

March 3rd is a big day for Year Six pupils across the country as they find out which secondary school they will be attending later this year. Wherever your child has been offered a place, it can be a tricky time.

Here are some simple tips to support them with this process...

All Change!

Even if your child has been offered a place at their first-choice school, the good news can bring mixed feelings. The certainty of knowing which school they will be going to can be a bit of a reality check. There's a lot of change ahead: new journeys, new friends, new teachers, new learning styles, new uniforms, new buildings, etc. It's normal for your child to experience a wide range of emotions, including anxiety, sadness, anger and loss.

It's important to validate your child's feelings about this big step, whatever they are.



“This is real!!! I am actually going to be moving on.”



New friends...

First choice or not, most children are faced with the news that some friends won't be joining them in their new school. It's normal for them to feel sad about this. They might even feel angry with you for “making” them go to a different school to their friends.

It's important to recognise that this is a big deal for them and it's normal for them to experience some pretty strong feelings about it. Validate those feelings.

Try to avoid comments like, “Don't be silly, you can just make new friends!” Instead, let them know that you understand why they might be feeling sad, angry or scared. Give them space to talk about how they are feeling.

Encourage them to problem solve about how they can keep in touch with friends, for example, through after school activities, social media and gaming. Show your child that you are willing to take active steps to support them in maintaining friendships over time by organising a weekend play date, helping them to find shared after school activities or, if you haven't already, reaching out to their friends' parents.

The end of the world?

In London, where competition for school places is fierce, up to 1 in 3 children will not be offered a place at their first-choice school. That's a lot of disappointed parents! YOU might feel that your child's future is doomed, that they are going to fall in with the "wrong crowd" or that they will fail academically. You might be devastated that they're not going to the same school you attended. It's normal for you to feel this way BUT it's important not to pass these feelings of disappointment, anger or hopelessness on your children.



What they need right now is:

1. To see that you have faith in their ability to thrive in **any** school.
2. Some space to process and talk about how **they** feel about the situation without being bogged down by your emotions. If you're going to rant, do it privately.
3. Encouragement to engage in problem-solving. How can you all make this a success?
4. Reassurance that you will be proud of them, whichever school they attend. This is particularly important if your child sat entrance exams or had interviews for various secondary schools. They might be feeling that they have let you down, which is a very heavy burden to carry!
5. A sense of hope. A reminder of times where you/they thought that certain situations, people or events were going to be terrible, only to find that they were amazing.

You may decide to appeal the decision. It's your right to do so but bear in mind that this may prolong the period of uncertainty for your child and you could still end up with the same outcome. If you're going down this route, it's important not to give your child the impression that the school place they have been offered is the worst outcome in the world.

Look for positives about the school. A longer journey is an opportunity to build independence. A larger school offers more opportunity to find like-minded classmates. A school that hasn't received a high OFSTED rating may benefit from increased effort or funding to make exciting changes. A school with a less academic focus could offer a host of exciting creative or sporting pathways, where your child could shine in new ways.

Remember, your child may be attending this school for the next seven years, so you really don't want them starting that journey with strong feelings of negativity.

During the Summer term NHS Education Wellbeing teams will be offering our 3-session Worry Ninja workshops, in school, to support Year Six children with common fears and worries about the transition to secondary school. In the meantime, if you/your child are struggling with the news you have received today, reach out to your child's class teacher or email ewsinfo@swlstg.nhs.uk for further information about the support we offer.