may be organisational skills, social skills , emotional and/or sensory regulation skills and problem solving skills.

Below are a few examples:

Organisation	Social	Emotional	Sensory	Problem solving

- getting to and from school
- having the right books and equipment
- reading a timetable
- navigating their way to class
- keeping track of time
- getting changed before and after PE
- following instructions
- doing homework on time
- keeping hold of their belongings
- making new friends
- balancing new and existing friendships
- speaking to adults respectfully
- working with students they don't know
- managing emotions in different situations
- knowing when they are becoming overwhelmed
- dealing with unexpected change (e.g. supply teacher)
- knowing how to manage their sensory needs
- using sensory regulation strategies unprompted
- knowing what to do if they have forgotten something
- knowing what to do if lost
- knowing what to do if late for school or miss their bus

Some of these skills may already be a strength and these can be used to boost confidence and overcome worries.

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6 >> Support plans and one page profiles

The SEND code of practice

6.44 SEN Support In Schools

"Where a pupil is identified as having SEN, schools should take action to remove barriers to learning and put effective special educational provision in place. This SEN support should take the form of a four-part cycle through which earlier decisions and actions are revisited, refined and revised with a growing understanding of the pupil's needs and of what supports the pupil in making good progress and securing good outcomes. "

This "four part cycle" is known as the Assess -Plan- Do - Review cycle - and there is an expectation from local authorities that children who have been identified as having special education needs will also have a support plan in place. These are funded by the schools "SEN Support" budget. Essex Local Authority refer to this as a "one plan" however other local authorities or schools may give them a different name - such as IEP (individual education plan), ISP (individual support plan), Provision Plan, Provision Passport - the list is endless!

This plan will be sent to your child's secondary school and it is important that it is updated by the new school to reflect the provision strategies and interventions they use. Most schools will suggest that the plan is reviewed with the parents in the second half of the Autumn term, to allow the child time to settle and give the school time to fully assess their needs. However this does not mean your child will be unsupported in that time.

If you have not already been in contact with the secondary SENCO - it can be helpful to send them an email at the beginning of the new academic year, to make sure they have received your child's plan from their primary school, and book an appointment to complete a review of the plan later in the term.

If your child also has an EHCP - the secondary school will have been formally consulted as part of the admissions process - by accepting the child as a pupil and being named on the plan - the school have a duty to implement all provisions listed in Section F of the plan.

One page profiles

Often these are created alongside SEN Support Plans and EHCPs. They are an A4 page that includes the child's photograph and important information about how best to support them.

These can be invaluable in secondary schools. Due to the much higher number of staff that will have contact with your child, these profiles give them a quick snapshot of how to work with your child and are easy to read and understand.

It is likely that your child has one written by their primary school - but it is important that it is up to date and a true reflection. There are lots of templates online and by creating your own version you can guarantee that the most important information is included. Hard copies and electronic copies can then be given out to relevant staff.

Sheff Kids - lots of templates, based on children's interests - https://www.sheffkids.co.uk/resources/
Helen Sanderson Associates - plainer designs https://helensandersonassociates.com/person-centered-approaches-programs/creating-one-page-profiles/

Top Tips for writing a one page profile

✓ Make sure it reflects your child's views on how they want to be supported - try to involve them in a way you feel most appropriate
✓ Prioritise the order you write things - with the most important points at the top of each section
✓ Keep it as brief and easy to read as possible
✓ Time how long it takes to read through - if it is taking more than a couple of minutes it may need a little editing
✓ Ask someone to read it who doesn't know your child very well - ask them if there were any parts that weren't clear or how confident they feel they have a clearer understanding?

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Creating a transition book >> 7

A transition book is a really helpful tool for your child to refer to in the lead up to moving schools. It is a visual way to find out information, and something they can keep referring back to.

Much like when you are going on holiday, you want to look at where you will be staying, what the weather is like, places you can go to and things you can do. We all like to have some idea of what a new place will be like, but for our children they may need more information, and for it to be presented clearly and visually.

A transition book can be made for, with, or by your child. It can look however you like and be presented in a way that works for them. One child may need a physical paper booklet or folder, another may prefer a power point presentation, and another child may just like some photos or screen shots saved to their device.

