

Starting Gr 7

A Parent Guide for Neurodivergent Tweens & Teens

Starting Year 7 is a major transition — new school layout, timetable, subjects, teachers, expectations and social groups. These strategies help your child feel organised, confident and supported through the change.

Build Predictability Before Day One

- Visit the secondary school grounds when it's quieter (halls, classrooms, sports areas)
 - Attend orientation, transition or "meet the teacher" events if offered
 - Walk or travel the route to and from school together so your child knows what to expect
 - Create a simple visual outline of a typical Year 7 day (timetable, breaks, travel, after school)
- Ask the support teacher if you could pop in to say hi during a pupil free day, perhaps even meet your pastoral care or other key teacher/s

Why? Predictability reduces anxiety and builds confidence

Practise Organisation Strategies

- Set up a weekly planner or calendar (paper or digital) for homework, deadlines and activities
- Create clear folders — physical or digital — labelled by subject
- Use an uncluttered diary or task list for daily to-dos
- Teach your child to check their timetable and pack required items the night before
 - Discuss how to organise inside their locker (shelves, hooks, removable labels)

Why? Organisation skills help children manage the increased workload and transitions

Social Navigation & Connection

- Check if the school has a buddy system and how to access it
- Encourage friendly contact with peers before school starts if possible
 - Discuss lunchtime options (clubs, quiet spaces, eating spots)

Why? Early social strategies reduce stress and promote belonging.

Understand the School Structure & Supports

- Find out where key places are: locker areas, toilets, classrooms, tuckshop, office, pastoral care, learning support
 - Ask who to go to if there's a problem (pastoral care, year coordinator, welfare team, learning support)
 - Check how pastoral care or learning support works at the school
 - Clarify how students are informed of changes and where support is available

Why? Knowing who to ask and where to go builds independence.

Support Regulation & Transitions

- Practise calming or regulation strategies at home
- Talk about big feelings and normalise that nervousness and excitement can co-exist
 - Pack items that help self-regulate (water bottle, sensory tool, quiet prompt card)
 - Discuss how your child can take short breaks if allowed by the school
 - Discuss break and regulation options with the school

Why? Emotional tools help prevent overwhelm.



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Partner with the School Team

- Share your child's strengths, preferences, and support strategies with teachers
- Ask about expectations for homework, assessment, devices, and communication
- Ask about access to academic and organisation support, and options such as study lines
- Agree on who and how you'll communicate with the school and best times to check in
- Request advance notice of routine changes wherever possible

Why? A strong home-school connection supports consistency.

Celebrate the Transition

- Notice small wins (first bus ride, finding a room, organised bag)
- Offer specific praise for strategies tried
- Reflect together on each day and what helped
- Reassure your child that Year 7 students are like the "Preppies" of high school — they'll be guided and supported, not left to figure it out alone. Normalise that it may feel overwhelming at first.

Why? Positive reinforcement builds resilience.

Plan for Sensory Needs

- Check uniform items for comfort and fit before school starts
 - Break in shoes and adjust uniform components that feel uncomfortable
 - Pack useful tools (earbuds, sensory item, favourite drink)
 - Talk about the sensory environment (crowded hallways, bells) and how to cope

Why? Comfort and familiarity support self-regulation.

Resources

Finding the right school bag:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNvx6-HAfJI>

Positive Partnership's 'Working Together' Communication Tool

www.positivepartnerships.com.au/uploads/Communication-Tool.pdf

Locker Challenges: How to support your child

www.understood.org/en/articles/all-about-navigating-locker-challenges

