

Moving up to Year 7 is a big step.

Professor Julian Elliott, an educational psychologist at Durham University, says: "For many children, secondary school represents a step towards autonomy and the whole process of growing up and leaving childhood behind." It can be overwhelming for children and parents alike.

So.... How was your day? What did you do? Who did you sit with at lunchtime? These are all questions that we may ask our child most days when they come home from school.

How many of you have heard the answer..... NOTHING!

These conversations cause friction from the offset so try to turn this around. When you walk in the door after a long day at the office how many times have you been confronted with someone asking, "How was your day?", "What did you have for lunch?", "Did you pick up the milk from Asda?", "Did you remember to call and make me an appointment?" Being bombarded with questions sometimes after a long tiring day can just put you in a bad mood... so why not ask your child - "Are you ok? Good" - And then wait for a better time after you have all had chance to unwind a little after a long hard day.

Some families use dinnertime as a time to communicate with each other about their day, some families have very hectic evenings and don't get chance until bed time to have a "catch up".

Just remember that some children LOVE to tell you every single detail about their day as soon as they see you - whilst others need time to unwind - just like you may need after work.

Build your child's confidence. Settling in well is all about self-esteem. Children with high self-esteem are less likely to be bullied, or to bully, or belong to gangs. They are more likely to gather a wide circle of friends. They can confidently say "no" to anything with which they don't feel comfortable. So tell them how great they are. When did you last pay them a compliment? They don't have to have done anything special to deserve one; a compliment on how well they look after a pet, or that they are kind or thoughtful, goes a long way. Do this daily and watch their confidence develop.

Remember to praise them every day that they get up on time, organise themselves, and remember everything they need before they walk out of the front door in the morning.

Listen to their fears. Your child is possibly anxious and also afraid their concerns will appear trivial. For instance, if they become lost in the maze of corridors, what should they do? They could make their way to the school office – they should have a map – or find a pupil or teacher to direct them. What they shouldn't do is hide in the toilets until the lesson is over. Talk through the options with them. Do this for every concern they may have so that they know you take it seriously.

- ◊ Remind your child that being a good friend, especially to shy and quiet children, is one way to make friends. Be encouraging if they want to invite friends home and suggest it if they don't.

- ◊ Show that you feel positive about their school and "talk it up" even if it was not your first choice or you lost an admissions appeal. If you have high expectations, these will be sensed by your child.

- ◊ If they miss a school bus home you need to talk through what they will do, especially if you are working and can't pick them up straight away.

- ◊ Make sure they have emergency money and credit on their mobile phone – if it's allowed in school.

- ◊ Think about any changes you might need to make at home so they have the time, space and energy for homework. In the early days you should check their homework diary daily and if it looks empty, check with other parents or the school. Your child may simply forget to write it down.

- ◊ Encourage them to join lunchtime or after-school clubs. They are a great way to make friends. If after half a term they really don't enjoy it, they can drop it.

Give your child a few weeks to settle in. Ensure you know who to contact for any situation, and the school's preferred means of contact. If they are having any problems, social or educational, make an appointment to see their form tutor.

- ◊ Glynis Kozma is author of *Secondary School: A Parent's Guide*, and was a teacher for 30 years
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