Again there are templates and ideas online but we would always suggest picking and choosing bits that will work for your child.



Ideas for what could be included:

★ Introduction to the school, with its name and photos of school grounds and buildings. If you have any photos of your child at school from visits/open days it can be good to include them. A map of the school if available (or you can use the satellite view on Google maps for an aerial shot of the school).

★ Information about how they will get to school. A map of the route they will walk or a picture of bus stop/train stations they will get on and off at.

★ Information and/or photos of key members of staff.

★ List of new vocabulary - for example “form teacher” or “head of year.”

★ List of uniform items and photos - again if you have already bought their uniform, a photo of them wearing it may be more meaningful.

★ School day timings (if your child struggles with telling the time - you could include photos of what those times look like on analogue clocks and digital 12hr and 24hr clocks). Include before and after school timings - e.g. What time they will need to get up and when they will leave the house. If they are using public transport timings of their bus/trains would be helpful.

★ Lesson Timetable when available.

★ List of subjects.

★ List of extra curricular activities and clubs.

Information about lunch & break time arrangements - how will they get their lunch, where can they eat, Where can they go and what can they do during these times.

★ Some “what if...” scenarios or information on where who they can go to for help (see problem solving).

★ Important school rules (particularly if different to primary school) - you may also want to include the school’s consequences to breaking these rules - but this may cause unnecessary anxiety in some children.

★ List of people they will know at the school (if applicable).

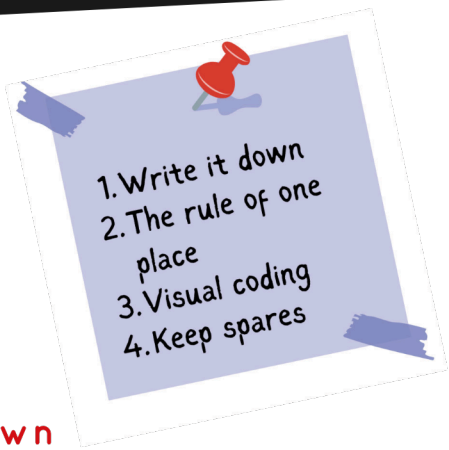
★ A list of things they are looking forward to.

★ A list of things they are worried about (and ways that can help).

★ A plan for THE FIRST DAY!

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8 >> organisational strategies



1. Write it down

Writing things down seems simple, but how many times have you thought "I must write that down so I don't forget" and then failed to do so? It is something you need to get into the habit of doing.

Individuals with additional needs may also have difficulties with their executive functions (the brain processes that help us manage our behaviour, keep focused and stay organised) so it is really important to externalise as much information as possible.

Teaching our children how to use things such as a calendars, weekly/monthly planners or timetables is a great place to start. You may already have something that you keep your family plans on and could start getting your child to help you update it. Some children may prefer to have their own separate planner as it is clearer to understand. Make sure they set aside a regular time to update these, or they may initially need extra prompting to write things on there.

Some people need to write things down at the moment they think about it - so it is important to make sure they have instant access to the tools to do so. Many people use calendars and notes on their phones for this exact reason, but having a small notepad and pen in their bag can be a good backup.

The more difficult someone finds it to recall things from memory, the more frequently they may need to write things down.

It may also be helpful to practise how to take notes - as a note saying "bring stuff for art" isn't helpful if they can't remember what "stuff" they mean!

Some children may need to learn what the important things are that they need to remember. You will want to avoid ending up with lots of reminders that their favourite online gamer is doing a live stream, but nothing about remembering to bring in ingredients for Food Technology!

When appropriate, using the camera on their device can also help , particularly if they have difficulties with writing or reading. Whether it is taking a photo of their dirty trainers after Cross Country to remind them to take them home to clean, or the note that you left them to collect the forgotten Tupperware from their food technology classroom!

With schools utilising online systems for homework, long gone are the days when you failed to properly write down what you needed to do. Having something to remind them what they need to take each morning is an extra way of avoiding completed homework being left at home! Having a checklist by the front door can help avoid the stress of remembering something when they are halfway to school.

