

Taking the Leap: Starting high school

A guide for teens with cerebral palsy (CP)

Congratulations! Preparing to leave elementary school is a big step. Starting high school can be a time of new challenges and making new friends. Some other teenagers with CP have given us some advice to share with you to help you know what to expect. Most teenagers with CP find that there can be a few things that are a bit hard in the first few weeks but then things get much easier.

Before you start

- Even though most kids don't like doing homework or assignments, you are going to have to do a lot of them in high school. If you find it hard to get assignments done, talk to your parents and teachers and work out how to make it easier. Some teenagers type instead of write, get their assignments early or get their teachers to help them plan the assignment so they know what they are doing. You need to start practicing finishing your assignments and using a diary to help you plan ahead as early as possible. You can even do this when you are in high school.

"In elementary school, whenever we had assignments and stuff they always reminded you what it would be like in high school. I also learned to touch type from about Grade 3 so I would get better at typing so it would make it easier for me in high school." (Beth)

- Find something that you really enjoy – it might be a sport, music, drama, photography – and start practicing it from when you're in elementary school. Find out ahead of time what leisure/recreational opportunities are available in your high school and in the community.

"One of the things, which I would tell other people is find something that they are good at and just keep (doing) that. Keep on going with that because that makes it a lot easier." (Raphael)

- Some teenagers find it helps to do a summer camp and/or go to an orientation at the high school before they start so that they know some other teenagers.
- In high school your parents usually don't come into the school. This means that if you are finding things hard, are falling behind with your work or need a teacher to do something differently then you need to ask them about it. It helps to start doing this while you're in elementary school so that you feel more confident about it.

The first week

- Most teenagers feel nervous about starting high school. The first few days can be overwhelming, but most teenagers find that they really like high school. If you are feeling overwhelmed, talk to your teacher or your parents so that they can help.

"Nervous. Oh because I thought oh my god, how big it was, what class am I in, how am I going to make friends and all that." (David)

Authors: Fiona Jones, Sylvia Rodger, Jenny Ziviani and Roslyn Boyd

Making friends

- Making friends is really important in high school and most teenagers feel a bit nervous about this. Many teenagers find that they make more friends in high school than they do in elementary school.

“...try to be like a normal kid without cerebral palsy because other kids will accept you for who you are, or kids won't accept you but the ones that will, will be true friends.” (Sarah)

“It was pretty daunting at first to suddenly find yourself with a whole lot of people that you have no idea who they are. But it was pretty good knowing someone.” (Beth)

School work

- In high school, you will get to try new subjects that are often more interesting than those you do in elementary school. You can choose some subjects and it does not matter if you are really good at one subject but find another one tricky.

“There are different subjects, like English, Maths, Science still the same but they're like more into teenage stuff.” (Ramon)

- There is usually more homework and it is quite different to elementary school. You might feel quite tired at the end of the week. Try to give yourself lots of time to get your work done, and don't leave it until the last minute. If you are having difficulty keeping up with the workload, speak to your teachers about creating an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Changes to your workload might be made so that you will have more success.

“Well I wasn't used to all the homework, because in elementary school every week you just did the same type of thing, like spelling and maths and stuff like that. But it's fairly unpredictable what you might get. You might get a whole heap one day and not a lot the next day.” (Beth)

So, start planning early, give yourself plenty of time and know that even if it is hard at the start, it will get much better! Best of luck – be yourself and enjoy it!

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