



Starting High School

You've just finished with middle school (or are about to) and you start wondering, "What's high school really like?" Is high school a lot different from middle school? Is it going to be hard starting out in a new place? Will it be difficult going from being one of the oldest middle school students to one of the youngest high schoolers?

The transition from middle school to high school is an important and seemingly daunting one, but one that everybody goes through. Though this new environment can be stressful for many people, lots of other freshmen are feeling the same way you are — you're all starting out in a new place. With that in mind, here are a few topics that commonly worry incoming freshmen and some things you might want to know about them.

Starting Out at a New School

You may not know a lot of people when you first start high school. Maybe your friends from middle school are going to a different high school, or even if you know other freshmen you might not know many upperclassmen. How are you going to make friends among this sea of unknown faces?

Most high schools hold a freshman orientation before school actually starts. These are helpful not only because you learn your way around the building and get to meet some of your teachers, but you also get to meet fellow freshmen. That way, when you show up on your first day of school, you may already recognize a few familiar faces.

When you talk to people at orientation, you'll probably find that a lot of them are feeling just like you are. They're all new to the school and don't know what to expect. Talking about a common concern with your classmates could spark a new friendship.

Learning Inside the Classroom

How about the workload in high school — is it a lot harder? Will there be more homework than there was in middle school? Your classmates are probably worried about this very same subject.

The work in high school builds off of what you learned in middle school, giving you a more advanced knowledge of many academic subjects. So you may find that you have more work to do or that it's a bit more challenging. But these challenges can make you feel less bored with the usual routine. Besides, doesn't it feel great when you've mastered something really tough? Maybe you'll find a new appreciation for biology or discover your passion for literature.

If you ever find your work too overwhelming, teachers and tutors are available for extra help. While you have more independence as a high school student than you might have in middle school, there are still many resources to fall back on if you feel that the work is too much.

Extracurricular Activities

High school also has more extracurriculars than middle school did, such as clubs, music and theater groups, student government, and sports teams. This is a fantastic time to explore your interests and try new things. Who said school has to be all work and no play?

These activities may take place before or after school, or during your free periods or study halls. Because of this, time management is an important skill to sharpen in your first year and one that many students successfully learn. Extracurricular activities are great to participate in, but remember to leave free time for yourself. Everybody needs some downtime.

Learning Outside the Classroom

Aside from the things you learn in class, high school is also a time when people start to learn important lessons from their friends and classmates. High school is a time of increasing independence and responsibility. As in middle school, you or your friends may encounter some tough times. But if you ever find that personal issues get really overwhelming, there is always someone to talk to. Friends and parents can be great resources, but sometimes that's not enough. School counselors or other therapists can be very helpful if you want to talk with someone outside of your friends and family. So many people are available to help you. Just because you're becoming more independent does not mean you're alone.

Middle school taught you the basics of academics, time management, and social skills while providing you with a little extra support and guidance — kind of like a bicycle with training wheels.

High school gives you the chance to take off those training wheels and learn how to be more independent. It's perfectly OK if you're nervous at first. Even if you don't get off to the best start, that's normal too — everybody's a bit wobbly the first time they take off their training wheels. Just be patient and keep trying. Once you've adjusted to your new independence you may find you can go farther than you ever imagined.

The Starfish

Once upon a time there was a wise man who used to go to the ocean to do his writing. He had a habit of walking on the beach before he began his work. One day he was walking along the shore. As he looked down the beach, he saw a human figure moving like a dancer. He smiled to himself to think of someone who would dance to the day. So he began to walk faster to catch up. As he got closer, he saw that it was a young man and the young man wasn't dancing, but instead he was reaching down to the shore, picking up something and very gently throwing it into the ocean.

"As he got closer he called out, "Good morning! What are you doing?"

"The young man paused, looked up and replied, "Throwing starfish in the ocean."

"I guess I should have asked, why are you throwing starfish in the ocean?"

"The sun is up, and the tide is going out. And if I don't throw them in they'll die."

"But, young man, don't you realize that there are miles and miles of beach, and starfish all along it. You can't possibly make a difference!"

The young man listened politely. Then bent down, picked another starfish and threw it into the sea, past the breaking waves and said, "It made a difference for that one."

Each of us can make a difference to this world.