2.The rule of one place

Finding items of clothing, resources and equipment becomes quicker and easier the less places we need to look for them. Having a few dedicated places for all of those items, both at home and at school, can reduce the stress of running around the house ten minutes before the bus arrives trying to find a rugby sock.

The box!

Depending on the available space in your house having one area for all school items can be helpful. This might be as simple as a box large enough to store their bag as well as books, folders and other equipment. Having this box in the place your child is most likely to "dump" their belongings when they come home is ideal.

Get your child into the habit of packing their bag in the evening ready for the next day. Books that aren't needed can be put in the box and replaced with the ones that are. The bag then sits in, or on the box ready to grab when they leave.

To take it to the next level of organisation, inside the main large box, you can use separate smaller boxes, bags or zippy wallets for items related to individual subjects. For example, a plastic zipped wallet for French to contain the exercise book, reference book and French dictionary. This can always be incorporated later, once your child has got used to keeping everything in one place!

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Top Tip!

★ If you use zippy wallets, the whole wallet can be placed into your child's bag so that the equipment stays organised in there too.

Uniform and Bag

Try to encourage them to keep their uniform all together - for example hung up on their bedroom or wardrobe door. Having "the box" nearby may also reduce the likelihood of things getting misplaced. Encourage them to get their uniform ready the evening before and teach them that shirts should be swapped for a clean one when needed. School shoes could be kept next to their box to make sure they don't leave the house without their bag!

Choosing a school bag, and PE bag, with a few different pockets or compartments can be beneficial. Encourage your child to put the same things in the same pockets. This rule can also apply to their blazer - always keeping the same items in the same pockets will help them keep track of smaller and important items.

Top Tip!

★ If it doesn't already, make sure the inner pocket of their blazer can be closed securely with a fastening such as zip or Velcro (if adding a zip is a little out of your skill set, there are many clothing alteration or dry cleaning companies that can add fastenings for a low cost). This pocket can then be used for more important or valuable items such as phone or bus pass - anything that would cause a real issue if it fell out of the pocket and went missing.

3.Visual coding

Our brains are able to process colour and symbols quickly, so using these to help label or code school items can speed up organisation and finding what you are looking for.

Colour coding is effective, quick and easy to do. Start by getting your child to colour code their timetable - each subject being allocated a different colour. This colour can then be used on anything relating to that subject, such as the classroom on the school map, their books and subject specific equipment. This could be as subtle as a small coloured sticker, dot of marker pen, or if you are keeping things in separate storage items such as wallets/folders you could coordinate their colour too.

Labelling your child's uniform with their name is important, and it may be worth putting in an extra hidden name label on more expensive or easily misplaced items such as blazers and ties. When it comes to stationery and equipment it can be helpful to make them stand out - even if it is just a dot of permanent marker on the end of a pen. Doing this will help your child quickly identify what is theirs at the end of a lesson, and deter other students from borrowing items and not returning them.

4.Keeping spares

Whilst it is important that our children learn to value their possessions, and not rely on someone to always give them a new item if they lose it, the reality is, that if organisation isn't their strong point, it is likely that something important will be forgotten or lost at least once.

At secondary school there is normally a higher expectation by school staff that students will attend class with all the items that they need, and whilst the occasional misplaced item can be covered by apologising to the teacher, it may turn into an issue if it happens repeatedly. Making sure that you have spares of important equipment and uniform can reduce the stress of getting into trouble because of losing it.

However, being given the spare item comes with an important rule. They can use the spare item on the proviso that they try their hardest to locate the original item when they are at school. Also, if they lose the spare item then there are no more back ups!

Having slightly more basic and cheaper versions as the spare items can help keep costs down (this can also encourage them to keep a closer eye on the originals!). You can also ask at the school office if there is anywhere to buy second hand uniform - ties are the item most likely to go missing during PE!

Having your child help you choose the "spare" item may avoid them refusing to use it. You can also use it as an opportunity to help them learn about budgeting! For example "We can spend £X on your PE bag, but only £x on a spare one."

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10 >> Problem solving strategies

As adults we will have developed our problem solving strategies, primarily through trial and error and learning from our past experiences. Our brain stores these memories and we are able to recall them quickly and apply them to deal with the current situation. We are often able to come up with a Plan B (or Plan C, D and E) without too much processing or distress.

