

ADHD: Exams and the Transition to Secondary School

A guide for parents and carers

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Supporting your child during exams

- **Practice over reading:** focus on active revision methods — past papers, practice questions, or listening to audio while moving around.
- **Study in chunks:** break revision into shorter sessions spread across days. The Pomodoro method works well: study for around 40 minutes, then take at least 10 minutes doing something completely different.
- **Break big tasks down:** larger assignments can feel overwhelming. Help your child divide them into smaller, manageable steps. If starting is the hardest part, sit alongside them until they get going.
- **Watch hyperfocus:** your child may dive deep into a subject they love and achieve a great deal in one go. This takes huge energy and exhaustion often follows, even the next day.
- **Background sound:** some children focus better with quiet music or even a familiar TV programme in the background. If it is not their main focus, it may actually help concentration.
- **Sensory supports:** weighted objects on their lap, crunchy snacks, or sipping cold water through a straw can help regulate their nervous system.
- **Change the setting:** a café, library, or simply a different room can boost focus. Sometimes just having people around makes it easier to study.
- **Try body-doubling:** having someone else in the room — a peer studying or you sitting nearby — can make a big difference to task initiation and focus.
- **Keep moving:** movement and exercise are not distractions — they are essential. A short walk, stretching, or sports can refresh focus and boost concentration.
- **Power naps:** short naps of up to 30 minutes during long study days can restore energy and attention.

Supporting the transition to secondary school

The move to secondary school can be a significant pressure point. New environments, more teachers, less predictability, and higher academic demands can all increase anxiety and emotional dysregulation. You may notice more frequent outbursts at home as your child adjusts.

What you can do before the move:

- Work closely with both the primary and secondary school. Ask primary staff to document every accommodation and strategy that has worked — and push for secondary to mirror these from day one.
- Arrange extra visits to the secondary school: quiet tours at different times of day; meeting the form tutor, SENCO, and pastoral staff; and practising the route.
- If possible, arrange a photo or video tour of key spaces (entrance, lockers, canteen, toilets, SEN base) for your child to look through at home.
- Work with your child to write a short "first week" social story they can revisit when anxious.
- Help them build a Transition Passport — a one-page summary of their strengths, sensory needs, triggers, what helps, and their regulation plan — and share this with all relevant secondary staff.

In the early weeks of Year 7:

- Reduce demands at home and allow extra downtime. The school day takes enormous energy.
- Keep communication open with school via a named contact.
- Use the emotion regulation strategies in our companion factsheet — they are especially relevant during periods of change.
- Increase your own self-care and support network so you can manage the additional pressure on yourself.

Skills to build at home before secondary:

- **Organisation:** practise bag-packing using a visual checklist; colour-code subjects.
- **Time management:** rehearse reading a timetable and using a timer for tasks.
- **Emotion regulation:** co-create a calm plan (movement, breathing, a safe adult to check in with) and practise it during low-stress moments.