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Thoughtful Parenting: Transitioning between schools

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As students wrap up their academics for the summer, certain groups may experience anxiety as they enter into what educators view as major educational transition times in their lives.

The National Association of School Psychologists has published numerous articles on student transitions from elementary to middle school, middle school to high school and high school to college.

Thoughtful Parenting: Youth Services

This weekly column about parenting issues is written by area youth-serving professionals. It publishes on Mondays in the Steamboat Today. Read more columns here.

In each period of transition, students are developing skills to be successful in their new environment, a process that can create considerable stress.

As they lay stepping stones for advancing their ability to problem solve, make decisions and think independently, there are ways you can help.

Middle school

• Lockers and combinations: Many students are terrified they will forget how to open their locker or forget the combination.

What you can do: Practice ahead of time. Find a lock that your students can practice using, so the day they have their "locker party," they will feel confident in opening the new lock.

• Managing time between classes: Navigating between classes can be challenging and embarrassing for students who enter a class late.

What you can do: Review the schedule, and do an advance trip to the school to locate classrooms.

• Friendships: Group dynamics change as students make new friends in middle school. Students may feel left out as friendships change.

What you can do: Be an empathetic listener. Simply understanding your children's concerns and guiding them on how they can embrace the changes will help them navigate their friendships.

• Standing out in the crowd: Being the tallest one in class, the most developed, the shortest or at the far end of the "normal" curve can be very difficult for students.

What you can do: Focus on their positive attributes. Show them how their difference can be an asset rather than a liability.

• Classwork expectation: Some students may worry that they will not be able to keep up academically with the increased workload and independent expectations.

What you can do: Reassure your students that they will be able to handle the workload with proper organization and time management. Remind them about school resources, such as counselors and tutors.

High school

• Social fears: Behaving appropriately around older peers, being bullied by upperclassmen and exhibiting a socially acceptable fashion sense can be terrifying to a freshman.

What you can do: Listen to and encourage your children. They may join sports teams, clubs or other extracurricular activities to gain a diverse group of friends. Ask them what they feel the right reaction might be in a variety of situations. Role-play.

• Academic concerns: Fearing a hard homework load and worrying about their GPA are frequent concerns for adolescents.

What you can do: Empower them to take control by creating a schedule (or online planner) to track homework and manage time. In schools that provide a parent portal to track grades and assignments, show them how to use it.

• High school procedures/rules: Leaving campus, being tardy, lingering in the halls, taking bathroom breaks, observing homework policies, staying on top of eligibility notices — all can cause stress and concern about doing something wrong or being singled out and humiliated.

What you can do: Discuss the expectations. Try to reflect with your student on the grading system, open-closed campus policies, tardy policies, etc. Know them ahead of time.

College

• Personal responsibility: For the first time, many students entering college are on their own to get to class on time, make appointments and manage their money.

What you can do: Give them responsibility. During the summer shift, give these responsibilities to your students. Identify resources to help them become independent. Work with them to develop a system to manage finances.

• Academic concerns: Students may fear what they are expected to know for exams and how long they need to study for each class.

What you can do: Give them tools. Help your student create a weekly planner that shows the important assignments and exams. Build in set study times. Discuss the steps to prepare for important exams. Encourage them to use the college resources on campus for tutors, study groups, academic coaches and professor open hours.

Parents can ease these times of transition by being involved, listening to concerns and offering advice when necessary.

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