However, for many of our children it can be difficult to come up with a new plan when something unexpected has happened, even if they have been in a similar (or the same) situation previously.

So how can we help them improve their ability to navigate problem situations?

A helpful way can be by **rehearsing different scenarios** (What should I do if...) that they are likely to come up against whilst at school.

For example:
"What should I do if... I can't remember what lesson I have next"
Some children may be able to **think of several different solutions** - and this would be an opportunity to **discuss which of them has the best outcome.**
"Is following another student in your year group to their class better than going to the office and asking an adult if they can help you find out?"

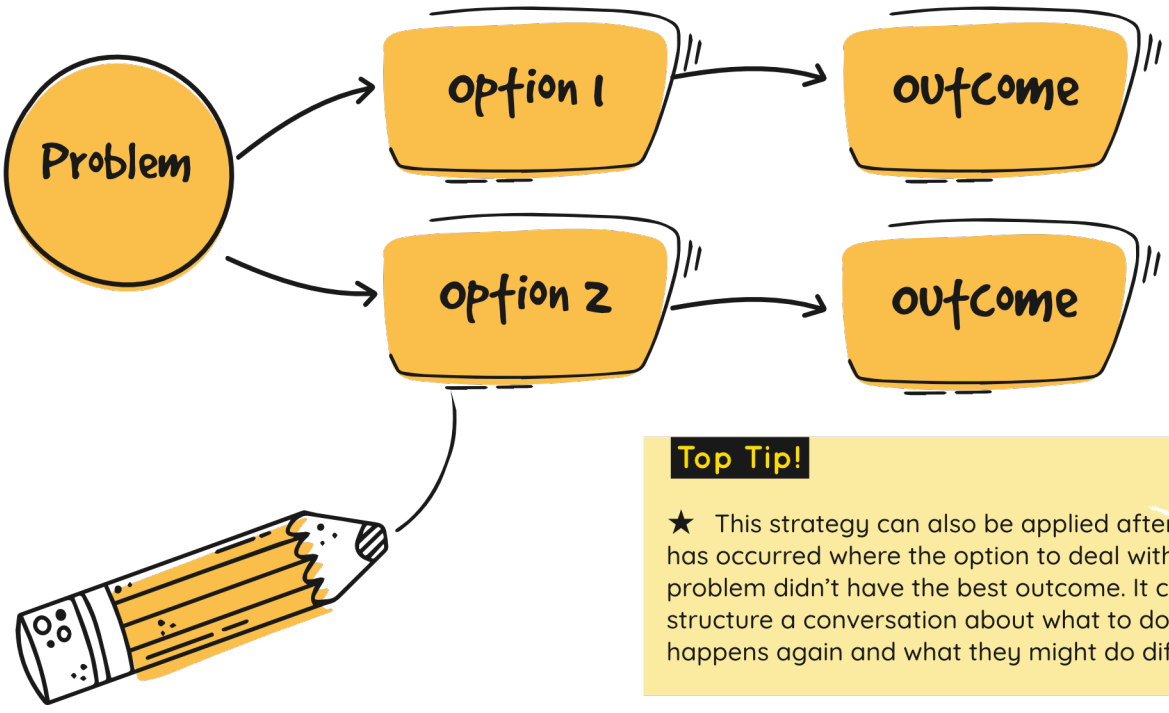
Some children may find it difficult to give solutions, so may benefit from being able to **choose from options that you give.**
Even with this type of rehearsal some children might struggle to think of the solutions when faced with the problem in real life. So it can also be beneficial to **have these written down** - whether it is in a small notepad or just a note on their mobile device.

Also having a list of which members of staff they should go to for help with different things might be useful - as some children can generalise their thinking - so if they ask one adult and they don't know, then they will assume that no adult will know. This might be a problem if they are asking their science teacher which room their art club is in after school!

Some children might need help understanding how you ask for help.

Using phrases such as "can you help me please? I'm not sure what to do." before telling someone the problem can often get better results from people than giving a statement such as "I can't find my pencil case."

Presenting the scenario visually, using either simple drawings or a flow chart, can help with processing the options.



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Top Tip!

★ This strategy can also be applied after a situation has occurred where the option to deal with the problem didn't have the best outcome. It can help structure a conversation about what to do if it happens again and what they might do differently.

Role play or games

It can be helpful to practise some scenarios in a fun way to help embed the memory. You could create a simple board game or quiz where they have to answer "what should I do if..." questions, or choose the option with the best outcome to win more points.

Role playing the situation can also help them practise their communication skills. It can be fun to flip the roles, with them playing the teacher/adult and you showing how you would ask for help, or explain why you are late to class etc.

Drawing comic strips of situations, or acting it out using figures/toys can take the pressure off it being about them. You could choose two different characters, one who makes poor decisions and the other who makes more sensible decisions. You could incorporate using characters connected to any special interests to make it more engaging.

Some children may benefit from having the activity videoed so that they can watch it again.



Real life practice

Putting the skills you have talked about into real life practice can be a powerful tool, particularly when we don't have to really worry about the outcome. For example, practising the route to school before the term starts so that we remove the negative outcome of being late for school if something doesn't go to plan.

Some children may need to watch you navigate the scenario first before trying it themselves. It is a great opportunity to externalise your thought process and talk to them about what you are thinking and the options you are trying.

You can also use situations that are not school specific but help teach an important life skill that they will need at secondary school.

For example; asking someone for help to find something. This could be practised by asking a shop assistant which aisle a certain item is on.

This may also be a good point to ensure your child understands who it is OK to speak to when we need help, and how we speak to different types of people.

It can be helpful to talk to them about how they can use those skills at school, as some children find it difficult to transfer knowledge to different situations.

Any real life practice should **always** be done under supervision of a trusted adult. This may start with having that person right there next to them, and then moving to supervising from slightly further away as they grow in confidence.

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12 >> Emotional regulation

For many children and young people, keeping check of their emotions and using self calming or alerting strategies can be one of the biggest challenges they face before, during or after school.

At secondary school there is often the assumption that the students will have a certain level of emotional maturity and be able to effectively cope with difficult situations. This might include being disappointed, following someone else's rules, compromising when working as a group, being incorrect, and dealing with sudden changes.

Outbursts of frustration, sadness or anger are less likely to be tolerated by staff, or may be perceived as defiance or rudeness. This may also be the same for children who are more likely to internalise their difficult feelings and shut down and be unable to communicate.

If this is something your child struggles with it is really important that all staff are aware, and know the best way to communicate during, and after any difficult situations. They should also be made aware of ways to avoid potential triggers in the first place! Having this in writing (for example - on a One Page Profile) is helpful and avoids it being easily forgotten.

Children who struggle with self regulation often "let it all out" when they reach the safety of home, which impacts hugely on the whole family. Making sure that the school builds in time for them to "decompress" throughout the day can reduce this.

Alongside this, it can be helpful that your child learns about their emotions and builds a toolkit of strategies to help either calm them, or motivate them.

We often jump straight to the strategies - saying things like "when you start to feel angry you should try taking 5 deep breaths". However we should not readily assume that our children can actually identify how they are feeling. Some may need to go back to basics and be taught how to interpret their own emotions and the feelings of others.

Often emotion work is centred around looking at people's faces and naming what emotion they are feeling.
Although this is helpful, and helps them interpret other people's feelings, it doesn't always help identify their own— it is unlikely that when they are in a situation where they are beginning to feel frustrated they can look at their face in a reflection to see what it looks like!

It is important to also focus on how our bodies might feel, for example when we are feeling embarrassed our faces might feel hot and our throat might feel dry. When we are worried our stomach might hurt and when we are annoyed our jaw might feel tense.

Some children may be unable to pinpoint and verbalise exactly how they are feeling so using strategies such as labelling emotions with an alternative such as numbers, colours, characters or animals can help children express what is going on inside their heads. The Zones of Regulation and The Incredible Five Point Scale are systems that utilise this strategy.

It is then about learning which calming or energising strategies work best for your child and teaching them how to use them independently. Make sure any strategies are communicated and understood by staff. Particularly if it involves needing to be alone - or "going for a walk". If a child is punished for using a self-regulation strategy they are unlikely to use it again. Many schools use "passes" for students who need to leave the classroom to calm down.



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Our brains process, filter and respond to sensory input constantly, even whilst we sleep. The way our brains do this will differ slightly from person to person, and individuals with additional needs may be affected more by their sensory differences.

We all have ways of managing our sensory experiences such as wearing sunglasses when it is bright out, earplugs when the clock ticking is stopping us sleeping, or a long sleeve top under that particularly itchy jumper!

To be able to manage their sensory experiences we need to help our children understand what they are over or under responsive to, and help them build a toolkit to cope in a sensory-heavy environment.

Taking pre-emptive steps can be a helpful starting point. Think about the different areas of the school, are there things you can already identify as being possible sensory trouble spots?

As children get older they may not wish to use strategies that make them "stand out" so it can be helpful to think about more discrete alternatives. Are there strategies that are more subtle or that can be concealed easier? - e.g. Ear plugs or headphone buds as opposed to large ear defenders.

Sensory needs do not disappear just because a child has gone to secondary school - so it is important to speak to the school SENCO about how they can be managed and supported in school. Is there a room that they can sit in for a sensory break that is quiet, has low lighting and plain walls? Can sensory breaks be worked into their timetable - rather than "when they say they need it".

It can also be helpful to schedule some "sensory chill out time" as soon as your child gets home from school. Before asking them questions about their day or to do chores/ homework, allow them to go to somewhere in the house to decompress. Depending on your child's individual needs this may need to be a calm and relaxing space where they can rest, or something more stimulating to help them "let off steam" and meet their proprioceptive or vestibular needs such as bouncing on a trampoline or kicking a football. If they are doing something physical to burn off excess energy, introduce a short calming activity straight after to help balance things out.

Using calming sensory strategies throughout the day can also work to help with emotional regulation.

Sensory processing differences is a substantial topic that is very individualised to each person. You and your child may already have a fairly good idea which sensory areas impact them the most, but speaking to a sensory occupational therapist or learning more about sensory processing may bring other areas to light, as well as knowing some strategies to support.

Calming Activities

Below are some ideas for calming activities, some of which are sensory based, while others are simply gentle activities which can help individuals relax.

Blowing bubbles	Eating chewy or crunchy food	Throwing and catching	Bouncing a ball	Weighted items
Massage - light or firm touch depending on the child	Progessive Muscle Relaxation	Listing to soft/ relaxing music	Reading	Being in a dark or dimly lit place
Yoga	Mindfulness/ Meditation activities	Colouring or other craft activities	Puzzles	Taking a bath
A tight hug, or having a peanut ball rolled over them	Squeezing something	Having something to fiddle with	Rocking slowly back and forth on a chair, ball or swing	Being wrapped tightly in a blanket

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14 >> Social Understanding

Adjust your own expectations

As adults we tend to realise that when it comes to friendships, quality is far more important than quantity. However, as children and adolescents, the world around us tells us that when it comes to friends it's "the more the better". This message is further exacerbated when we enter the world of social media where our number of "friends/followers" is on display for all to see.

As parents, it is only natural to want your child to have a big circle of friends and want to encourage them to meet new people and spend more time socialising. However, it is important that we listen carefully to the social needs of our children rather than impose our own expectations on them and then use this as a measure of social success.

Many young people and adults with additional needs, particularly those on the autism spectrum, often explain that having a small group of friends who understand them and allow them to be themselves, is far more fulfilling than having a large number of more shallow friendships with people with whom they have to spend a lot of time masking their true self.

Focus on building positive social opportunities

The strongest friendships are often built on shared views and common interests. Secondary school offers an opportunity to come into contact with more people, meaning that the likelihood of your child finding someone who they have something in common with increases. However, helping them find opportunities to mix with more students within the school and also make friends outside school makes this easier.

Finding clubs or groups around a subject they are interested in is a great starting point. Clubs that have some kind of structure or set activities can be helpful, as this gives them something to focus on other than the social aspect, which can take the pressure off and allow friendships to happen more naturally.

Understanding tricky aspects of "typical" friendships

There are certain types of behavioural expectations within most friendships and some of these can be tricky areas to navigate for many young people, but particularly those who have social understanding difficulties. Some of these skills may need to be worked on over time and explicitly taught. This can be done through role play, talking about social situations from TV and films, social stories, comic strip conversations, or even using figurines to act out the scenario.

✓ Interpreting non-verbal cues

Looking at facial expressions and body language and how this is a big part of communication.

✓ Emotional support

Friendship often involves supporting your friends when they are feeling low and can even be tricky for adults to figure out what to do when someone needs emotional support. Looking at, and talking about how friends respond to each other's problems in films, TV programmes and books can help.

✓ Compromise and flexibility

Good friendships are balanced, and therefore require an element of flexibility and compromise. Understanding that friends may not want to do the same thing as them, or that they are allowed to change their mind can be difficult. It is also important that the same is applied back, they should not have to do everything a friend says, and they are allowed to say no or change their mind too!

✓ Social maintenance

Friendships need maintaining, particularly as they grow older and parents step back from organising social opportunities. Whilst this is easier to do when you see someone each day at school, some children struggle with maintaining a friendship over the holidays, and it may not even occur to them to get in touch or see their friends outside of school!

✓ Change and ends of friendships

This can be difficult for everyone at any age, but it is important for our children to understand it is a normal part of life and that it is OK. Again, also understanding that it applies to them too; they do not need to stay friends with someone if they do not wish to.

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Focus on friendships

Focusing on helping our children to develop a positive peer relationship, even if it is with just one or two individuals, should be our focus when it comes to worries about bullying.

Not only are children less likely to be bullied if they are not alone, but should there be any incidents of unkindness or bulling, having a friend to support and reassure them hugely decreases the long term negative impact bullying can have.

Also ensuring that your child understands what makes a good friendship will make them less vulnerable to manipulative, fake friendships.

Understanding why people bully others

Bullying should not happen, and often when people talk about the "reasons" bullying occurs we often focus on why the victim was a target. However, we should focus more on what the bully is trying to achieve - which is a sense of power over an individual. This, by default, allows them to gain status over their peer group through fear, intimidation and in some cases a warped sense of respect. Often individuals who bully have their own ongoing issues and this status boosts their ego and inflates their own sense of self worth.

If we know what the bully is trying to achieve and that their actions are purely about them, then we can sometimes put a stop to it in its early stages and lessen the impact on the self esteem of the person being targeted.

The main goal of verbal bullying is the "reaction" from the intended target. The bully is aiming to either upset or anger their victim, and the bigger the reaction the more power they feel over that person. So often the best strategies involve trying not to give them the response they are aiming for.

Strategies for the person being bullied

Try to remain calm and ignore them completely if possible.
Have a selection of short, bland, non aggressive phrases to use in response e.g. "that's nice" or "that is your opinion".
Alternatively, if able to, use assertive statements starting with the word "I". For example "I don't deserve that, I want you to stop"- this should be said in a strong confident voice.
Potentially try "disarming with kindness" - some research has shown that it is difficult for people to engage in continued spitefulness when the person they are aiming it at is being nothing but kind to them in return. However, this is quite a skill when faced with a bully and not a natural response!
Move away quickly to a safe space, preferably one where there are adults present. Try to avoid going somewhere alone where you are isolated.
Do not accept friend requests/follows on social media from people you are not good friends with. When the bullying moves to online it can become relentless. Ensure anyone who is actively unkind to you is blocked or unable to view any of your information. Make sure your social media accounts are set to private and ask a trusted adult to check what can be seen by someone who is not your "Facebook Friend".
Most importantly, tell someone you can trust.

Strategies for parents/trusted adults

✓ Keep a written log of any incidents you are aware of. Make sure you put a date and take any photographic evidence if applicable - particularly in the case of online bullying.
✓ Make sure school are aware as soon as possible and as often as possible.
✓ Look at the school's anti-bullying policy and ensure it is being followed.
✓ Boost your child's self esteem, find lots of opportunities for them to do something they are good at.
✓ Explain the reasons bullying occurs and what the bully is trying to achieve - help them to understand that it is not their fault they are being bullied.
✓ Show them what the people who matter really think about them - ask friends, relatives and people they look up to, to write things down that they like about your child. This can be given to the child so that they can look at it. Some families have put this in a book, or on a poster in their room, or asked friends to record video messages.
✓ Try to find opportunities for positive social interactions and to make friends with like minded peers.
✓ Help them with any social understanding difficulties - do they know how to start conversations with people and how to maintain positive friendships?
✓ Practise and role play strategies.
✓ Use comic strip conversations to show thoughts, words and actions e.g. Other children may not help because they are scared – not because they don't like you.
✓ It is also important that the difference between good and bad friends is explained—not only to help them be a good friend but to make sure that they have good friends too.

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16 >> Links to further information and resources

Secondary Transition and Education Support

BBC Bitesize - Starting Secondary School
www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/tags/zh4wy9q/starting-secondary-school/1

Oxford Owl - Tips for Starting Secondary School
www.oxfordowl.co.uk/tips-for-starting-secondary-school/

Autism Education Trust - Resources for Schools, Parents, Children and Young People around autism in school
www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/

Special Needs Jungle - SEND Information
specialneedsjungle.com/category/send

IPSEA - Independent SEN Advice
www.ipsea.org.uk/Pages/Category/get-support

Essex Local Offer - Information on One Plans and EHCPs
send.essex.gov.uk/help-learning/support-school

One Page Profiles - www.sheffkids.co.uk/resources

Learning Style Strategies vark-learn.com/strategies

Twinkl (have a wide range of transition booklet designs)
www.twinkl.co.uk

Organisation

Calendarpedia - Word, Excel and PDF timetable templates
www.calendarpedia.co.uk/timetable-excel-templates.html

Microsoft - Schedule Templates
create.microsoft.com/en-us/templates/schedules

Ayoa – website to help with organisational skills through mind mapping www.ayoa.com/mind-mapping/software

Zip Wallets (lots of different brands available on Amazon)
www.amazon.co.uk/Document-Duralble-Plastic-Zipper-Wallet/dp/B07DKVFT82

Gator GPS Watch www.amazon.co.uk/Techsixtyfour-Smart watch-Wearable-Mobile-Tracker/dp/B07KDS6SCY

Emotional Regulation

Zones of Regulation
zonesofregulation.com/resources

The Incredible 5 Point Scale www.5pointscale.com/

Sensory Processing

Corinna Laurie Sensory Strategies “When is Behaviour not Behaviour?” (video) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eH2Oh0U4V0c

NHS Making Sense of Sensory Behaviour
www.nhsggc.org.uk/media/1626/making-sense-of-sensory-behaviour_falkirk-booklet.pdf

Friendships/Bullying

Do2Learn do2learn.com/SocialSkills/overview.htm

Social Stories and Comic Strip Conversations
www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/communication communication-tools/social-stories-and-comic-strip-coversations

Sarah Hendrickx - Social and Personal Relationships on the Autism Spectrum https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-Ifwh2QcE8h?V=l-Ifwh

Contact contact.org.uk/help-for-families/information-advice-services/

Family Lives www.familylives.org.uk/advice/bullying

Kidscape www.kidscape.org.uk/

NSPCC www.nspcc.org.uk/what-is-child-abuse/types-of-abuse/bullying-and-cyberbullying/

Brook Gibbs - How to Stop A Bully
www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oKjW1OIjuw

The 2 Johns (online safety) esafetytraining.org

Think U Know - online safety resources for children and young people www.thinkuknow.co.uk/11_18/

Resources/ Equipment

Tink n Stink - sensory and educational
www.tinknstink.co.uk/

Sensory Oojamabobs - chewy items (including pencil toppers, hoodie and zip chews, and chewlery) and Fidgi-Flips - small discrete fiddle toy
sensoryoojamabobs.co.uk/shop/

Sense Toys -sensory, educational, social & emotional resources sensetoys.com/

TTS - educational equipment, SEN, social & emotional resources www.tts-group.co.uk/secondary/sen/

Crossbow Education- dyslexia resources
www.crossboweducation.com/

Flexitable (foldable maths grids) flexitable.co.uk/

Whiteboard Timetables/Planners

Wilko https://www.wilko.com/en-uk/wilko-weekly-planner-set/p/0349365

Amazon www.amazon.co.uk/s?k=whiteboard+planner

Tesco www.tesco.com/groceries/en-GB/products/302516971

Smart Panda https://smartpanda.co.uk/collections/

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